CHINESE LITERATURE

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Chou En-lai

Impromptu Lines Written on a Spring Day

— 1914

Over the green countryside I strain my eyes,
But all is shrouded in a murky haze.
Across the plains, a fierce fight for power,
Patriot after patriot will rise to strike.

The pathways red with cherry blossoms;
The lakeside green with willow leaves.
Amidst the twittering of swallows,
Another year of yearning passes.

In August 1913 Chou En-lai went to study in Nankai Middle School in Tientsin. The following year he and several fellow-students sponsored and formed the Ching Yeh (Study Hard) Society and published the journal *Ching Yeh*. He was the journal's editor-in-chief from 1915 to 1916. This poem was published in its first issue.

In 1914 the warlord, Yuan Shih-kai, enforced a reactionary rule over China and though Dr. Sun Yat-sen launched a war against him, it ended in failure. Yuan suppressed the revolutionaries and the labouring people even more cruelly. In this poem, Comrade Chou En-lai exposed Yuan's crimes in suppressing the revolution, foreseeing that even stronger resistance and a revolutionary spring would evolve soon.

Thoughts on Seeing Peng-hsien Off Home

— early 1916

Was it merely fate that we met
As fellow-students in Tientsin?
All marvelled at our daring speech
Reminiscing over crabs and wine.
Firm our resolve in danger or hardship;
Eager our readiness to uphold justice.

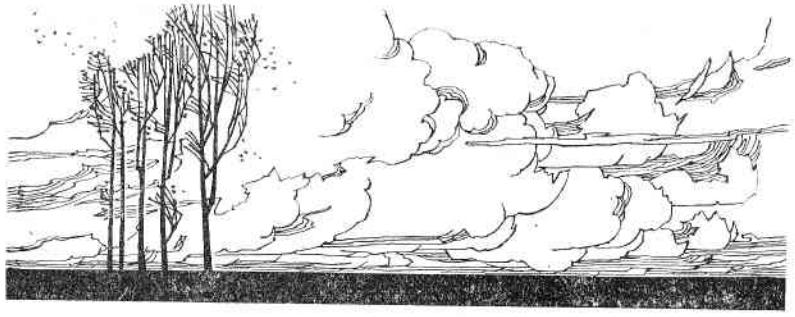
This poem was first published in the fourth issue of the journal *Ching Yeh* in April 1916. Chang Peng-hsien, from the province of Kirin in northeast China, also went to study in Nankai Middle School in August 1913 and was Comrade Chou En-lai's schoolmate. He was one of the sponsors of the Ching Yeh Society.

In this poem Comrade Chou En-lai expressed his revolutionary desire to save his motherland and to study hard, lauding true friendship between comrades-in-arms and wishing his friends well.

May we again be neighbours
When your farming days are over!

The east wind hastens the traveller
As we finally part at the quay.
Soon melting in the distance
Only a memory remains.
Our sorrow like separated stars
Or scattered clouds.
Yet happy in the prospect
Of future literary exchanges.

All of us have raced ahead,
Yet you alone are in the lead.
Working for others, I was thought a fool;
Struggling against the tide, you've been the best.
Crows hover round the tree at dusk;
A lone wild goose fades into the sky.
Bosom friends of memorable days
Must be melancholy at parting.



Concurring with Teacher Chang Kao-ju's Lament over Current Events

— *October 1916*

Storms sweep across our vast country;
Words cannot express our motherland asleep.
Autumn intensifies our sorrow;
Intolerable to hear the crickets chirp.

This poem first appeared in the fifth issue of the journal *Ching Yeh* published in October 1916. Mr. Chang Kao-ju, a teacher in Nankai, was a patriot with democratic ideas who supported the students in their progressive activities. His poem *Lament over Current Events* was carried in the same issue of *Ching Yeh*.

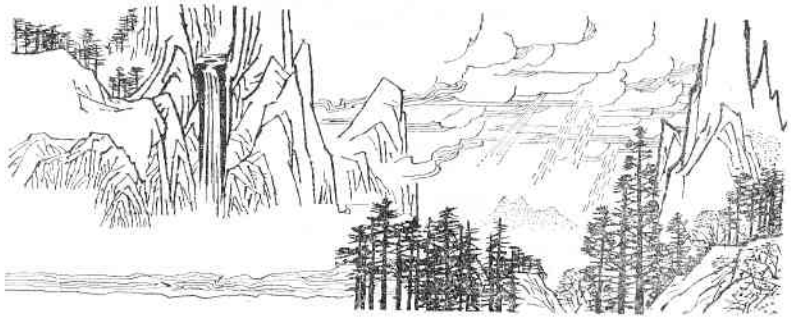
In 1916, after the death of Yuan Shih-kai, the warlord Chang Hsun replaced him and attacked Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionaries, in an attempt to restore the feudal monarchy. Thus China entered another dark period in its history. Comrade Chou En-lai wrote this poem to show his contempt for despotism and his determination to change the situation. In this poem he compared the reactionaries to chirping insects in late autumn who would not survive long.

Having Sung of the Yangtse, I Turn Eastwards

— *September 1917*

Having sung of the Yangtse, I turn eastwards,
To explore the sciences and relieve suffering.
For ten years I'll study to break new ground,
Or drown in the sea, no less heroic.

Comrade Chou En-lai wrote this poem after he left school and before he set out for Japan where he studied from September 1917 to April 1919. He decided to return home in order to join in the struggle in China against imperialism and feudalism in 1919. Before leaving Japan, his good friend Chang Hung-hao gave him a farewell dinner and asked him to write something to remember the occasion. Comrade Chou En-lai copied out this poem and added these words: "I wrote this poem at the age of 19 when I was coming to Japan." "Now I am returning to China for other work. I write this to bid farewell to my friends." At the same time, he made it clear that he copied out the poem to remind himself of his early vow.

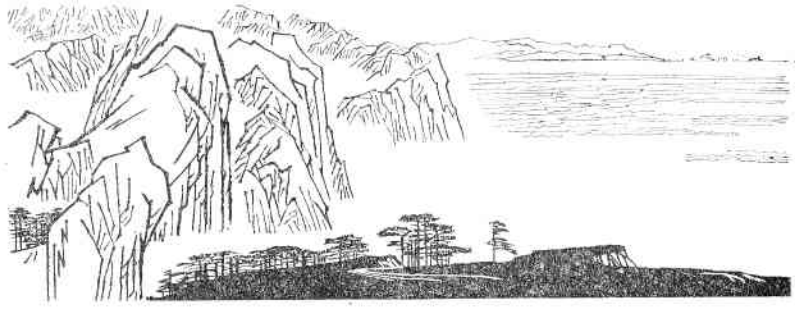


Arashiyama in the Rain, Kyoto, Japan

— 5th April 1919

Twice I have visited Arashiyama,
Pine-bordered cliffs, scattered cherry trees.
A high peak towers above the cliffs.
Among the rocks flows a stream
Clear as a mirror.
In the drizzle a mist envelops.
A ray of sunshine pierces the clouds
All the more dazzling.
The deeper the quest for truth,
The more it seems obscured.
Thus to glimpse the light
Heightens its beauty.

This poem was published in the first issue of the journal *Awakening*. Comrade Chou En-lai wrote it in Kyoto on the eve of his return to China.



Farewell to Li Yu-ju and for Shu-an's Eyes

— 8th June 1920

So rapid your progress
In three months since we met.
I thought it was a jest
When Nien-chiang said you'd go to England,
Then Tan-wen said France.
Before long you came

On January 29, 1920 Comrade Chou En-lai led the masses in Tientsin to demonstrate outside the office of the governor of Hopei Province, demanding the reopening of the Association of Various Circles in Tientsin and the Tientsin Students' Union, which had been closed on January 23, and the release of the 24 representatives arrested on the previous day. He and three other representatives were arrested by the police. He wrote this poem after Li Yu-ju, a girl comrade, visited him in the house of detention to say goodbye before she set off for France on a work-study programme. Shu-an was Chou's schoolmate at Nankai School and Li's sweetheart.

To bid farewell and tell me,
You can go
And you are about to leave.

Shu-an wrote me a letter
Quoting you as saying:
"... Besides I'm independent,
I can work for my living.
Whatever happens
I won't starve or die!
Happiness must be sought.
It never comes through inaction! ..."

I remember your parting words:
"... Buy a 4th class ticket,
Or travel in a 3rd class berth. ...
... Off to work and study.
Support myself after a year.
... Studying applied physics and chemistry,
To blaze a trail
For women's economic and spiritual independence
To regain their inalienable rights. ..."

How your spirit,
Your determination
And your courage
Are firm and strong,
Inspired by the struggle.
You travel
Via the East and South China Seas,
The Red Sea and Mediterranean.
May their surging waves

Speed you to the shores of France,
The land of liberty.

Once there
Take up your tools
And earn shining successes
By the sweat of your brow.
Develop your talents,
Maintain your simplicity.
Then on your return
Unfurl the flag of freedom,
Sing the song of independence,
Fight for women's rights,
Striving for equality.
Plunge yourself into action,
And through your determination
Overthrow outdated ethics.

In passing through Nanking
You'll encounter Shu-an.
I imagine your sad parting
At Hsiakuan Station
Or by the Huangpu River.
Do not dwell on separation
Since on this earth you both reside.
Your love, moreover, like a lotus root,
"Linked by fibres though divided".
In two months
Shu-an will be in the New World.
Yet the waves of the Atlantic
Cannot prevent your exchanges;

Like two radio receivers
On either side of the ocean
You will commune.

After three moons
On a wharf at Marseilles,
In the suburbs of Paris,
Perhaps we'll meet.

Farewell!
You are going.
You are about to leave.
So rapid your progress
In three months since we met.

— at the house of detention of the Tientsin Procuratorate

8th June 1920

Yu-ju,

I've composed this poem as a memento for you since you are leaving and I can't be with you to see you off. Starting at four o'clock this afternoon, I managed to finish it by half-past six. I consider it among the better poems in my collection.

What do you think of it? Please show it to Shu-an when you reach Nanking. Please try to use your poetic talents to write me one in reply before your ship arrives.

Farewell! Perhaps we shall meet again in three months' time. At least, let's hope so.

Tien-an has also written you a poem to wish you bon voyage!

En-lai

Parting in Life or Death

— *1922*

... From Shih-shan's letter to Nien-wu, I learned about the death of Huang Ai at the hands of Chao Heng-ti and the capitalists, for his part in the textile workers' strike in Changsha. Deeply moved by feelings and memories of my late comrade, I composed this poem recording my thoughts and as a message to my friends.

Heroic death,
Wretched life.
Death is worthier
Than cowardly existence!
Partings in life or death
Are hard to bear.
Partings in life bring anxiety,

Dying in vain achieves nothing;
A meaningful death
Is better.

No sowing,
No reaping.
Without the seeds of revolution
How can communism flourish?
How can the red flag flutter
Unless dyed in martyrs' blood?
Nothing comes cheaply.

Armchair talk
Is no substitute for action!
Cowards too
Feel sadness at parting
Partake in birth or death.
Yet a meaningful death
They cannot comprehend.

Rely on no one!
The way of life or death
Lies open to all.
To fly towards the light,
Fledged and free:
To turn the virgin soil
With iron hoe;
Sowing seeds among the people,
Shedding your blood upon the soil.

Separated in life
Perhaps parted for ever.

Reflections on life and death have shown
Death as well as life
Demands total commitment.
Why grieve over eternal parting?

This poem was first published in the supplement of the Tientsin newspaper *New People's Will* of April 15, 1923. Comrade Chou En-lai was then in Germany, working in the European branch of the Chinese Communist Party, doing revolutionary propaganda and organization work among the Chinese students and workers living in Europe.

Huang Ai from Hunan Province was a member of the Awakening Society sponsored by Comrade Chou En-lai when he was studying in Tientsin in 1919. He took an active part in the Tientsin students' patriotic movement led by Comrade Chou En-lai. Later he went to Hunan and came into contact with Comrade Mao Tsetung, under whose influence he joined the Socialist Youth League. In January 1922 Huang Ai and others led the Changsha textile workers in a strike. On January 16 he was arrested by the Hunan warlord Chao Heng-ti and was killed the following morning.

In a letter from Germany to a fellow revolutionary in China, Comrade Chou En-lai wrote: "Huang Ai's death was both heroic and tragic. It had no precedent in China and was rare in the world labour movement. Because of our friendship, we cannot help but grieve, but the best way to honour his memory is to work harder! My only tribute to him is the above poem expressing my feelings and my recent commitment to the C.P. . . . The sad news of Huang Ai's death has strengthened my resolve. In any case, I hope I won't let this late friend down."

In this poem, Comrade Chou En-lai expressed not only his deep respect for his martyred friend, but also the proletariat's view of life and death. It shows the author's noble communist spirit.

Odsor

Spring Rain

"It's raining so hard. Why don't you put on your raincoat? Look, you're soaked to the skin. Come in quickly."

Old Arben, lying facing the wall of his yurt, was roused by the voice of his grand-daughter Mandrwa. Before turning round, he heard a man speaking outside.

"Never mind. The rain simply refreshes me." The door flapped open and shut as they entered the yurt. "Oh, your grandad's sleeping. Is he any better?" the man asked softly.

It sounded to Arben like Mandrwa's friend, the young herdsman. Not wanting to interrupt them he remained motionless, as if asleep.

"It's not too serious. He's on the mend now," the girl replied in a low voice.

"I've brought you an effectual remedy." The man seemed to be putting something on the table. "Dr. Wang guarantees this'll cure him."

"So you came out of your way to bring him medicine?" Mandrwa asked in surprised delight.

"Isn't that only right?" the man retorted frankly. "Now let's go and have a look at your sheep."

Then the door closed softly behind them, and Arben heard them squelching through the mud.

"To have a look at our sheep? Who is he?" It could not be the herdsman, Arben decided, for he would not take so much interest in sheep. He got up with an effort, his silver beard quivering, and went softly to the table to open the packet on it. Inside were six large pills, each inscribed with a golden brand. "He came through the pouring rain to bring me such good medicine!" Arben looked exultantly at the pills in his hand. "But who is he?" He pressed his forehead against the window-pane to peer out.

Dusk was falling over the Ordus Plateau. Through the misty rain, he made out two people examining the sheep. The man bent to stroke first this one and then that.

"Ah. . . ." Arben nodded. "Cholu! No wonder that as soon as he arrived here, he went to see the sheep. He's a true herdsman's son." In delight 75-year-old Arben forgot his illness. With a smile on his bronzed, wrinkled face he opened the door and fondly called the visitor by his pet name.

"Borhu, what do you think of our sheep?"

"How are you, grandad?" A new-born lamb in his arms, Cholu strode out of the pen. A swarthy young man of about twenty-seven and of medium height, he was the brigade Party secretary. Wearing a yellowish cap and a faded blue robe tightly girdled at the waist, he came striding towards the old man.

As they were shaking hands, Mandrwa came running towards them with another lamb. She was a strong and buxom teenager with sparkling eyes, a slightly upturned nose and finely curved lips — an intelligent and warm-hearted girl. Cholu and Mandrwa helped the old man in.

"I have seen five flocks on my way here, but not one of them up to yours." Wringing out his wet cap and clothes, Cholu added cheerfully, "They come from the same strain and have the same sky above, the same earth below, so why is there such a disparity between them? There must be a reason for it."

Old Arben only gave him a non-committal answer as he picked up a thermos flask to pour him a cup of milk tea.

"Here, grandad!" Mandrwa gave him the pills.

"Did you come here on business, Borhu, or to bring me medicine?" asked the old man, smiling.

"He came here to make a self-criticism to you," Mandrwa cut in.

"To me?" Pointing at himself, Arben stared in surprise.

"Yes." Cholu nodded.

Frowning, Arben tried to remember when the two of them had squabbled. He's a good Party secretary, he thought. There's no need for him to criticize himself.

Cholu had lost both parents when he was young. At twelve he had started herding sheep for others and had a hard time of it. After Liberation, still only a boy, he had been brought up by the Communist Party. After he joined the Party himself, he served the people day and night regardless of wind or rain and difficulties. His eyes were always sparkling with sincerity and happiness.

Not long before this, Mandrwa coming back from a meeting had told her grandfather, "The commune Party secretary and brigade leaders all criticized themselves."

"Why? Have they made some mistakes?" The old man was taken aback.

"No," replied Mandrwa. "It's not only those who make mistakes who should practise self-criticism. Secretary Cholu said, 'Without criticism and self-criticism people can't make progress, just as plants without sunlight can't thrive.'"

"Oh? That's a new idea to me." Arben toyed with the thought.

Putting down the cup, Cholu now eyed the old man's honest, kindly face and said, "You may have forgotten, grandad, the shearing last autumn. . . ." He went on to apologize for his attitude on that occasion.

It had happened one fine afternoon when Old Arben, coming home, was glad to see a group of youngsters headed by Mandrwa shearing the sheep. He dismounted from his horse and entered his pen, then suddenly flared up.

"Hands off those sheep! Who taught you to clip them this way?"

The shearers straightened up in astonishment and looked — in vain — for any sign that they had injured the sheep. Then their eyes turned to the old man, wondering why he had lost his temper.

"Who told you to clip the sheep's rump?" He stamped his foot, livid with rage.

"Secretary Cholu told us to so as to get a bigger clip," replied Mandrwa.

"Secretary Cholu?" bellowed Arben. "No one, not even him, has the right to harm the commune's sheep." With this he unlatched the pen and drove out the sheep. Then, mounting his horse he headed for the brigade headquarters.

"Did you tell them to clip the sheep's rump, Borhu?" The old man collared Cholu just as he was getting into a truck. "Nothing doing! Who'd be responsible for the consequences? It's a serious matter." He seemed so unduly worked up that the others there laughed, making him too angry to speak.

"We discussed it in advance, grandad." Cholu chuckled at sight of the old man in such a huff. "We can shear a good three ounces of wool from each rump. Figure it out for yourself. With tens of thousands of sheep, how much extra wool does that come to? How much extra money shall we make?"

"Money, money!" Arben was more furious. "Are you our Party secretary or a merchant? Just wait and see. You're all wrong — asking for trouble!"

"I don't think so." Cholu smiled thoughtlessly. "If anything's wrong then it's your way of thinking."

"My way of thinking! All right. Maybe I'm too old." At this he mounted his horse and with an indignant crack of his whip rode off.

Cholu realized that he had gone too far. But before he could call Arben back, the truck he was in drove off.

Since then one year had passed. Yet Cholu felt contrite each time he remembered this tiff. He believed the old man had been wrong, still he had the commune's interests at heart and had meant well.

"Grandad, I was wrong," said Cholu frankly. "I should have thought of you as my own father, then I'd never have been so rude."

"Honestly, that's the way my grandad is. Don't take it so seriously, Party secretary," put in Mandrwa, feeling both touched and embarrassed.

The old man was very touched. In all his life as a shepherd, no one outside the family had shown any respect or consideration for him. Feeling too moved to speak he stroked the young man's hands.

"Don't reproach yourself, lad," he said at last. "We are just like one family. There's no need to let such a trifle prey on your mind. It's true I was angry with you, but that's all over and done with, see?" He patted Cholu on his shoulder.

"No, comrade, as a Party secretary I shouldn't have been so rude to an old man. I should realize that one tactless word of mine can lower our people's morale and stop them from taking the initiative."

Old Arben at length saw what he meant. "Don't put me down like this, lad!" He put up one little finger, then went on proudly, "Even an axe can't destroy my initiative. If you don't believe me, come and see the sheep I've reared."

"I believe you all right. But it seems to me you're less ready to criticize us these days or express your opinions."

Mandrwa thought for a while with her eyes screwed up before she nodded.

"No, that's not true." The strong-minded old man shook his head. "I was born blunt and outspoken. I rap out my opinion as soon as I find something wrong. But I never bear a grudge. I live for my sheep. The better they graze and the plumper they get, the happier I am!"

By now it was dark. Pelting rain drummed on the top of the yurt. Looking at his watch and listening to the rain, Cholu was in a hurry to leave, but the old man and his grand-daughter would not let him. Cholu said that he had telephoned the brigade to notify their team leaders to meet at headquarters that evening and arrange for the coming shearing. He had to go the next morning to attend another meeting in the county.

The timely rain warmed Cholu's heart, making him eager to go into action. The old man and the girl tried hard to keep him, but in vain.

"Saddle his horse, quickly," Arben finally ordered as he was draping his raincoat on Cholu's back.

"He didn't come on horseback," Mandrwa laughed.

"What's wrong with your horse?" asked Arben in surprise, for rarely indeed did the herdsmen on the grassland go anywhere on foot.

"We've handed them all to the farming team to help them grow more grain."

"Then take one of ours, will you?" suggested Mandrwa.

"Right. Sloshing through the rain is heavy going."

"No. That doesn't matter," Cholu retorted. "Our Red Army marched more than eight thousand miles. We ought to go on foot

sometimes otherwise how can we know how hard it was for them covering that great distance."

The young man's enthusiasm excited Arben's envy. He patted him on his shoulder and said, "Ah, if I were still your age. . . ."

Outside the yurt, the grassland was already hidden in the rainy darkness. Some milkmaids by their fence were milking cows. The breeze carried to them the girls' laughter and snatches of herdsmen's songs.

Cholu, tucking the skirt of his gown up in his girdle, trudged off through the swampy grass. Soon he disappeared into the dark.

Having seen him off, Mandrwa came back to their yurt. A cup of water in her hand, she urged, "Take your medicine now, grandad."

Picking up a pill, he gazed at the gold characters on it.

"I forgot to pay for this!" he exclaimed at last.

"Don't you know we get free medical care?" she retorted with a smile.

"Before Liberation," reminisced the old man, tears in his eyes, "if I could have afforded to buy medicine, your father wouldn't have died. At that time, a pill like this cost as much as a horse."

"Forget it, grandad. Hurry up and take the medicine," the cup of water in her hand, she urged him once more. Old Arben peeled off its wax coat then and drank it down.

Whether owing to the medicine or his own peace of mind, the old man felt much better. His grand-daughter sat down to study by lamplight as he was lying on the bed thinking.

All of a sudden he sat up to ask, "What do you think of me? Take initiative for instance."

"You're good in every other way," she answered frankly after a moment's thought. "Only you don't show quite enough concern for the other teams' flocks and herds."

"Give specific examples." He edged a little forward. "I want to criticize myself too."

Secretly pleased, Mandrwa said, "For instance, not long ago some teams' ewes and lambs died. Everyone else was frantic, but you didn't seem to care in the least."

"Who said so?" He sounded indignant. "The commune's sheep and cattle belong to us herdsmen. Of course I care about them. But last year they didn't take my advice and insisted on shearing the sheep's rumps. On top of that, winter set in earlier than usual and we had heavy snow. Nothing could be done."

"You're always harping on shearing rumps. What has that to do with the sheep dying?"

"*Aiya*, lass! It has a lot to do with it. Don't you believe me?"

"No, I don't. What's the evidence for it?"

"The evidence?" Moving nearer, the old man went on, "Our sheep are the evidence." Then he told her his theory in detail.

"So that's how it is! Why didn't you tell us earlier?" she demanded.

"No one would listen to me. Didn't you hear Cholu's story just now?"

"Yes, I did. But you didn't explain clearly what you meant."

This reproach dumbfounded Arben. Knitting his brows, his eyes fixed on the lamp, he did some serious thinking. And gradually it dawned on him that instead of warning them patiently and clearly, he had simply complained that they wouldn't take good advice.

"Saddle my horse," he told Mandrwa abruptly. "I want to go and see Cholu."

His grand-daughter would not let him go out in the rain. Hard as he pleaded, she was adamant. He would have to wait till the next morning.

He could hardly sleep that night as he remembered the natural disasters — floods, drought and blizzards — he and other herdsmen had endured in the past and how they had protected their sheep and cattle against them. He realized that he should have passed on his experience to the younger generation.

Before dawn Arben quietly got up and dressed, then slipped out of the yurt. The rain had stopped. The grassland was still slumbering. Though he moved so noiselessly, Mandrwa was such a light sleeper that she also awoke. When he was mounting his horse, the girl insisted on his putting on a lamb-skin waistcoat.

As he neared the brigade headquarters the sun rose, and wild flowers, washed by rain, were swaying in the gentle breeze while peasants were working in the fields by the road.

Tiptoeing into the brigade office he saw many men snoring on the beds there. "They must have sat up late last night," thought Old Arben. Among them were all the brigade and team leaders except Cholu. Perhaps he had already left. As Old Arben was turning to go he nearly trod on a man on the floor. It was Cholu, lying on his padded coat with a saddle under his head. On an inverted cup on the desk beside him stood a half-burned candle. By it was a pile of papers and documents.

"You take no care of your health, lad," murmured the old man taking off his waistcoat and draping it over Cholu. Then he left for their kitchen.

In the kitchen the cook Old Wang was working the bellows. At sight of his old friend Arben, he jumped up to greet him. While they were having a lively conversation, the cadres trooped in.

"Are you better, grandad?" asked Cholu with concern.

"Much better," Old Arben replied in high spirits. "Your medicine has cured me for good. I won't have a relapse."

"Did you take it all in one go?" Cholu was worried.

"No." Arben grinned. "I've put aside the remainder."

As he had come so early and looked so cheerful, Cholu asked, "Are you here to give us a helping hand, grandad?"

"No, to make a self-criticism."

"What mistake have you made? Is it very serious?" A youngster quipped, imitating Arben's way of talking.

"Yes, it is. If I don't get it off my chest, the rest of you will come a cropper too."

"So serious, eh?" Feeling intrigued, Cholu took a seat beside him. The cadres winking at each other crowded round, curious to know what Arben would say next.

Old Arben continued with a shrug of his shoulders, "It's wrong if you cadres issue orders without explaining the policy to us clearly, but it's also wrong for us ordinary team members to bear a grudge

against you when we haven't made our own opinions clear. Isn't what I say right?"

"Right!" they cried with one voice.

"That's only fair." Lighting his pipe he went on, "For example, when I gave you advice, if you didn't take it I'd give up and go away without explaining my proposal in detail. I used to think that you had your job as cadres and I had mine as a shepherd. Sometimes when we lost cattle or sheep, I just blew my top. Some people think me a blockhead, but I'm not." Jerking his head towards Cholu, he added, "He's shrewd. He knows that I lack initiative."

"What do you mean?" asked a cadre.

"Well, last autumn I didn't explain myself clearly enough."

"You mean about shearing the sheep's rumps?" the same youngster challenged. "Do you still think that our method was wrong?"

"Of course!"

"Then why did you follow suit yourself?"

"As to that. . . ." Casually he tweaked his beard then said with a laugh, "I did but not completely."

"What do you mean?" Cholu was curious.

"Actually I didn't want to clip the rumps but I was afraid that headstrong grand-daughter of mine would shear them clean — tails and all. Then I hit on a good idea. When shearing the rump, I clipped only the tip of the wool. The rumps looked shorn — you could see the swaths left by the shears — only they were bigger than those of your sheep."

"Didn't your grand-daughter discover your trick?"

"Yes, she did. She grumbled for quite a few days that I hadn't sheared the rump clean and had wasted a whole lot of wool."

They all exchanged laughing comments. Cholu probed further: "What does it do, grandad, leaving the wool on the rump?"

"It does plenty! We Mongolians have done this from way back, but no one knew why. At twenty-five, I grazed sheep for a merchant. When shearing time came and I left a mat of wool on the rump, he took me to task. I explained that it was our Mongolian custom, and that the rump looked better that way. He bawled, 'I raise sheep to make money from their wool — I don't care what they look like.

Clip it clean!' When bitter winter set in with driving snow, the sheep huddled together for warmth beside the sand-dunes. Even whipping couldn't budge them. But other flocks, able to stand the cold, were peacefully grazing on the mountain slopes. Later an old herdsman told me. . . ."

By now, the cook Old Wang was listening so raptly that he had quite forgotten to ply his bellows. And the cadres were all sitting motionless, eager to hear what followed. After filling his pipe and taking a few puffs, the old man continued:

"Practically speaking, it's not for looks but for warmth that wool is left on the rump. If you shear it, the sheep can't stand the bitter cold. Naturally they'll huddle together. And when they do that they can't graze properly. Soon they'll grow thinner and thinner."

"That's right. And the thinner they are, the more of them die," agreed Cholu.

"You're about to arrange for your next shearing, aren't you? Let me give you a suggestion."

"To keep the rump unshorn?" that youngster teased.

The old man rapped the young fellow's head with his pipe. "How would you feel, in summer, if you had to wear a silk shirt and sheepskin trousers?" he joked.

His retort raised a laugh.

"Fire away, grandad," urged Cholu, fishing out his notebook. "We'll certainly follow your advice this time."

"Good. In spring you must shear your sheep short. The shorter you clip, the cooler the sheep feels and the quicker it'll grow fat. And dip it straight after shearing, to protect it from diseases. When it comes to horses, though, never clip a stallion's mane. . . ."

"Wouldn't he feel cooler if we did?" asked the same youngster, winking at his friends.

Arben stroked the young fellow's head. "Why don't you shave

your head?" he retorted. "Don't you sport all that hair hoping to take the girls' fancy? The stallion's like you -- his mane helps him cut a dash. It makes geldings afraid of him but attracts the mares, so that each one foals."

The cadres applauded. "You came here just at the right time," they said. "You've helped us solve a difficult problem."

"Yes, that's valuable advice. But it's a pity that you didn't tell us earlier."

"It's not that grandad didn't tell us earlier, but we didn't take his advice."

"No, lad. I'm the one to blame for my hot temper. I should have explained it patiently in detail, but I wasn't public-spirited enough. Well, let bygones be bygones." He looked out of the window. "The rain has let up. This year our flocks and herds are certain to thrive and increase."

The cadres and Old Arben left the kitchen laughing. Under the clear sky the grassland had been washed an emerald green. Flocks of grazing sheep advanced like the white crests of waves. Cholu felt as if every wild flower was smiling at him, every raindrop on the grass sparkling with fresh hope.

"The spring rain came just in the nick of time," said Old Arben exultantly.

"Yes, it's turned fine now," Cholu jubilantly chimed in. "And this morning the sun seems bigger and brighter than ever."

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Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien

Besieged in His Palace

Chapter 31

As was his habit, the emperor rose at dawn and went to the courtyard to kowtow to heaven, before returning to his chamber. After supping a bowl of bird's-nest soup, he hastened to his court session by carriage. Not yet day, the early morning sun had just started to shine on the palace roof's yellow-glazed tiles. Feeling more morose than usual over the affair with his favourite concubine Tien, he sighed to himself: "Emperor Wan-li never attended court from one year to the next and seldom saw his officials, likewise Emperor Tien-chi. Yet the state had fewer difficulties. I, however, work diligently all the time, yet the gods do not favour me. The situation shows no signs of improvement and worsens daily. When I tried to raise funds for the army, my imperial relatives thwarted me and my ministers stood aloof. Even my favourite concubine pleaded for the marquis. When will all this trouble end?" Then he thought of his two trusted officials, Yang Ssu-chang, who was leading his forces to exterminate the bandits, and his minister of war, Chen Hsin-chia,

who was trying to negotiate a peace settlement with the Manchus and felt some relief.

The court session, held at the Tsoshun Gate, was very brief as the emperor did not listen to the usual reports from the different ministries. Irritated by some officials reporting about local famines and begging to be exempted from revenues and taxes, the emperor became more annoyed by communications about the desperate military situation in certain areas and requests for more troops. He thought to himself: "You are all court officials, yet blind to the real situation with your demands for more troops and more funds. Do you think these can be produced out of a hat?" However, he only said curtly: "Yes, I know." Then he grimly ordered the minister and two vice-ministers of revenue to step forward and answer some questions. Since the emperor's temper had been so erratic of late, the three ministers frightened by his stern look hastily knelt before him. Unsuccessful in his attempt to get money from the marquis, the emperor had instructed the ministry of finance a few days earlier to propose a plan to raise money. So now looking at his three officials he said:

"Because of the difficulty in trying to raise funds for the army, your ministry suggests borrowing one year's rent from civilian families in the capital. After I had read your report last night, I issued an edict to that effect. This must be done impartially so that people cannot complain that we are squeezing money out of them, while failing to solve the real problem."

Kowtowing the minister replied: "It will be carried out in Shuntien Prefecture and Tahsing and Wanping Counties and should relieve the situation to some extent."

The emperor nodded and said: "Since you have determined upon this, you must persist in it and not waver."

Having made inquiries from some other officials and ministries such as the ministry of war, the emperor then adjourned the session. After he had returned to his palace, changed his clothes and eaten breakfast, he sat as usual at his desk to read the reports. First he read Hsueh Kuo-kuan's, in which he tried to defend himself, refusing to admit he had embezzled the money. Dissatisfied, the emperor could barely control his anger, but as he did not wish to punish him on the

eve of the empress' birthday and still hoped that Hsueh would help him in borrowing money from the imperial relatives, he managed to restrain himself. He wrote on the report that it was to be filed away, then feeling disgusted, he left the palace to try and alleviate his mood. Some eunuchs and maids followed him in trepidation not daring to make a sound. When the emperor reached the palace gate, a eunuch thinking he might require a carriage, stepped forward and asked meekly:

"Where does Your Majesty desire to go? Does Your Majesty require the carriage?"

The emperor hesitated. Ahead were the three main halls; behind the Chiaotai Hall was the empress' Kunning Palace and the imperial garden. He neither wished to visit the empress' palace and see the eunuchs and maids busy with the preparations for the birthday celebrations, nor the garden with its flowers and goldfish. In the past he would have gone to the Chengchien Palace to see his favourite concubine Tien, but now she was banished. He was never too eager to visit his other favourite concubine Yuan, and none of the others appealed in the least. Pausing, he gazed up at the sky and was silent for a while till he heard the sound of music coming from the east. He turned and asked:

"Where is that music coming from?"

At his side a eunuch answered: "Since tomorrow is Her Imperial Majesty's birthday and she will be fully occupied, she went today to the Fenghsien Hall to pay homage to the ancestors."

"Hmm. Yes, it's a good idea to go there early," the emperor muttered to himself. He felt he should explain to the empress why he had punished the concubine Tien, and he could also take the opportunity to suggest that she ask her father, the Earl of Chiating, to make a voluntary contribution of several tens of thousands of taels as an example to the other imperial relatives. With this in mind, he left his palace.

If the emperor retraced his steps and went out of the Jihching Gate and turned east past the lane behind the treasury, he would reach the Fenghsien Hall, but lost in thought he went to the main street and turned north. At the Jihching Gate, he hesitated again, feeling he

should not go to the Fenghsien Hall and disturb the ceremony. Besides, he could hardly discuss the affair of Tien or money matters before the shrines of their ancestors. He paused and then continued northwards, so that the eunuchs assumed he was making for the empress' palace and one rushed ahead to prepare a welcome for the emperor. The emperor, however, muttered:

"I'll just rest a while in the Chiaotai Hall. I won't go to the empress' palace."

After his rest he still felt troubled and uneasy, so rising he went outside and paced around waiting for the empress, who soon came. Seeing the emperor looking depressed, she hastened forward asking:

"Why is Your Majesty here?"

"As you were at the Fenghsien Hall, I decided to wait for you here."

The empress asked timidly: "Does Your Majesty require something from me?"

"Have you heard that the concubine Tien has been sent to the Chihsiang Palace?"

"Yes, I was informed yesterday evening." She lowered her head and sighed.

"Do you know why I punished her?"

"No. As mistress of your household, I've failed to set a good example for the others and so she has greatly angered Your Majesty. I am therefore partly to blame. I hope that Your Majesty will take into consideration her past good behaviour despite her spoilt and proud manner. She also is the mother of three of Your Majesty's sons, the youngest of whom is a delightful child. I hope that Your Majesty will be merciful."

"It is because her youngest son is only five that I did not deal too severely with her."

"What caused the offence?"

"She's too arrogant and dared to communicate with people outside the palace and plead for the marquis."

This news startled the empress, as her father had also been sending messages through a palace eunuch begging her to speak on behalf of the marquis to the emperor. Knowing the emperor's suspicious nature, she had decided against this and rebuked the eunuch. Now

she congratulated herself for not meddling in the affair. She thought for a moment and then summoning up her courage pleaded with the emperor:

"The rules of our ancestors are strict and ladies of the imperial palace are prohibited from interfering in affairs of state. Yet since the concubine Tien was very likely asked by her father, it is different from other outside communications. Besides all the imperial families are related, so it is natural that all feel concerned if one is in difficulty. According to the rules, the concubine Tien was very wrong to plead with Your Majesty, but it is very understandable. I hope Your Majesty...."

Before she could finish the emperor glaring severely reprimanded her: "What nonsense! How dare you ignore our ancestors' rules and spoil her?"

The empress' voice trembled as she answered: "I dare not. But she did this because Your Majesty spoiled her, not I. When I saw her being pampered, I tried to stop it and for this incurred Your Majesty's wrath. How can I spoil her?"

Wagging his finger at her, the emperor sputtered: "Why you ... you.... What are you implying?"

The empress never dared to speak boldly to her husband, but since he was reproaching her so strongly before her eunuchs and maids, she felt aggrieved. Growing courageous, she tearfully said:

"Has Your Majesty forgotten? Last New Year's Day, because of wars and famines Your Majesty cancelled the ceremony for court ladies to come and offer their congratulations, only allowing the palace ladies to do so in the Kunning Palace. There was a heavy fall of snow that morning. I was irritated by the concubine Tien's insolent and spoilt manner, her lack of respect for me, all of which Your Majesty ignored. When she came to greet me I decided to snub her and show her my authority. Hearing her name announced, I kept her waiting at the Yunghsiang Gate and only after some time did I grant her an audience. After she had kowtowed I neither detained her to talk nor bade her be seated. Confronted by my silence she withdrew. Later when the other imperial concubine Yuan came, I summoned her immediately and leaving my throne I smiled at her and led her

by the hand into the inner chamber for a talk. I treated her like a sister. Tien, already resentful at the way I had treated her, became even more so when she heard about Yuan. Later Tien reported this to Your Majesty, and while Your Majesty had no cause for anger since I had devoted my life to you, still you reproached me for my behaviour. Now Your Majesty can hardly accuse me of spoiling Tien!"

No one in the palace ever dared talk back to the emperor, who only allowed people to be humble and servile. On hearing her retort and suggestion that he was responsible for spoiling Tien, he was furious and swore at her. "You damn fool!" he cried, thrusting her violently so that the empress, caught unawares and in her bound feet, lost her balance and staggering backwards fell to the ground. Immediately the eunuchs and maids threw themselves on the ground before the emperor, meekly begging him not to be angry, while two other maids helped the empress to her feet. The empress had been his wife for many years, when he was Prince Hsin and treated badly. As she was being helped up by her maids weeping, she covered her face and cried: "Oh, Prince Hsin, Prince Hsin!" Afraid lest she say more and further enrage the emperor, her maids hastily helped her to her carriage to return to her palace. The emperor meanwhile stared at the prostrate eunuchs and maids. Having no outlet for his anger, he kicked one of the eunuchs, swore and then went back to his palace.

The emperor's calm returned as he sat before his desk. Instead of explaining to the empress why he was being forced to borrow money from the imperial relatives and suggesting her father contribute a large amount as an example, he had pushed her over and said nothing. He regretted both his increasing irritability and dashed hopes. Wrestling with his annoyance, he perused the official reports and gazettes, most of which concerned famines, revolts and requests for money for the army. Among these was a report from Yang Ssu-chang, who apart from a request for money, stated that he was about to surround and exterminate the insurgents under Chang Hsien-chung and Lo Ju-tsai in the border region between Szechuan and Hupeh. Sceptical at such optimism, the emperor sighed and thought:

"Always talking about laying siege, but who in fact is being besieged? Every year we boast about rounding up the bandits, but it's just talk. I feel I'm the one being besieged here in the Forbidden City!"

The empress wept for a long time in her palace, refusing to leave her bed for lunch or to eat, despite the entreaties of her chief maids and eunuchs who knelt outside her bedroom. At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, a rule was made that all empresses and imperial concubines should be chosen from middle-class families of good background, so as to prevent the relatives from becoming too powerful and creating problems as in earlier dynasties. If a girl became an empress or imperial concubine, then her family naturally rose in status and enjoyed great wealth and luxury. Before coming to the palace, the empress had lived as an ordinary citizen in her middle-class family, and later while her husband was still a prince, she had had some trying experiences. These had left a deep impression on her. In her exalted status, she did not dwell on her origins, but now feeling wronged and unhappy, she recalled her youth, weeping as she remembered how at sixteen she had been chosen as the prince's bride. She felt the emperor was heartless. She knew that many empresses in the past had met unfortunate ends. Some lost imperial favour as they grew old; others were attacked by a favourite concubine. To lose favour meant dismissal, incarceration, being poisoned or forced to commit suicide. Never in the palace flourished true love, and fate was fickle.

Just after midday, the chief eunuch of the empress' palace, Liu An, reported to the emperor the condition of the empress. The emperor felt even more remorse, since it was the empress' birthday the next day and should the affair spread around the capital, everyone would be shocked and his reputation would be tarnished. He ordered the crown prince and his other sons and daughters to go to their mother and plead with her weeping. The imperial concubine Yuan was also sent. The empress, however, refused all nourishment, which increased the emperor's anxiety, worried as he was over affairs of state and the imminent birthday celebrations. Later, when it was almost dusk, he sent his trusted eunuch Wang Teh-hua to the empress' palace

with a gift of an ermine rug and a hamper of sweetmeats. The eunuch knelt to present them and then kowtowing said:

"Your Imperial Majesty, the emperor was very worried about affairs of state today, that is why he lost his temper. He deeply regrets his behaviour and when he heard that Your Majesty had not taken your lunch, he was so distressed that he could not eat or read state papers. Tomorrow will be Your Majesty's birthday and your mother, the palace ladies and servants will be coming to congratulate you. For the sake of His Majesty, your mother and your birthday celebrations, we beg you to eat some food."

The empress was silent for a while and the eunuch dared not rise. Then she saw the ermine rug in her maid's hands and suddenly remembered that it had been in her husband's house when he was still a prince and realized that the emperor was sending this to show he would never forget their past love. Then she thought of her mother's coming visit, and weeping she said:

"Go and tell His Majesty that I will obey his order and eat something."

"Long live Your Majesty! Long live His Majesty!" Wang said with relief and kowtowing withdrew.

The empress still felt hurt, but with her birthday, and the government in difficulties, the celebrations though frugal would still cost up to thirty or forty thousand taels of silver with all the various rewards, gifts and feasts, and so she decided to tell her husband that she only required twenty thousand taels and meet the difference herself. The chief eunuchs in charge of her properties and land could also contribute. So she summoned Liu An, her chief eunuch, and asked him:

"Are all the gifts and rewards for tomorrow ready?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," said Liu An bowing.

Then she asked: "Have the sutras been copied?"

Her chief maid, Wu Wan-yung, who was standing behind her bowed and answered: "One bound copy was sent here this morning, but we did not show it to Your Majesty because you were unhappy. The other twenty copies will be ready by this evening and bound dur-

ing the night. They'll be brought here early tomorrow morning in time for Your Majesty to distribute them as gifts."

The empress said softly: "Show me the sutra."

Her maid bowed and casting a glance at the maids standing nearby withdrew. Immediately a maid brought warm water in a gold basin and knelt before the empress, while two others helped the empress to wash her hands. The maid Wu after washing her hands returned with a rectangular ebony box, which she opened kneeling before the empress. The empress smiling faintly took out the sutra, which was mounted on a long piece of folded yellow hempen paper and bound by two wooden boards covered with yellow satin. On the cover was a brown silk label on which was neatly written the title: "Vadjra Pradinaparamita Sutra". The writing inside was neat, frail and feminine and copied in a dark red liquid. The empress read the first passage in a low voice:

"It is said that when Buddha was once at the Jetavana Vihara in the county of Sravasti with a large group of his main *Bhikchus*, one thousand two hundred and fifty all together. . . ."

She looked pleased as she closed the book and passed it to one of her maids. Then she said to Liu An approvingly: "This palace maid's piety is praiseworthy."

The chief eunuch bowed and answered: "Copying this sutra in her own blood shows her devotion to the Buddha and to Your Majesty."

Turning to her maid Wu, the empress inquired: "What's her name? I've forgotten it. Has she been rewarded?"

Wu replied: "Your Majesty has so much to occupy her mind and in the palace there are over ten thousand maids, so how can Your Majesty expect to remember each name. She is called Chen Shun-chuan. When Your Majesty ordered that she be rewarded with ten taels of silver, I told another maid, Liu Ching-fen, to convey this news and the reward to her, for which the maid kowtowed her gratitude and wished Your Majesty everlasting fortune and a long life."

The empress said: "To the other twenty maids who followed her example give five taels of silver each, and since they all fasted and abstained from eating meat, let each be given a box of preserved

fruit. But since Chen Shun-chuan did this for my birthday and set the others a good example, reward her with an extra box."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Wu kowtowed and then rising withdrew to one side.

The chief eunuch then knelt down and said: "Your Majesty, Hui-ching, the monk from the Lungfu Monastery will burn himself to death tomorrow to pray for the good fortune of Your Majesties. Everything is ready."

When the empress had first heard of this several days ago, she had hoped it would occur to bring good fortune and show the emperor that she was an empress whom all her subjects, including the monks, respected. And the emperor would be pleased with it too. Looking at Liu An, she sighed:

"Who would ever have thought that a monk would show such devotion? Is he really sacrificing himself voluntarily?"

Liu An answered: "Though a monk has renounced the mortal world by taking holy orders, he remains a subject of the emperor. Loyalty and piety are human virtues which monks share, and this monk, Hui-ching, was so moved by the emperor's concern for the state and Your Majesty's devotion, that he also prayed for the state. As Your Majesty's birthday approached, Buddha awakened a desire in him to sacrifice his life for Your Majesty. Such devotion is rare. By sacrificing his mortal flesh, he will become a saint in nirvana."

This news pleased the empress. After a while she said: "Then I won't try to prevent him."

Liu An continued: "We have already distributed, yesterday, donations to the monasteries in the capital in honour of Your Majesty's birthday. But since a monk from the Lungfu Monastery is going to burn himself to death, it should receive a special donation. If Your Majesty will instruct how much to give, we will attend to it."

Not knowing what to reply, the empress answered: "Do as you think fit. In such trivial matters, there is no need to consult me."

The eunuch said: "This is a wealthy and famous monastery, not relying on alms like the poorer temples. Whatever Your Majesty donates is an example of Your Majesty's kindness, whereas to give too lavishly is against the emperor's desire for frugality. I therefore

suggest an additional two thousand taels because of Hui-ching's sacrifice and a further two hundred taels to construct a pagoda for his ashes."

The empress nodded but said nothing, though she thought to herself: "Our maids copy sutras in their blood and a monk sacrifices his life. If only the lord Buddha in the western paradise will observe their piety and protect us so that we may enjoy good health and prosperity in the state."

After Liu An had kowtowed and retired, he obtained the two thousand two hundred taels from the palace treasury, keeping one thousand for himself and sending the remainder by a eunuch, Hsieh Cheng, to the chief abbot of the monastery with instructions to write out a receipt for the full amount. But the eunuch, Hsieh Cheng, deducted a further five hundred taels, leaving only seven hundred for the monastery. The chief abbot, Chih-hsien, kowtowed and thanked the empress for her generosity on behalf of all the monks. Then he wrote the receipt as instructed and gave it to the eunuch. It mattered little to him how much he received. He was satisfied to maintain the connection with the empress' palace. Moreover, he would receive tens of thousands of taels from donations once the monk had burned himself to death in public.

The following day, the twenty-eighth of the third month, was the empress' birthday. Before dawn the sounds of drums, bells and chimes were heard from all the temples in Peking, as monks and Taoist priests chanted sutras for the empress. In the Takaohsuan Hall, west of Longevity Hill, now known as Chingshan, and Yinghua Hall in the Forbidden City, priestesses and palace maids had started praying before midnight to show their loyalty to the empress. After the fifth watch, the crown prince at the head, the empress' children and ladies of the palace all went in turn to congratulate the empress, who was seated on her throne. Her palace was lit by magnificent lanterns, while incense burned and music played. Only the imperial concubine Yuan paid her homage inside the hall; the others according to rank did so outside. The late emperor's concubines being senior in status need not appear in person, nor Empress Yi-an, widow of

the late emperor. Though a sister-in-law and permitted to join in the celebrations, yet she was young and it would be inappropriate for her to meet the emperor. Moreover, she preferred a retiring life, reading, practising calligraphy or chanting Buddhist sutras at her home. She sent instead two maids with presents for the empress, one of which was a scroll of a Buddhist sutra copied by herself on yellow silk and elegantly bound. Leaving her throne, the empress told the crown prince to go and thank her on her behalf. The concubine Tien, who was in disgrace and unable to appear without permission, sent her congratulations in writing signing herself "your guilty slave", and by her youngest son, carried in his nurse's arms with some eunuchs and maids in attendance. In the past the empress had been annoyed by Tien because she was the emperor's favourite and arrogant and they had sometimes quarrelled. But since she was in disgrace, the empress sympathized with her and on reading her congratulations and seeing her son, she felt sad. She picked up the child and sitting him on her knee played with him a little before telling the maids to take him into the garden to play.

It was daylight when the ceremony ended and the empress left her throne, changed her clothes and ate breakfast. After a short rest, she looked at her presents which her maid Wu had displayed in the east and west chambers for her to inspect. Apart from the ones given by Empress Yi-an and the late emperor's concubines, there were gifts from the emperor's concubines, the chief eunuchs in charge of the seals of the twelve departments, the six eunuchs in charge of the secretariat, the chief maids in charge of the six bureaux of the palace, all the chief eunuchs and maids of the more important palaces and the nurses of the crown prince and the emperor's other children. Of these, the presents from Wang Teh-hua and other wealthy eunuchs of the secretariat were among the best. From outside the palace, those gifts from the eunuchs in charge of the East Bureau, the various armies and Taihoshan outside the capital and the silk factories south of the Yangtse were the most splendid. They had been sent to the palace some days earlier. Having viewed her gifts, the empress returned to the main hall to receive congratulations from the eunuchs and maids. Of the twenty thousand servants inside and outside the pal-

ace, only a thousand eunuchs and four hundred maids and nurses were permitted to pay homage to the empress outside the hall. Having official ranks like the government officials and dressed accordingly, they were grouped from the empress' palace courtyard to the streets. It was a spectacular and magnificent sight and the air was heavy with perfume. Wang Teh-hua was the first to kowtow to the empress, since as the eunuch in charge of the imperial seal, his position was equivalent to a prime minister. Next was Tsao Hua-chun, who headed the East Bureau, and then others according to their status. After the eunuchs came the chief maids and nurses. Their names announced by the master of ceremonies, music and exploding firecrackers, all intermingled in the festive atmosphere. When the ceremony, which lasted more than one hour, was concluded, the empress returned to the west chamber for a rest before changing her clothes and waiting for her mother's arrival with mixed feelings of anticipation and sorrow. She was also worried lest the monk had not burned himself to death and that she would become the laughing stock of the capital. Summoning Liu An, she inquired:

"Is everything ready for the monk's sacrifice?"

He bowed and replied: "Please do not concern yourself over it, Your Majesty. A platform with a pile of faggots and a hassock has been constructed in the front courtyard of the monastery. Hui-ching has been sitting on it since dawn, meditating and chanting mantras, praying for himself and Your Majesty. Nothing like this has ever happened before in the capital and so crowds have gathered to watch the miracle, offering incense and alms, while others wait nearby. The inspector of the east city and the local garrison are supervising the situation and police reinforcements have been sent to keep order."

"Is anyone from the palace in charge there?" the empress asked.

The eunuch answered: "I sent Hsieh Cheng since he's a very reliable and capable person and he will keep us informed."

Then the empress turned to her maid Wu: "Have the maids who copied the sutras in their blood been rewarded?"

"According to Your Majesty's order, the rewards were distributed

last night in the Yinghua Hall and they all wish to express their gratitude to Your Majesty."

"When will the ceremony at the monastery start?" the empress again asked Liu An.

The eunuch replied: "As the faggots were to be lit at nine o'clock, it should be beginning now."

The empress said to herself: "So now is the time."

From the Lungfu Monastery came the sounds of bells, chimes, pipes, flutes and monks chanting sutras, creating a solemn and awe-inspiring atmosphere. A huge cast-iron incense burner, higher than a man, stood before the main hall, and in the middle of the courtyard was a brick reservoir, to enable the pious watchers to make their offerings outside the inner gate. To the left of this inner gate were four monks with beaming faces sitting at a long table receiving and recording donations. Worshippers were tossing prayers into a blazing fire. At nine o'clock, the chief abbot Chih-hsien, a respected figure in the capital among the aristocracy, came out of the main hall with several hundred monks in full Buddhist attire, chanting mantras and sounding wooden clappers. Reaching the front court, they surrounded the platform and continued their chanting, putting their hands together in prayer. The police and soldiers drove the onlookers back several yards from the monks, whipping and clubbing those who tried to approach nearer. Some were bound and arrested on the charge of disturbing the peace on the empress' birthday.

Hui-ching, the monk, who was only twenty-three years old, had been sitting on the hassock since dawn, sometimes opening his eyes to look at the crowds, but mainly keeping them closed trying not to think about his imminent death and hoping to achieve a state of oblivion. This was hard as earthly wishes assailed his mind. He had lost his voice so that he could utter no sound, and so he recited silently to himself a mantra, "Pradjna Paramita Dharani", which his teachers and other old monks had said would help him forget the world. But after he had recited it five times, he still recalled his past life and family. . . .

His family name was Chen, and he had been born in Chen Village in Hsiangho County. A severe famine when he was eight forced his parents to send him to a monastery as an apprentice monk to keep him alive, but as it was a poor monastery, he and his teacher went out begging for alms. Four years later, during a war, the monastery was destroyed by fire and so he was taken by his teacher ostensibly to make a pilgrimage to the sacred Wutai Mountain, but actually to seek refuge there. For several years they wandered from place to place, until they finally reached Peking in the sixth year of the reign of the emperor and settled in the Lungfu Monastery, because the old teacher had once studied there. Since they worked diligently and were willing to do all jobs and were homeless, the monks asked the abbot to accept them. Hui-ching had, during his apprenticeship, earnestly studied the sutras, and as he was intelligent he made great progress and was respected. His teacher had died the year after they came to the monastery. At eighteen he had undergone a religious ceremony in which twelve marks were burnt on his shaven forehead with incense. Among the several hundred monks, there was like everywhere else much bickering and many power struggles, with the higher-ranking monks oppressing the others. Despite Hui-ching's diligence, he was kept in a low position, assigned the hardest tasks, and often bullied. Considering all his present misfortunes as a punishment for his sins in a past life, Hui-ching strove to be a good monk, so that after his death he might go to the western paradise and if he attained Buddhahood, he would help his father, elder brother and younger sister to improve their lives as well as his dead mother in the nether regions.

He had only seen his father once since he became a monk, when his father heard that he had entered the Lungfu Monastery and arrived as a beggar to see him. He had learned from his father how his mother had died of starvation during the seventh year of the reign of the emperor; how his elder brother had worked as a labourer for a family until in the eleventh year of the emperor's reign he was abducted by invading Manchus and never heard of again; and how his younger sister, Little Shun, was very pretty so that when she was just fourteen she was taken by the palace as a maid, since her family was

too poor to bribe the officials and prevent it. Once there she had been unable to communicate with the outside world. As Hui-ching could not support his father in Peking, nor help him financially, they just wept and then his father departed as a beggar again.

Ten days earlier, the abbot of the monastery had informed him that since it was to be the empress' birthday and there were wars and famines everywhere, they wished him to sacrifice himself to appease heaven. All the high-ranking monks came in turn to persuade him, praising his intelligence and zeal and assuring him of paradise and Buddhahood after death. Since the world of man was a world of misery, why live? Far better if he sacrificed his life and attained an early state of bliss. Then his ashes would be placed in a pagoda in the Western Hills and he would be regarded as a saint. If some particles of his bones were left, another pagoda would be built inside the monastery where believers could worship such sacred relics. Eventually Hui-ching agreed to burn himself to death, but he still longed to see his father once more and hear news of his brother and sister, though he was not even sure if his father was still alive. Then three days ago he had expressed his doubts about proceeding with the sacrifice, which worried the abbot and chief monks lest it would anger the emperor and cause them great difficulties. Again they persuaded and cajoled him with veiled threats, until finally he agreed, but they remained uneasy. The night before, they had made a hole in the pile of faggots, covering it with a wooden lid and placing the hassock over it. Then taking him there in secret, they had explained that if at the last moment he changed his mind, he could remove the lid and escape through the hole to mingle with the monks. Later he would be taken to a remote spot like the Omei Mountains, where his name would be changed so that the truth would never be known. In the last days, Hui-ching had been unable to eat or sleep, his mind tormented by conflict, and his health deteriorated. The abbot the day before had kindly prepared some medicine with some costly ginseng in it. This touched Hui-ching and he thanked the Buddha for this kindness. The medicine made him feel stronger, but his voice began to grow hoarse, until after he had taken two doses, he had lost

it almost completely. They said the medicine was too strong and that his loss of voice would only be temporary.

Feeling the warm spring sunshine on his face, Hui-ching opened his eyes to see the surging crowds below. Suddenly he caught sight of one old beggar from the countryside who looked like his father, only leaner and feebler than five years before. Trying to edge his way through the crowd to the front, the old man was struck and pushed so that he nearly fell, but still he tried desperately to advance. At first Hui-ching thought that this must be a dream to tempt him, but then he realized that the man was in reality his father. The pain in his heart brought tears to his eyes and he no longer wished to die, only to see his father once more.

He was frantically trying to extricate himself when bells and drums began to sound in the monastery and as the flames leapt up around the dry faggots, dense smoke arose. Hui-ching threw aside the hassock and removed the lid to find to his horror that the hole had been filled in. Through the smoke he tried to shout out to his father, but his voice made no sound. He then tried to leap down, but his garments had been secured to the faggots while he had been meditating. He struggled but was quickly enveloped in the flames until finally he could not see his father any more, but only vaguely heard the sound of bells, drums, chimes, clappers and the monks chanting: "Namah Amita Buddha!"

Music also was heard in the palace, as four chief maids led the empress' mother into the palace to congratulate her daughter. Court ladies normally came at dawn to pay homage, but since Lady Ting was coming alone and her daughter wished her to stay and talk, she had been told to enter the Hsihua Gate at nine o'clock and the palace an hour and a half later for the audience. She had been specially allowed to travel by sedan-chair to the gate, where she had changed to a small palace sedan-chair and been carried by the palace maids to a back gate for a rest. Not permitted to enter the palace, her servants waited at the Hsihua Gate. At the appointed time, she was taken by the chief eunuch and lady in waiting of the empress' palace to the Tsengjui Gate, supported by two magnificently dressed maids. Another maid

then took the old lady to the Yunghsiang Gate where they waited for the empress to ascend her throne. Lady Ting, glancing surreptitiously around, saw that lining the path to the steps were maids carrying yellow pennants, gilded spears, silver halberds, yellow silk umbrellas, embroidered banners, fans and other insignia which glittered in the sunlight dazzling the eye. Feeling very tense, the old lady's heart beat rapidly.

When two maids went to the west chamber to ask the empress to ascend the throne, attended by her servants she solemnly and silently complied, very excited at the prospect of seeing her mother. Four pairs of maids stood on either side of her throne, while two maids stood behind it holding crosswise two yellow silk fans with an embroidered phoenix design. At the side stood the crown prince, Tzu-lang, who was twelve years old, and the second and third sons. A moon-faced mistress of ceremonies left the hall and cried out in ringing tones above the steps: "Let Ting, lady of the first rank and Countess of Chiating, ascend the steps to pay homage to Her Majesty!" Lady Ting then went forward reverently, supported by maids, past a row of guards and mounted the side of the marble steps carved with dragon designs and stood at the top, her head bowed. Although she was the mother of the empress, yet as her subject she could not raise her eyes to look at her daughter enthroned in the middle of the hall. It was many years since the empress had seen her mother and through the thick incense smoke she could see that the old lady was getting plumper. Maids supported her because of her bound feet, but she did not look as vigorous as before. Feeling a pang of grief and suppressing a sob, she ordered her maid: "Let the Countess of Chiating be specially permitted to enter the hall for the ceremony." Feeling moved Lady Ting expressed her gratitude and helped by her maids entered the hall and stood before a red silk embroidered cushion five feet away from the throne. As solemn music began to play, Lady Ting felt even more overawed and hardly able to breathe, forgot about pleading for the marquis and feared only that she might make a mistake.

Following the orders of the mistress of ceremonies, the old lady curtseyed four times and then knelt down to kowtow three times to

the empress. Another attendant outside the door cried out: "Let the Countess of Chiating present her letter of congratulations to Her Majesty!" Two maids carried a desk on which the letter had been placed into the hall with two other maids in front. As always it was an elaborate eulogy wishing their majesties a long life, and normally it was never read. Then the old lady, ordered to rise, got trembling to her feet and curtseyed again four times.

According to court etiquette, the empress sat motionless while her mother paid her homage, though she felt moved. The ceremony concluded she bade her mother be seated, at which her mother thanked her and then looked at her daughter for the first time. When their glances met, she quickly lowered her gaze.

Wang Teh-hua, standing outside the door, was afraid that the empress might become too emotional on seeing her mother, so forgetting etiquette, he quickly approached and bowing suggested:

"Since the ceremony is over, would Your Majesty care to rest in another chamber?"

Silently the empress left her throne and retired to a side chamber where helped by her maids, she removed her court dress for her everyday clothes. She wore a golden tiara embossed with pearls and green jade in a dragon and phoenix design; a wide-sleeved red gown embroidered with a golden thread dragon and phoenix design; a cape embroidered with golden thread in a yellow cloud design; a long red satin skirt; and a crimson belt embroidered with golden designs. Then she told her maids to summon her mother, who came and kowtowed again. When the old lady had sat down and taken some tea, they started to talk, the empress asking about her family and relatives, while her mother rose to bow and answer. The countess, however, felt ill at ease and scrutinized her daughter's expression, trying to find an opportunity to discuss more urgent intimate subjects privately.

The previous day the empress had sent a eunuch with some gifts to her family and so she turned to her chief maid who was standing behind her and said softly: "Bring me the sutra." The chief maid glanced at the other maids and left the chamber, while two others immediately brought warm water and a towel for Lady Ting to wash

her hands. Wu soon returned with the sutra and standing in front of Lady Ting declared: "Let the countess receive Her Majesty's generous gift." At which the old lady hastily knelt down to accept the sutra, saying: "I thank Your Majesty for this fine present." The chief maid then smiled and encouraged her to look at the pages. Lady Ting reverently examined them, seeing that the words were copied out neatly in some dark red colour which was not vermilion or rouge. Before she could take a closer look, Wu took back the sutra and said: "Thank Her Majesty!" Immediately the countess kowtowed her thanks and wished her daughter a long life. Two maids helped her up and she again curtseyed. The empress bade her be seated and then said:

"Because of the difficulties of state we have limited our celebrations and reduced our presents to one tenth of the normal amount. Some of our maids are so loyal that they have used their own blood to copy out sutras for me to pray for my good fortune. A maid called Chen Shun-chuan was the first to copy out the Pradjnaparamita sutra in a very neat hand which I shall keep for myself. Her example was followed by twenty others and I shall give half of these to various pious relatives and senior concubines, while the other half will be distributed to the most important monasteries in the capital. With this sutra I give you, I hope that the light of the lord Buddha will shine on you for ever, protecting you from danger and bringing prosperity to your family."

The old countess rose and answered: "The prosperity we already enjoy we owe to Your Majesty, and by this sutra which Your Majesty has generously given us we shall surely enjoy even greater abundance and not cause Your Majesty any anxiety."

The chief maid then spoke: "Your Majesty, a eunuch has taken the sutra to the Hsihua Gate to the countess' servants who will handle it with great care."

The empress nodded and said to her mother: "A monk from the Lungfu Monastery decided to sacrifice himself for our good fortune. Such an action is exemplary."

Her mother replied: "Everyone in the capital has been talking about it for the last few days. It's such a rare event and shows Your

Majesty's great virtue has so influenced everyone that even those who have renounced the world are still loyal."

This pleased the empress. She sighed and said: "Then we pray that we may once again enjoy peace and prosperity under the protection of the lord Buddha."

Lady Ting had made repeated requests to congratulate her daughter, so that she might have an opportunity to speak privately to her daughter about the marquis on behalf of the other imperial relatives. Since her daughter was looking pleased, Lady Ting started to turn the subject of their conversation to the imperial relatives in the capital, but just as she began, a eunuch at the Yunghsiang Gate announced in a loud voice: "His Majesty is here!" Music started playing in the courtyard and the empress hastily left her seat and went out with her maids to welcome the emperor.

The emperor looked more drawn and haggard than usual after a sleepless night. Arriving at the main hall and sitting down, he noticed that the empress had been crying and asked in surprise:

"It's your birthday today, so why are you so sad?"

The empress smiled and said: "I'm not sad, only I haven't seen my mother for some time and so. . . ."

"Is she still here?"

"Yes."

"Then ask her to come here."

The emperor sat on the throne, and the old countess came supported by maids and kowtowed. Then the emperor asked her to be seated and have some tea and talked to her for a short while. The old lady did not dare to stay long and so she kowtowed and withdrew, the maids taking her to the east lodge to rest.

The emperor joined the feast for the empress with the crown prince, his other sons, his eldest daughter, Princess Chang-ping, who was twelve years old, and the two imperial concubines, Yuan and Chen. Lady Ting was the only imperial relative present. Those lower in rank than the imperial concubines were not qualified to attend, but the empress had arranged for them to have feasts in their palaces. The senior palace ladies were the same, except that the crown prince had to go and kowtow to them, while they sent their maids with con-

gratulations and wine to the empress. All present at the feast toasted the emperor and empress, while those of lower rank, the chief eunuchs and maids in turn offered toasts outside the hall against a background of music and the voice of the mistress of ceremonies chanting out the orders. As each knelt on a silk cushion, an attendant would take the offered golden tray and enter the hall with it held aloft to kneel before the emperor and empress. Two other maids would remove the two jade goblets from the tray and replace them with two empty ones. The emperor and empress paid little attention to the ceremony, and the wine was poured by maids into a huge porcelain pot decorated with a hundred birds paying homage to a phoenix. If their majesties happened to glance at one of their servants or smile at them, then this was considered a very great honour. Among the eunuchs, only a few such as Wang Teh-hua or Tsao Hua-chun would qualify for such treatment.

While the eunuchs were offering their toasts, the chief maid Wu stood at the side of the steps in case the empress needed her. A slender-looking maid, her face beaming, approached Wu with a bowl and taking off the lid whispered:

"Sister Wu, taste this, it's delicious. Their majesties only touched the spoon and then it was removed and it's still warm."

Wu saw that it was a fresh cucumber soup with some tender peas, white shreds of swallows' nests and dried shrimps. Smiling she shook her head and whispered back:

"Yes, it does look delicious."

Then the maid continued: "At this time of the year it isn't easy to get fresh cucumber in Peking and the palace cooks said it cost more than twenty taels to make."

"So expensive?"

"Yes. One of the cooks came across a man from Fengtai who had three cucumbers yesterday and who wanted ten taels a piece for them. When the cook argued they were too expensive the man immediately ate one saying that he wouldn't sell them but eat them instead. In case he really ate them all, the cook bought the remaining two for twenty taels so that their majesties might enjoy such a rare

treat. So with all the other ingredients the soup cost more than twenty taels."

This impressed Wu and she said smiling: "So much money! Yes, please take it to my room."

Just then another maid tugged at her sleeve and whispered something in her ear. Wu was shocked and giving two other maids instructions, she left the courtyard and ran to the one outside the Yinghua Hall.

The maid, Chen Shun-chuan, who had fasted and chanted sutras in the courtyard outside the Yinghua Hall, had always been frail, and copying the sutra in her own blood in the past two months had further damaged her health. Ten days earlier she had become seriously ill, but because of the empress' birthday, this was kept a secret. She had served in the empress' palace and was Wu's close friend. Too ill to work she had begged to leave the palace to fast and worship the Buddha, but the eunuch in charge of the hall, seeing that her health was deteriorating and fearing lest she die, decided to send her to Anlo Lodge, which was for palace maids who had become too old or infirm. Those who did not die there acted as laundresses. Chen begged to be allowed to stay, but was refused and so she had asked to see Wu once more before being taken away. The chief maid felt grief at seeing her friend lying in her bed so pale and thin. Grasping Wu's hand, Chen wept and said feebly:

"I'm leaving today so I won't see you ever again." Unable to say more she gripped her friend's hand more tightly.

Wu in tears said: "Rest for a few days there, and when Her Majesty is in a good mood, I'll plead for you. Since you showed such devotion to her, she'll probably allow you to leave the palace and as you're young you can marry and have a happy life. So your piety will not have been in vain."

Chen sobbed: "I don't even think of freedom. In a few more days I'll be taken to the crematorium, the Hall of Pure Bliss."

Weeping, they held each other's hands. Then Chen took out a bundle of silver from under her pillow and giving it to Wu explained: "You know I came from Chen Village twenty *li* from Hsiangho

County town. My parents though very poor were still alive when I came to the palace, as were my two brothers. My second brother entered a monastery when he was eight and went to the Wutai Mountains with his teacher. In the eight years since I came to the palace I have never communicated with the outside world and with all these wars and famines I don't know if my family is alive or dead. From the money I was given at festivals I've saved up over ten taels and with the ten Her Majesty gave me yesterday, I now have twenty-three taels thirty cents. . . ."

Without thinking Wu exclaimed: "The cost of a bowl of cucumber soup!"

Chen was puzzled: "What do you mean?"

Wu tried to cover her mistake saying: "Oh, nothing. How silly, I was thinking of something else. Nothing to do with you. Shall I give this money to someone?"

Chen replied: "Like me you came from a poor family, we're two of a kind. You always helped other unfortunate maids and you've been so good to me. Everyone respects and likes you. Please ask a trustworthy eunuch to make inquiries about my family and then give the money to them. At least it will help to keep them alive and it will repay them for raising me till I was fourteen. As for me, I'm doomed to die. . . ." The girl sobbed and then hearing the music from the empress' palace realized that the feasting had begun and urged Wu to go, saying: "What if Her Majesty wants you and you aren't there?"

Wu holding back her tears agreed: "You're right. I must go back quickly. Some of the other girls who followed your example are also ill, but I haven't got time to go and see them now."

Chen said: "When they come to say goodbye to me, I'll tell them what you said. They all hope the empress will show them mercy and free them before they die. One of the reasons they copied the sutras was so that they wouldn't be born women in the next life. Who can say about the next life? Perhaps they won't leave the palace alive either." For a moment she struggled for breath before continuing: "I heard a monk from the Lungfu Monastery decided to burn himself

to death for their majesties, so what we did is nothing compared to that."

Wu felt very sad and tried to comfort Chen: "Nonsense! Her Majesty greatly appreciated your loyalty. Of course she felt very pleased about the monk's sacrifice. Hui-ching is a most remarkable. . . ."

"What's the monk's name?" Chen, startled, looked at Wu in horror.

"Hui-ching I think."

Chen was shocked and started to tremble. Then she reminded herself that her brother had gone to the Wutai Mountains with his teacher, so he could hardly be in the Lungfu Monastery. Probably there were many monks with the same name. Calming herself, she said weakly:

"Dear Wu, you had better go now."

Sighing and weeping, Wu parted from her. Outside the empress' palace she met the eunuch Hsieh Cheng, who had just returned from the monastery and who was speaking to Liu An in a low voice. Knowing him well, she felt free to ask him:

"What happened to the monk who sacrificed himself?"

The eunuch replied: "It's finished. By a strange coincidence, his father happened to arrive from Hsiangho. If he'd come a little earlier there could have been trouble."

This disturbed Wu, and she quickly asked: "Did the monk know his father was there?"

"The fire was lit just as the father appeared and as I was nearby I could see the monk behaving strangely as if he had spotted his father. But by then it was too late."

"Did he call out to his father?"

Hsieh whispered: "He took some medicine a couple of days ago and lost his voice, so he couldn't have cried out even if he had wanted to."

Eyes wide with horror, Wu stamped her foot in disgust and exclaimed in a low voice: "Why you! . . . and that old abbot, a pious disciple of Buddha a respected monk! . . . You . . . you've acted abominably!"

Silencing her with his glance, Hsieh sneered: "What do palace maids understand about such affairs?"

Going through the palace gate, Wu gave the money to a maid to keep for her and then calming herself, she walked up the steps forcing a smile on her face to join the other maids under the eaves. She noticed the emperor had poured a goblet of wine for the empress and was talking to her also with a forced smile:

"I'm sorry but we have to economize with the empire in such a mess. Once peace and prosperity are restored, then we shall really celebrate your birthday in a grand style."

The empress replied: "Yes. I hope that the military situation will improve and Yang Ssu-chang return in triumph so that Your Majesty will have no more worries."

After the feast, the emperor hastened to summon his cabinet to discuss military and state affairs. While the imperial concubines returned to their palaces, the empress and her mother went to the west chamber to talk further. Here she could relax without maids and bothering about court etiquette. Lady Ting had noticed the concubine Tien's absence from the feast, confirming rumours, and hesitated to speak to her daughter about the marquis. After some chitchat, and seeing there were only two maids in the chamber, she decided there was nothing to lose and so getting up she said in a low voice:

"I am most grateful to Your Majesty for granting me this special favour of offering my congratulations and I shall never forget this. There is some family matter on which I should like Your Majesty's advice, however."

Nervously glancing at her mother, the empress asked: "About the Li family?"

"Your Majesty is very discerning. I'd like to ask. . . ."

"The emperor is very angry about this, so if the Li family pleaded with you to speak for them I don't want to know about it."

This took the old countess aback and she felt very disappointed. Everyone had primed her on what to say and do and insisted that she must not let such an opportunity be lost. A short silence ensued

and then the old lady decided to test her daughter. Smiling meekly she said:

"Of course in my low position, how could I presume to plead for the marquis."

"Then what is it?"

"The marquis has been jailed and his properties confiscated, but his daughter is betrothed to one of our family. Although she is fifteen, the marriage has not yet been concluded and I would like Your Majesty's advice on this problem."

The empress thought and sighed: "They certainly are in great difficulties, and we are in no position to help them. Yet the engagement cannot be broken at this point. Take the girl to our family in a small sedan-chair as unobtrusively as possible and don't let her bring anything from her home apart from the clothes she's wearing. Then choose an auspicious day for the marriage and have done with it."

"I will obey Your Majesty's order." The old countess was bitterly disappointed as she saw that the emperor's decision was irrevocable.

Her daughter again warned her: "Remember, the girl must bring nothing."

She replied in a trembling voice: "Yes, I understand. Only her clothes."

Sighing the empress continued: "The Li family have deeply angered His Majesty and the other imperial relatives have annoyed him. None of you care about his difficulties."

This shocked her mother. "But Your Majesty. . . ." she protested.

The empress ignoring this went on: "His Majesty would never borrow money from the imperial relatives unless the treasury was absolutely empty and the military situation was critical. There is no other way to raise money and you all share the fortunes of state. Don't you derive your wealth from the palace and your nobility from the emperor? Naturally His Majesty is angry that when the country is in such a serious state that the Li family are being intransigent and refusing to contribute a single cent, while the imperial relatives try to plead for the marquis and show no concern for His Majesty. Once the bandits have been exterminated and prosperity restored, then His

Majesty will reward everyone, but none of you seem able to appreciate this."

Seeing her daughter's stern expression, the old lady remained silent. Just then the mistress of ceremonies entered and knelt before the empress:

"Your Majesty, the Countess of Chiating must now take her leave. Please ascend the throne in the hall."

There were many things that the empress wished to say to her mother. The emperor's inability to raise money from his relatives showed his weak position, but she could not say this to her mother, nor detain her longer. Instead she said with a sob:

"Ah, mother, you hardly ever come to the palace. When shall I see you again?"

The old lady, with tears in her eyes, tried to comfort her: "Don't be sad, Your Majesty. If peace is restored, perhaps I can come to the palace next year to offer my congratulations with the others and then I may see Your Majesty again."

"I hope so."

Lady Ting then kowtowed to her daughter and supported by maids withdrew from the hall to wait by the steps outside the main hall.

Changing back into her court costume, the empress emerged amid the sounds of drums and music and ascended her throne, with her children at either side. Maids and eunuchs stood in two rows outside the hall, while two maids with yellow silk fans held crosswise stood behind the throne. The mistress of ceremonies came to the steps and cried out:

"Let the Countess of Chiating enter the hall to bid farewell to the empress."

Supported by two maids, Lady Ting went up the steps and into the hall as music and chanting sounded. After prostrating herself before her daughter, she left deeply disappointed. Passing between the rows of guards, the old lady was helped out of the palace gate, never daring to look back. When the music ceased, the empress withdrew to a chamber to rest after changing her costume. Then Liu An entered to report on the magnificent spectacle of the monk burning himself to death. The empress inquired:

"What did he say?"

The eunuch bowed and answered: "He said nothing but obviously felt no pain at all since he sat smiling serenely on his hassock, his hands in prayer, chanting a mantra and praying for Your Majesties' well-being. The way of Buddha is indeed miraculous."

Satisfied the empress smiled faintly and nodded, forgetting her earlier sadness. She motioned with her hand to dismiss Liu An. After washing her hands, she looked at the sutra Chen had copied in her own blood, feeling that with this and the monk's sacrifice, Buddha would favour her with good fortune and a long life. Feeling an urge to read the sutra again, she began in a low voice:

"It was said that when Buddha. . . ."

The marquis despaired when he heard that the concubine Tien had been banished for trying to plead for him and that the empress dared not say a word. His illness became serious until finally he decided to commit suicide by swallowing some gold. The head of the imperial police, a eunuch named Wu Meng-ming, and Tsao of the East Bureau decided to report the cause of the marquis' death to the emperor as illness, so that they could not be charged with negligence over his suicide. This news so disturbed the emperor that he immediately went to burn incense and pray before Empress Dowager Hsiao-ting's shrine and ask her pardon. He was also anxious to know the reactions of the other imperial relatives. The following day, he summoned Tsao and asked him what gossip he had heard. Tsao, having been bribed by the imperial relatives, took the opportunity to say: "According to our reports, all the imperial relatives and nobles hope that Your Majesty will regard the affair as closed and allow the marquis' son to inherit the title and return the confiscated properties." Staring coldly at Tsao, the emperor said in disgust:

"Tell the imperial police to arrest the marquis' son and continue demanding the money."

The eunuch knelt down and begged: "Your Majesty, the son is but a boy of seven called Li Tsun-shan."

"Just seven! Damn! Not grown-up yet!"

Shaking his head in frustration, the emperor told Tsao to go, but then ordered that the marquis' chief steward be jailed and his properties confiscated. The imperial relatives would utilize the marquis' death to resist, while he was determined to see his scheme through to the end until he had raised sufficient funds for the army. Suddenly he asked Tsao sternly:

"I heard that the other day people were saying that the imperial relatives were still resisting my orders. Is that so?"

Tsao bowed and replied: "Yes. I've reported it all."

Snorting the emperor said: "We'll see who's master of this empire, me or them! When I've finished with the Li family, I dare any of them to resist my orders. So they really think they can challenge me? What fools!"

Dismissing Tsao, he jumped up from his chair and began pacing furiously about his palace.

Chapter 32

The Ming forces under Yang Ssu-chang had temporarily made some progress against the peasant insurgent forces, and in the autumn of that year several of the insurgent forces under Chang Hsien-chung and Lo Ju-tsai were forced to flee to eastern Szechuan, where besieged on all sides, many surrendered. Even Lo himself wanted to give up, but Chang stopped him, and they fled further into the interior of Szechuan. Li Tzu-cheng's forces were also lying low and attracting little attention. On the surface the situation seemed quiet, but in reality, the Ming Dynasty had never been in such a crisis before. Throughout his reign, the emperor had had to deal with peasant unrest and the increasingly powerful Manchus. The campaign in Szechuan was unresolved, while in Shantung, northern Kiangsu and Anhwei, southern Hopei, northern Szechuan, Honan, Shensi and elsewhere, other peasant uprisings were starting. Those in western and southern Shantung and Hsuchow especially were a serious threat to canal communications, the lifeline of the central government. The emperor had urged Hung Cheng-chou to advance with his troops outside

the Shanhaikuan Pass to Sungshan, Hsingshan and Tashan to relieve the forces besieged in Chinchow and stop the Manchus from further incursions. The generals, however, had difficulties in co-ordinating and there was the problem of supplying the troops, so the situation became very precarious. Because of incessant wars, pillaging by government troops, heavy government taxation and natural disasters, all north China and the Yellow River Valley provinces had their rural economy ruined. People either died of starvation or became refugees, and villages were deserted. Serious droughts or locust plagues had recently desolated the lower reaches of the Yellow River and Huai River Valleys, while similar calamities were occurring south of the Yangtse. Even formerly prosperous centres such as Soochow suffered from inflation with the price of grain soaring, and there were many incidents of people fighting for grain in the cities. The country was practically bankrupt, while government military expenditure kept increasing. The crisis deepened, manifested for example in the struggle between the emperor and the imperial relatives over the issue of raising money for the army, and in the direct confrontation between the emperor and his high officials because of their different assessments of the situation.

The parasitic imperial relatives and nobles who lived in luxury cared little for the present difficulties, while the government officials had a clearer idea of the realities of the situation and were deeply concerned. The emperor, feeling the pressure unbearable, struggled to extricate himself and restore the fortunes of his empire. He dared not admit to himself that his dynasty was tottering, but his hidden fears made him more despotic and cruel, unable to tolerate any criticisms from his officials or modify his decisions.

The imperial police and East Bureau were able to make some capital out of the emperor's order to confiscate the marquis' properties. The other imperial relatives were anxious lest it should be their turn next, while the big landowners were critical of the emperor's decision. Other government officials remained aloof, waiting for the outcome. The imperial relatives however felt compelled to act and so they wrote a report, begging the emperor to be lenient and return the marquis' property since he had already died in jail. They

also asked for his son to inherit his title to placate the spirit of the empress dowager. Superstitious by nature, the emperor considered using this as a pretext to end the affair, but since he could think of no alternative scheme to raise money in such a desperate situation, he finally decided against yielding and to continue with his demands. He tossed the petition aside for filing, sighing and thinking: "What a bunch of fools all you imperial relatives are! Where does your wealth come from? If the empire is lost, so will you be." Then the emperor started to vent his anger on his chief minister Hsueh Kuo-kuan, thinking that if Hsueh had thought of some other plan instead of approving, he would not be in such a dilemma.

Three more days passed. The emperor was sitting dejectedly, when the eunuch in charge of the secretariat, Wang Cheng-en, entered with a stack of reports, all of which criticized Yang Ssu-chang and estimated little chance of his success in his campaign. Among the most vehement was one from Huang Tao-chou, a junior adviser to the crown prince, which criticized Yang's increasing taxation to train new troops, his recommendation of Chen Hsin-chia as minister of war, his proposal to make peace with the Manchus and his "unnatural behaviour" in not going home to attend his step-mother's funeral. Irritated by the other reports criticizing Yang, this one made the emperor even more furious and he muttered to himself:

"Huang Tao-chou is a real bastard! No sooner in the capital than he's showing off trying to thwart my plan so as to be praised for his courage to speak out and for his sense of justice."

He neither felt like commenting on the report nor reading any more. Instead he rose and walked about the room depressed. Suddenly he sighed and exclaimed:

"How can fools like Huang understand my plan for the state?"

Huang, like the emperor, wished to shore up the collapsing empire, but he firmly opposed the emperor's measures. Unable to criticize the emperor directly, he could only passionately denounce Yang for leading the country to disaster. By opposing the increase in taxation, he represented to some extent the interests of the lesser gentry, but he also feared that the people would be forced to revolt, since already there was unrest. The emperor felt himself forced into an action

which he knew was unpopular, like a man drinking poisoned wine to quench a raging thirst, and he thought to himself: "My officials are good at criticizing but they haven't suggested a better plan." The emperor also disliked any mention of the secret peace negotiations with the Manchus, which Huang had openly stated and opposed in his report. The Manchus were considered by the emperor as subjects who, because of discrimination by officials, had turned against the government and in the past twenty years had been causing problems. A policy of appeasement was necessary and indeed was all that seemed feasible. In the Sung Dynasty the appeasement of the Nuchen Tartars served as a warning, and the emperor had no desire to be viewed in history as a weak and ineffective ruler. For a year, Yang and Kao Chi-chien had controlled the government and been secretly negotiating with the Manchus, but the emperor had forbidden them to speak of their negotiations, only of pacification. Yet Huang had bluntly criticized Yang's policy of appeasement and this offended the emperor, who hoped that by making peace with the Manchus he would be able to concentrate all his forces on one front and crush the peasant insurgents. Strategically, he felt this to be a most important emergency measure, but Huang was so limited that he could not appreciate this. No one at court measured up to Yang's efficiency and tact in the eyes of the emperor, and so he would not brook any attempts to get rid of him at this point. Returning to his desk, the emperor glanced at the words "unnatural behaviour" and grumbled to himself:

"We have always tried to rule the empire in a filial and pious way and yet you little upstart attack us on this. In history there have been many examples of high officials being unable to mourn for dead parents because of urgent state affairs with the sovereign's approval, such as the case of the late prime minister Lu Hsiang-sheng. What would happen if both Yang and Chen mourned their parents for three years? Would you direct the campaign for us as the new minister of war? What nonsense!"

Then the emperor lifted another report from a secretary at the ministry of ceremonies, Wu Chang-shih, who charged that the chief minister Hsueh had been accepting bribes. Wu, an official of the

ninth rank in the department which dealt with dispatching imperial edicts, bestowing ranks, sending officials to attend to sacrifices, sending relief or to subject states, and whose position was very unimportant, had asked others to recommend him to Hsueh in order to have himself transferred to be a secretary in the ministry of home affairs. Accepting Wu's gift, Hsueh promised to help him, but as he thought little of Wu's talents, he only had him transferred to a secretaryship in the ministry of ceremonies. Wu was very disappointed because a position in the ministry of home affairs was highly prized, since that office oversaw official promotions and demotions. A secretary in this ministry was only of the seventh rank, while one in the ministry of ceremonies was of the sixth, yet the former was more important, making suggestions in the presence of the emperor and having more access to bribing or blackmailing officials. It was, therefore, more lucrative than the latter. Wu felt Hsueh had cheated him and awaited his revenge. Having heard recently that the imperial relatives were conniving with the chief eunuchs to get rid of Hsueh and that the emperor was angry with him over the affair of the marquis, Wu felt it was an opportune moment to write an exaggerated report about Hsueh's accepting bribes. This was the pretext the emperor was waiting for to dismiss Hsueh from his cabinet. Without making further investigations or allowing Hsueh to speak in his own defence, he decided to punish him severely. With his vermilion brush he wrote:

"Our chief minister Hsueh Kuo-kuan has embezzled money and engaged in corrupt practices. This cannot be tolerated. Let the departments concerned discuss the matter and report their decision on his punishment."

Having given his order to a eunuch, the emperor continued reading the other reports, more than ten of which were from local officials near the capital, and from Shantung, Honan, Shensi, Hukuang and south of the Yangtse, asking for tax exemptions and reporting on famines. One was a petition from more than five hundred people who had come to the capital from Shantung or nearby, which spoke of famines and hardships suffered under the Manchus and at the hands of the government forces. The people were desperate, and unless

all taxes were stopped and financial relief sent, the weak would die and the strong revolt. This was the first the emperor had heard of this and he was uncertain how to act. At this point, Tsao from the East Bureau happened to enter and so the emperor asked him:

"Did you know that about a thousand people from Shantung and other districts have come to present a petition in the capital?"

Bowing, Tsao replied: "Yes, Your Majesty. They started trickling in about three days ago. They first sent their petition to the department which deals with civilians' letters, but as the wording was incorrect and the department refused to accept it, they re-wrote it and presented it to Your Majesty today."

"Are they good citizens?"

"Our investigations have not found them guilty of any improper actions. Some beg for food in the day or sleep on the streets outside Chienmen Gate at night. The city inspectors and garrison are also keeping an eye on them, but they have found nothing wrong."

Turning to Wang, who was in charge of the secretariat, the emperor asked: "Didn't we exempt these places from tax several months ago?"

"The famine areas of these two provinces were exempted from tax, but though the yellow government order was cancelled, there was still the white local order. Thus they derived no benefit."

Saying nothing the emperor dismissed the two eunuchs with a gesture. He knew what the people said was true, but he could hardly exempt them from all tax when he had no money for the army, nor send financial relief when the treasury was empty. After a moment's hesitation, he wrote on their petition:

"The state of these people deserves pity. Let the ministries of war and revenue consider carefully how best to exempt them from tax and provide relief and then report on their decision. These people should not remain in the capital lest they get into trouble or break the law."

This was just an excuse to remove them in case they became an embarrassment to him. Beset by so many difficulties, the emperor felt that he could do nothing right. Trying to forget the famines and his worries, he picked up a report from Hung Cheng-chou, who

was always requesting more money or troops. The emperor, loath to face such problems, began reading it uneasily, only to quickly realize that it was about something entirely different. It was asking the emperor to cancel the prohibition on smoking tobacco. The emperor had felt half a year ago that as the word "tobacco" sounded like "Peking", it was inauspicious for people to smoke tobacco, and so growing tobacco was prohibited and punishable by death. Over eighty years earlier, tobacco had been introduced into China from the Philippines, and it had been grown in the north for about seventy years. The prohibition had not been carried out effectively and had caused further dissatisfaction among the troops stationed outside the Shanhaikuan Pass who enjoyed smoking. Hung hoped that the edict would be repealed and that tobacco grown in the north could be transported to the south. Putting down the request, the emperor sighed and thought:

"How did all this happen? Ah yes, are we to be smoked out of Peking? It certainly sounds unlucky. Still it doesn't look like it can be prohibited any more."

Early in the morning, two days later, as the sound of drums was heard from the Five Phoenix Tower, government officials arrived at the Tuan Gate for the court ceremony, and gossiped about the general dissatisfaction over taxation, the wars in Hukuang and Szechuan, or the Manchus. Most were concerned about the increases in taxation but would not voice their opinions for fear of trouble.

As this was a day for the full court session, the ceremonies were more elaborate than for the daily routine ones. Silk-uniformed guards had, before the fifth watch, escorted colourfully clad elephant trainers to the six elephant cages at the Hsuanwu Gate and then to the Meridian Gate where the animals had their exercise. On the second roll of drums, the elephants took up their positions at the gate by themselves, standing in pairs facing each other like the guards. On the third roll of drums, the side gates were opened, the middle gate being reserved for the emperor. A group of officers with ceremonial weapons and standard-bearers with flags went inside the gate and lined up on either side of the imperial path. Some eunuchs from the palace also

guarded the steps, followed by two pairs of horses with golden saddles, stirrups and other accoutrements. These four handsome and obedient steeds formed part of the guard of honour, since the emperor always travelled by sedan-chair. Yet four eunuchs stood by the horses with four carved ebony stools should the emperor decide to mount one. Silk-uniformed officers in iron armour and helmets with red tassels, carrying bows, arrows and swords lined the steps. As soon as the bell was rung at the Meridian Gate, the court officials hurriedly emerged from the lodge to enter through the side gates. After the last one had entered, the elephants crossed their trunks barring the way for others.

At the Huangchi Gate, the officials, according to rank, the military ones at the west and the civil at the east, lined the steps. Four censors faced each other to oversee the ceremony.

A crowd of several hundred citizens from Shantung and the environs of Peking had been led by twenty elders to the Right Changan Gate. Though most were bankrupt small landowners, they represented also the interests of the peasants, petty traders and artisans. After reading the emperor's order for their dispersal, they were bitterly disappointed and had written another petition, which the department had refused to accept because of the emperor's instructions and its strong statements. The elders pleaded to no avail and so they decided to use the court session as a way of appealing directly to the emperor. Barred from approaching both the Meridian and Chengtien Gates, they could only kneel outside the Right Changan Gate, hoping that some high-ranking official who lived in the west city would pass and take pity on them and hand their petition to the emperor. The guards at the gate kept them at bay with clubs and swords, driving them further away when some high official approached. Outside the gate was a drum tower with three small offices facing east and a tower in which hung a drum. According to custom, if citizens were being unjustly treated and receiving no help from the authorities, then they could beat the drum and the case would have to be brought before the emperor. On this day there was more than the normal quota of guards and they were so brutal that no one dared approach. Some of the people started going down Chessboard Street

through the Taming Gate to the Left Changan Gate, where they found the situation the same as in the west city. At this some of the elders gave up hope, while others driven down the street waited until the officials had entered and then begged the guards to accept their petition, which they refused cursing. The most stubborn of the crowd remained kneeling, hoping that someone might take pity on them, while some collapsed from hunger and lay groaning on the ground. The scene was one of general disorder.

In the Forbidden City, after the officials had taken up their positions, a eunuch came out of the Huangchi Gate holding a yellow silk whip thirteen feet long, with a tip three feet long and three inches wide. It was waxed and fitted with a foot-long red-lacquered handle and inlaid with a gold dragon's head. At the edge of the steps he cracked the whip three times, then descended the steps and stood to attention. All was still in the solemn atmosphere.

Then a eunuch called out: "His Majesty has come!" and the emperor arrived in his sedan-chair. He wore a winged cap, yellow silk robe with embroidered dragon designs and a round collar and his expression was sullen. He was ushered in by splendidly dressed eunuchs and escorted by sixteen officials who walked backwards, ahead of his sedan-chair, while everyone bowed their heads. Stepping out of his sedan-chair, the emperor ascended the throne, known as the "golden rostrum", in front of which was a desk covered with yellow silk, embroidered with dragon designs, and three feet in front of which was a red-lacquered railing to prevent any official from attempting to assassinate the emperor. After the emperor had taken his seat, three eunuchs approached and stood to attention behind the throne. One carrying an yellow umbrella held it over the throne, while the other two carrying yellow silk fans crossed them to protect the emperor from possible assassins, since in the fans was a mechanism to conceal sharp blades. In the past, nine guards had held five umbrellas and four fans, but the emperor distrusted these men and so only his most trusted eunuchs were permitted to stand near him.

In a resounding voice, the master of ceremonies chanted: "Let the officials pay homage to His Majesty!" at which all in turn kowtowed to the throne as the orders were chanted out rhythmically.

Then they stood to attention. A censor supervising the procedures reported:

"A secretary of the ministry of revenue, Chang Chih-fa, dropped his writing tablet as he arose and he should be punished for this. We await Your Majesty's instructions."

Since the emperor had slept little the previous night, he was exhausted and muttered something which the officials could not distinguish. Then one handsome eunuch, wearing a round-collared red silk robe with a blue tabard and golden belt, who was responsible for conveying the emperor's instructions, stepped forward and announced in a girlish voice:

"His Majesty decrees that since the action was unintentional, it does not merit serious punishment. Stop his salary for three months. Let him thank His Majesty for his mercy!"

The emperor fidgeted absent-mindedly as the old official, aged over sixty, staggered forward and kneeling down said in a trembling voice: "Your humble subject has offended Your Majesty and deserves ten thousand deaths, and I shall never be able to repay Your Majesty's clemency. I thank Your Majesty for your mercy." His face tear-stained, he quavered: "Long live, long live Your Majesty!" The emperor's thoughts seemed far away and he barely noticed him. As the old official withdrew, the emperor glanced at those on his left and saw that Hsueh was absent since he was awaiting punishment. As the master of ceremonies announced the names of the officials outside the Meridian Gate, a eunuch spread a red list on the desk. The emperor briefly glanced at this and then looked in the direction of the gate, where he could only just make out some people kneeling outside the side gates. The master of ceremonies rose and withdrew a few paces, then turning towards the gate he cried out: "Let those officials outside the Meridian Gate pay homage to His Majesty!" The emperor looked as they kowtowed on the orders of another master of ceremonies, then as he heard the rumble of thunder, he looked at some dark louring clouds, and thought: "If only Yang Ssu-chang can succeed and take Chang Hsien-chung and Li Tzu-cheng captive!"

As the officials presented their reports, the emperor only half listened, thinking about his decision to punish Hsueh when he sudden-

ly heard the sounds of distant cries. Since this was highly unusual, he guessed it must be the people from Shantung and the area around Peking. Annoyed he thought to himself: "Ignorant mob! How dare they disobey me and stay here." Yet wishing to appear a good ruler, he suppressed his anger and summoned his minister and vice-ministers of revenue, forcing a benign expression on his face. He spoke slowly:

"Our people are like our own children. Since some of these districts have been devastated by famines, you must consider what exemptions should be granted and report your conclusions to me." The wind blowing from the south carried the distant commotion from the East Changan Gate again, to the throne, so that the emperor asked inadvertently: "Is that hubbub from the petitioners?"

The minister of revenue, Li Tai-wen, answered prostrate: "Your Majesty, they are the elders from Shantung and near Peking who have come to beg for tax exemptions and immediate relief."

The emperor frowned and was silent. Then he ordered a eunuch: "Tell them I have heard about their petitions and fully understand their plight. I will stop the local officials from increasing their tax and I have told the authorities concerned to attend to their relief without delay. But they must return to their districts immediately and not stay in the capital and get themselves into trouble or break the law. To do so will show their ingratitude to me."

Then he summoned all the other important officials who knelt before the barrier in front of the desk, not daring to make a sound. Their heads were bowed in fear before the emperor's fierce look. Some trembled. Although it was day, ominous dark clouds were gathering overhead and thunder rumbled in the distance. The emperor glanced upwards at the sky and then addressed the officials:

"I ordered you to discuss the case of Hsueh Kuo-kuan. Yesterday I read from your report that you had decided to be lenient with him. This is tolerating corruption. Hsueh as chief minister was too busy embezzling money and accepting bribes to help me govern the state. It is outrageous! It was in my mind to have him arrested and dealt with by the court of justice, but since there is no proof of

other crimes, his name shall be struck off the list and he is banished from the capital. Woe betide any who follow his example!"

The officials kowtowed and returned to their positions. Some had wished to report important affairs, but decided against it in view of the emperor's mood. During the ensuing silence the emperor thought of closing the session, but the uproar in the distance rose again and sounds of people wailing could be heard. Furiously the emperor glared and snapped:

"Who's in charge of the imperial police?"

Wu Meng-ming emerged and knelt before the emperor, who addressed all passionately:

"Since I came to the throne, I have tried to rule in a pious manner and work diligently for my people and like the ancient sages I have tried to encourage virtue throughout my kingdom. With the empire in turmoil I have lived frugally and attempted to restore peace and prosperity. The heavy taxation is an emergency measure, but people are short-sighted and only complain of temporary hardships." Then turning to Wu he said: "Go and tell them to stop making a disturbance, otherwise they will be arrested."

When the court session started, the petitioners only heard the indistinct cracking of the whip and then silence. From kneeling since dawn, their knees ached and their legs were numbed, so that some sat down though most remained kneeling. Some wept in despair thinking about their homes and the famines. A crowd gathered behind them to watch the fun, while others were sympathetic, whispering to each other. Whenever the guards at the gate wanted to drive them away, there were disputes. Suddenly a eunuch appeared and called out shrilly: "Listen to His Majesty's order!" at which all who had been sitting hastily knelt down, while the onlookers unable to get away also had to kneel. When the eunuch had finished, he turned away. Some had not been able to hear what was said. One white-haired old man rose quickly and ran towards the gate with the petition, calling on the eunuch to stop:

"Sir, please have pity on us. . . ."

Without turning, the eunuch entered the gate and the guards fearing lest the crowd storm it, picked up their clubs and swords to beat them

back. The Peking citizens, used to such brutality and arbitrary arrests, cried out in alarm: "They're beating the people!" and scattered in all directions. Shopkeepers hastily locked their doors as the confusion mounted. The city inspector arrived with a contingent of troops from the garrison headquarters and drove the indignant and terrified petitioners from the street.

By the time Wu arrived, the area had been cleared except for some discarded shoes and torn petitions. Wu ordered his men to coordinate with the city garrison to drive the people to the outskirts of the city.

As Wu was descending the steps of the Huangchi Gate, the emperor was wishing to bring the court session to a close, when one elderly official, aged more than fifty, left the ranks and knelt at the barrier. The emperor recognized him as Huang Tao-chou, the writer of the report attacking Yang Ssu-chang, and was angry. Before Huang could open his mouth, the emperor said sternly:

"I read your report. Have you anything else to add?"

Kneeling, Huang replied: "I beg Your Majesty to abolish the tax increases and punish Yang Ssu-chang to placate the people. If Your Majesty adopts a charitable policy, you will win the people's support."

Fidgeting, the emperor angrily said: "I adopted Yang's proposals and increased the taxes last year, because we are short of funds and men to fight the Manchus and bandits. The people are as my own children and I am well aware of their sufferings. But without money I can do nothing and so I have been forced to take these harsh measures. You officials criticize but do nothing to help, only attack each other, whereas Yang is at the front commanding my armies and facing all kinds of difficulties and moreover he is achieving some results. The nine insurgent groups in Fanghsien are suing for peace; Chang Hsien-chung since his defeat at Manao Mountain and Lo Ju-tsai are both besieged in western Hupeh and cannot escape; and Li Tzu-cheng is trapped in the Shanglo Mountains and will soon be crushed. Your bickering and obstructions could ruin the campaign. You even accused Yang of harming the people. Is that in your country's interests?" Then the emperor turned to address the assembly: "I

sincerely hope that you will all unite and co-operate instead of indulging in this factionalism and infighting."

The emperor thought that his words had effectively silenced Huang, but he had not reckoned on his fearless and stubborn character. A Confucian scholar, he only wished to be a loyal official and make his stand at court like soldiers in the field. Coming from a poor family and having been demoted many times, his interests were linked to the smaller landowners, who by the end of the Ming Dynasty were liable for all sorts of conscription levies and other taxes, while the great landowners were exempt from conscription and could avoid some of the land tax, transferring it to the smaller landowners. Thus the smaller landowners and landed peasants were exploited and their lands annexed by the great landowners. They faced poverty and starvation in times of war and famine. They were also numerically the largest group next to the landless peasants. While the emperor considered the great landowners as the mainstay of the state, Huang felt it was this smaller landowning class. From his own class viewpoint and based on his experiences, Huang was more in touch with the realities of the situation than the emperor. Feeling that the emperor had not understood his loyalty, Huang raised his head and said:

"Your Majesty, when I accused Yang of harming the state and reported the complaints of your subjects, I believed it was in the interests of the government, the people and the empire. It was never intended as a mere factional attack. For over twenty years I lived on the land before becoming an official in my middle-age. Twice I was banished from my offices and now I am over fifty, and Your Majesty showed mercy by not punishing me with death, so that in my last years I could serve Your Majesty. All my efforts could never repay Your Majesty's great kindness, and so to remain silent in times of danger would be irresponsible and show ingratitude. The proposed tax increases are disastrous. On my way here last month I saw the devastated areas of the Yangtse, Shantung and around Peking. Bodies and bandits were everywhere. In Honan and Shensi, it must be worse. And where have all these bandits come from? The weak among the common people have died, but the strong have risen in revolt against the rich and powerful who have exploited them. I went back to my

land after my last banishment and studied and lectured, talking to the country people and learning much. I worried when I thought of similar situations in history, and so I hope that Your Majesty will rescind the tax increases and execute Yang as a warning to others who would try to exploit the people."

The emperor exploded: "What have you ever done to solve the problem? Yet you criticize other plans as harmful to the people. That's slander! I myself made the decision to increase the tax. Since you say it's wrong, what's your solution then?" Enraged the emperor banged his hand on the desk and roared: "Speak up!"

All the frightened officials were concerned for Huang. Thunder rumbled ominously over the Forbidden City. Huang had been prepared for the worst when he had presented his report, and guided by his loyalty to the state, he was not afraid of death. So, looking up at the emperor with a determined expression on his face, he replied bluntly:

"From youth I have studied history and our present policy is unjust and oppressive. Where there is injustice, all remain silent and dare not speak out for truth; when there is oppression the common people suffer most and seek refuge like birds driven to the dense forest. The people from Shantung and around Peking are still sending petitions, but they will stop that if we lose their support. Yang's policy is suicidal. . . ."

The emperor interrupted him: "What nonsense! I need to raise money, yet when I tried to borrow some from the imperial relatives, they resisted; when I tried to raise taxes, the people complained. You even dare to say my policy is 'suicidal'. What a presumption! You still haven't given me an alternative plan. And if I did all you asked and removed Yang, could you command my armies and crush the insurgents? How can you say you are loyal and patriotic, yet make such wild accusations while I am sick with worry?"

Huang replied: "I speak only from loyalty. I too wish that the bandits could be destroyed, but I feel a much greater threat in Yang's appeasement policy towards the Manchus. People are losing confidence in the government. . . ."

The emperor broke in: "Just tell me your solution."

He answered: "A great proportion of the funds allotted to the regular troops goes into the pockets of officials because there are many registered who don't exist. If all these were crossed off the list, then there would be enough money to train the troops. This embezzling must stop, or we will have to squeeze the people for more and more until the situation is hopeless. The problem is not so much a lack of money, but a lack of honest and loyal administrators and bureaucrats. Your subjects are paying far more taxes than in previous reigns, but Your Majesty does not know these things. None dare speak the truth for fear of arousing Your Majesty's wrath, so honest people remain silent and the timid ones agree to everything, while the evil ones flatter and praise you for your brilliant leadership and insight. Yet they work only for their own ends and keep Your Majesty isolated from reality. Our forces often report a victory when there has been a defeat or slaughter of innocent people to get credit, so that the people distrust and hate them instead of the bandits. Bribes buy official positions and military ranks. Corruption is everywhere, yet how could Your Majesty know this? I say this knowing that I have incurred Your Majesty's displeasure, yet I beg Your Majesty to consider my words."

Trying to control his anger, the emperor asked: "What do you mean people are more heavily taxed today than in the past?"

Huang replied: "During the reign of Emperor Wan-li, because of the danger on the northeast front, an extra five million two hundred thousand taels were added to regular taxes. It caused great hardship. At the beginning of Your Majesty's reign, a further one million four hundred thousand taels were extracted. In the tenth year of Your Majesty's reign, Yang proposed to wipe out the bandits within three months, and there was another increase of two million eight hundred thousand taels, which was originally meant for that year as was stated in the edict, but already it has lasted for four years. Last year there was an increase of seven million three hundred thousand taels to train new troops, so that the total increases amount to sixteen million seven hundred thousand taels as well as the regular annual land tax. I hope Your Majesty will not kill the patient to cure the disease."

At this, the emperor almost lost control. But since Huang was a renowned and respected scholar, the emperor attempted to suppress his anger. Running his fingers over the desk, he remained silent and then grunted:

"You talk like a bookworm. You may know your classics, but what do you know about government? You are so short-sighted that you see only present misery, but never think that once the bandits have been exterminated peace and prosperity will be enjoyed by all. All you see is the increase in taxation, but tax is based on land owned mostly by the rich and powerful families, and for every hundred *mu* of land there is only an increase of thirty or forty cents, it can hardly harm the poor, but it will help prevent annexation of land by the rich."

Immediately Huang retorted: "There is so much annexation of land that the rich have hundreds of acres, while the poor have none. But there is a lot of corruption over the land tax, so that the rich can manipulate and evade the tax; though they have more land they give less grain to the government. The poor dare not cheat or evade the tax and they even bear some of the tax burdens of the rich; those who have less land give more grain. Then there are other levies and the rich so exploit the poor that the rich become richer and the poor poorer. The former middle class are now poor and hate the government worse than the bandits. Your Majesty has said that increased taxation can curb the greed of the great landowners. Yang reported that last year, but it is absurd. He is cheating Your Majesty and trifling with affairs of state."

The emperor shouted: "Enough! You are dismissed!" Seeing that the old man was reluctant to move, the emperor admonished him further: "The situation is critical and all of you should cooperate to save it, yet you use every opportunity to attack Yang. Your personal antagonisms obscure the government's difficulties. Your selfish behaviour in arguing endlessly is unseemly."

Huang defended himself: "When I only have the interests of the people and the state at heart, how can I be accused of self-interest?"

The emperor said: "You often lecture about the laws of nature and the desires of men, but it seems that is all just words. To act

without a motive is to follow the laws of nature; to act with one is to follow the desires of men, and the more human desires you have, the less you adhere to nature. This is the contradiction. Three years ago when you failed to enter the cabinet, you started to attack Yang. Is this following nature's laws?"

Since the emperor felt he was ruling according to the laws of Confucius and Mencius, and since Huang was a noted scholar of the neo-Confucian school, he deliberately chose jargon used by the neo-Confucianists such as Chu Hsi to criticize Huang. Huang however was interested only in the real problem and scorned such terminology. He replied vehemently:

"I must still speak against Yang. From my years of study of the classics, I know something of their principles and I only desire to be loyal and patriotic, scorning position and fame. I lived years on the land, my hands and feet are worn and calloused, my clothes rough, and I accepted the hard life never seeking wealth. Everyone knows this. I have never attacked Yang out of envy."

The emperor knew the injustice of his accusation and despite his stern look he spoke more gently: "A frugal life is virtuous, but arrogance and factionalism are not. Po Yi is an example of ancient virtue, but can you reach his standard? I value your integrity, hence I have always recalled you after banishment. But you have become too opinionated, conceited and impertinent. I shall pardon you since you are an imperial scholar of some merit, but I warn you never again to attack our chief ministers or try to obstruct our policies. You are dismissed!"

Huang was ready to die to save the dynasty and seeing that the emperor failed to understand this caused him deep grief. Nearly weeping, his voice rang out:

"Your Majesty! I speak only in the interests of the sovereign and state and not from self-interest. The people are like water, they can support or capsize a boat. To continue these policies will antagonize the people so that lawlessness will increase and the situation become unmanageable."

"Get out and await my orders!"

"But Your Majesty, your policy is disastrous and for me to remain silent is treachery towards the people and to you. It would not be just if Your Majesty decides to execute me."

By people, Huang meant the smaller landowners and landed peasants and though he did not state that the dynasty would fall, the emperor caught his meaning. Enraged he longed to have Huang killed, and banged his hand on the desk shouting:

"Huang Tao-chou! What temerity to argue in this outrageous manner to your sovereign! Do you think yourself immune because of your renown as a scholar? Just remember Shaocheng Mao. Yes, he was a famous scholar, but he overstepped himself and did so much wrong that in the end Confucius had him killed. There seem to be some Shaocheng Mao's around today."

As followers of Confucius, both Huang and the emperor believed that such an action was just. But Huang was not cowed by the emperor's threat and immediately continued:

"Loyal, pious and without self-interest, how can I be compared to Shaocheng Mao?"

The emperor knew the comparison was inept and though he was furious, he still tried to act reasonably. He decided to dismiss Huang and then instruct his officials to decide on some punishment and have him banished to a remote place in some minor capacity for good. Glaring at Huang he yelled:

"Go away at once!"

Huang kowtowed and rose on his cramped legs. Turning he staggered out while the emperor gazed after him thinking how hard he had worked for the state, yet Huang had not appreciated this. He sighed and then said in disgust:

"He was a scholar, yet he only learned to slander others."

Catching this remark, Huang at once turned round and knelt down again. Trembling, he answered indignantly and passionately:

"Your Majesty says I have only learned to slander people. If having the courage to speak frankly to the sovereign is slander, then flattery and deceit must be loyalty. Thus right and wrong are reversed, so how can one govern well?"

"You! You care not a fig for the desperate situation or my worries, but just argue in this manner to gain a reputation for courage. This is slander."

"Your Majesty only trusts Yang Ssu-chang. All the wrong policies are his proposals. He even recommended Chen Hsin-chia for his appeasement negotiations with the Manchus. Yet Your Majesty considers such a deceiver highly, though he does harm to the people. Why is he not a slanderer? My life has been devoted to study and I can only speak frankly, for I never learned to flatter or deceive. Yet Your Majesty says I am a slanderer. . . ."

At this the emperor lost control and screamed: "Arrest him! How dare he act so outrageously! Have him flogged!"

Huang was surrounded by several guards and taken away, while the emperor struck the desk with his fist and yelled again:

"Have him flogged!"

The assembled officials trembled and feared that Huang would be flogged to death. As Huang was roughly led out of the Meridian Gate, his cap and robe were pulled off and thrown to the ground. Unafraid of death, Huang only feared for the dynasty. Struggling, he raised his head and gazed at the gate, saying only:

"Ah, Heaven, Heaven!"

From the assembly, an official in his forties, of medium height and wearing the insignia of the sixth rank, hurried forward and knelt before the barrier. Kowtowing he pleaded in haste:

"I hope Your Majesty will take into consideration that Huang Tao-chou is highly respected throughout the empire as a scholar and virtuous man. His speaking so frankly to Your Majesty was from loyalty and patriotism. I beg Your Majesty to pardon him. Should he die undergoing the flogging, he would be regarded as a very courageous man and Your Majesty's reputation would be damaged."

Recognizing Yeh Ting-hsiu, the secretary of the ministry of revenue, the emperor rebuked him: "Huang Tao-chou has behaved disgracefully and even death cannot atone for his crime. Yet you dare to intercede for him. You must be one of his clique!"

Yeh kowtowed and replied: "Your Majesty, I never met Huang in my life before."

"Liar! To intercede shows you follow him. Let him be flogged too!" he ordered his guards.

Before he could appeal, Yeh was quickly arrested and dragged out. Yeh had known more about the real situation in the country since he worked in the ministry of revenue and he was more intelligent than most. He had hoped to be able to take this opportunity to speak to the emperor.

Liu Tsung-chou, the Left City Inspector of the imperial inspectorate, was well aware of the corruption and problems besetting the state. Having recently returned to the capital from his hometown, Shaohsing, he had seen with his own eyes the devastation and suffering. Seeing that all the other officials were too frightened to speak, he felt that since the situation was critical and he held a senior position in the bureaucracy, he should not remain silent. An old man, he went forward slowly, knelt and kowtowed. Before he could open his mouth the emperor demanded angrily:

"Are you pleading for them?"

Liu replied: "Yeh is innocent of all blame, yet I cannot intercede for him as he was my student. But I must try to save Huang because he is a learned and virtuous man, and a model for all scholars. Your Majesty was angered by his frank speech, but there are no other charges against him. Should he die by flogging, Your Majesty will regret it, but by then it will be too late."

"Huang Tao-chou was impertinent to me. He deserves death."

"According to law, a high official can only be given capital punishment for three offences. One is high treason; the second is abandoning territory to the enemy; and the third is for corruption and tyranny. Huang is guilty of none of these. Your Majesty has always detested cliques, but Huang belongs to no faction. He spoke as he did today because he felt it was his duty. It had nothing to do with petty jealousies. No one could believe Huang guilty of factionalism. I have known him for many years and I swear this is so."

"Unless he is flogged, how can my court be orderly? Enough. Go!"

"I am sixty-three years old and my life cannot be much longer, so. . . ."

"Get out!"

"Your Majesty, I hope. . . ."

"I said go away!"

"I hope that Your Majesty will be like the wise rulers Yao and Shun, and not be remembered as having killed an innocent person. In the thirteen years since Your Majesty ascended the throne, despite Your Majesty's hard work and diligence, the situation has so deteriorated until now it is critical. Why? Perhaps Your Majesty, too impatient for an immediate solution, has enacted the laws too harshly, issued too many edicts, promoted or dismissed people too peremptorily. Officials, afraid to take responsibility for their actions, try to conceal the truth for fear of punishment. Yet those who dare to speak the truth are harshly dealt with. Your government is without justice, and Your Majesty is becoming increasingly isolated."

"Nonsense! Me isolated? Officials since the reign of Emperor Wan-li have formed cliques. I dislike it and I won't tolerate it. I am just attempting to put a stop to this and ensure justice is carried out. Surely as an upright man you can see this. You must belong to Huang's faction. . . . You are dismissed!"

"I cannot leave until I have spoken my mind."

"Then what do you wish to add?"

"The talents in the state are not being used for good purposes. Money allotted to pay the armies does not reach our soldiers. The register is inaccurate. Generals cannot command their troops to fight against the rebels but slaughter innocent people instead. Huang's words may be bitter, but it has been said that a bitter medicine cures the disease. Honest advice may be unpleasant to hear, but it is best. To regain the trust of the people, Your Majesty must rule like the ancient wise kings. To enforce harsh laws and punishments, to continue to exploit the people will only make the situation impossible." Pausing to choke back a sob, he raised his head and went on: "Your Majesty sincerely wishes to improve the situation and worries about it, but ignores the ways of the ancients. . . ."

"I don't ignore them. It's you officials who have disappointed me." Turning abruptly to a eunuch he asked: "Has Huang Tao-chou been flogged yet?"

Wang Teh-hua came forward and knelt down to report: "It is about to commence."

"Then hurry up. There must be no leniency." The emperor turned again angrily to Liu: "All you scholars just lay the blame on the government in order to boost your own reputations. I'll spare you today, but no more of your nonsense. Go!"

"Since the flogging is to go ahead, then I must say all that is on my mind that I may die without regrets."

"What a persistent bastard you are! Continue after the flogging. Get up!"

"After I have finished speaking."

"Then wait kneeling!"

Thunder rumbled over the Forbidden City. Preparations had been made for the flogging outside the Meridian Gate by the west steps. Wu and Tsao had hoped that the emperor might change his mind, so they had waited, but now the flogging had to begin.

As the emperor's trusted henchman, Tsao sat on the steps to watch, while Wu sat on his right giving the orders. Nearby thirty officers stood to attention. Below were about a hundred guards in red uniforms and holding red-lacquered rods. Huang was pressed face-down on the ground, his arms and legs secured by ropes which four men pulled so that he could not move his body at all. The emperor's order was passed to Wu, who then ordered the guards in a stern voice:

"Lay the rod!"

"Lay the rod!" roared the guards in unison.

A muscular guard stepped forward and placed a red-lacquered rod on Huang's buttocks. When Wu shouted to start all the guards repeated his order and the flogging began. After three strokes, Wu fearing that Tsao would make a bad report to the emperor, ordered: "Beat him hard!" which the guards echoed. After every five strokes, a new man took the rod. Wu did not wish to see Huang killed at once, so he did not order him to be beaten in earnest. If that order were given, Huang would die after a few strokes. Tsao knew this, but as Huang was not his enemy, he said nothing.

Huang's nose and lips were bruised and his beard was stained with blood. Occasionally he cried out to heaven or the spirits of past kings,

but he never begged for mercy. His voice grew weaker, till after forty strokes, his sense of pain diminished and he gradually lost consciousness, only vaguely aware of distant noises and his body being shaken after each stroke. Then he passed out completely.

He was revived with cold water splashed over him, but since the emperor had not ordered the flogging to stop, it had to continue. After sixty strokes, Huang again lost consciousness. Tsao ordered them to stop while he went to ask the emperor for instructions, hoping to spare Huang's life. The emperor, however, angry and eager to kill Huang as a warning to all, glanced at Tsao coldly and said:

"Another twenty strokes!"

Revived with water, Huang heard the new order and cried weakly: "Ah, Heaven! . . ."

Huang gritted his teeth as the flogging recommenced, only hoping to die quickly. Wu saw to it that these last twenty strokes were lighter. At the end, Huang was barely breathing. According to the rules, he was picked up and thrown down three times, after which his body was tossed aside. Although Wu had made signs that his body should not be thrown down too hard, Huang passed out again and it was only after some time that he regained consciousness.

Yeh was given a hundred strokes, but being younger and in better health, he only passed out once. After Tsao had reported the flogging over, the emperor ordered them to be jailed. Then he glared at Liu who had been kneeling for over an hour and demanded in a threatening voice:

"Well, what do you wish to say?"

Liu raised his head and replied: "Two officials have just been flogged outside the Meridian Gate with Heaven in such an uproar that all have been stricken with awe. The day turned dark and thunder rumbled continually. Is this a portent from Heaven? Huang's scholarship could not be matched, his behaviour was always exemplary like the ancient sages, yet in his old age he received such treatment. No wonder the Heavens and Earth bewail his fate. But I am more grieved for Your Majesty, for our laws, for our state." Choked with emotion he paused before continuing: "When in the Tang Dynasty Wei Cheng criticized Emperor Tai-tsung to his face, the latter was so

furious he wanted him killed, but he restrained himself and came to trust and respect Wei. In the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu also disliked Chi An for his outspoken words and had him banished, but in the end he grew to tolerate him. How can Your Majesty seek to emulate these ancient kings and yet show less tolerance than they? This I cannot understand. As for. . . ."

At this the emperor interjected shouting: "How dare you! You talk about all your studies and honesty, but where is your respect and sincerity when you criticize your sovereign so scandalously?"

Liu replied: "Little of my life has been at court. Most has been studying and lecturing, and it is true that I stress sincerity, respect and self-awareness. For years I have tried to live by these principles and not violate them. I have never considered lip-service obedience as true loyalty, and so today I speak frankly risking my life. To do otherwise would be to show no respect and be insincere. My years cannot be long and so I want to tell Your Majesty about. . . ."

Thumping the desk with his hand the emperor yelled: "Be quiet! You're in league with Huang, criticizing me to my face. How vile! You are stripped of your post, and the ministry of penalties will decide your fate. Take him away!"

As Liu was being dragged out of the gate, the emperor still furious thought to himself: "Court discipline and scholars' manners have gone to the dogs! They show no respect at all for their sovereign. Goodness knows what will happen if such men aren't severely punished!" Casting a glance at the assembled eunuchs, he ordered in a low voice:

"All officials come forward to hear my words."

The officials complied according to ranks, with the titled, cabinet ministers and heads of the ministries in front. They were a little disorderly, but the censors and the master of ceremonies were too frightened to notice. All was silence save the rustling of robes and shuffling of feet. The emperor scrutinized their bowed heads before speaking. His blinding rage had given way to an expression of sorrow. Despite his flogging Huang and Yeh and punishing Liu, and despite the frightened expression of his officials, he knew he had not succeeded in winning their support, but only in isolating himself

more. He felt they did not appreciate his problems. Contrary to his previous tone, he now spoke more gently and with some remorse:

"Since my ascension to the throne, there has been strife within the government, in the countryside, floods, droughts and bad omens. I must accept responsibility for these. I have not been able to inspire you to work better for the state, nor have I been wise in distinguishing clearly between what is right or wrong. I have not used enough military force to crush the revolts and relieve my people. I lack both virtue and ability. Heaven displeased with my rule has sent us these terrible portents."

The officials who had rarely heard such a confession from the emperor in a court session were deeply moved by his words, but they were also quite aware that his mood could change in a trice. Apart from one official who made a flattering remark, the rest remained silent.

After taking a sip of tea, the emperor continued: "The way you think also affects the state and sometimes it is more to be feared than bad omens. Some prefer to form cliques rather than help their sovereign solve his problems, squabbling with each other out of self-interest, criticizing and obstructing government policies, not considering problems of state. But our ancient laws do not say how to deal with such people. It is easier to eradicate the peasant bandits than those who are really bandits masquerading as gentlemen. In future all such cases will be severely punished. From now on, all of you must forget your past differences and co-operate to help me in reviving our fortunes and in enjoying peace."

The officials knelt and answered: "Your Majesty's order will be obeyed."

Then the emperor told them to rise and warned them again about Huang and Liu and against acting impertinently to the sovereign, slandering other officials or obstructing the tax increases on pain of severe punishment. Finally he asked:

"Is there anything else to report?"

At this several cabinet ministers took the opportunity to plead for Liu, since he had lived in his hometown for many years studying and lecturing. While he was rather pedantic, he had never belonged

to any faction of Huang's and they hoped he would be pardoned. The emperor replied:

"Ever since the reign of Emperor Wan-li, many scholars have formed schools of opposition to the government and this is not good. Liu taught students for many years in Chishan so perhaps he has his own group of supporters."

A cabinet minister answered: "Liu was indeed known as the Master of Chishan, but we have never heard of his forming a faction."

The emperor reflected for a moment, then said: "Since he is old and senile, I agree to your request to treat him leniently. He must apologize for his conduct and if he refuses, he will be severely punished with no question of mercy."

The emperor was about to mention Yeh, when suddenly a gust of wind, rain and hailstones arose. A crash of thunder was followed by a flash of lightning which struck a tile ornament over a gate, while all the windows shook. The throne itself seemed to rock and the wind blew away the yellow umbrella. Turning pale, the emperor hurriedly left and went back to his palace by sedan-chair with his eunuchs. The officials and guards dispersed quickly in the storm.

This seemed most unauspicious and the emperor feeling unsettled decided to pray at the shrines of his ancestors.

The evening being darker than usual, all the lamps were lit in the palace. When a eunuch inquired if the emperor wished his supper, he shook his head and asked what the haste was for. Thinking it was time for Tsao to make his report, he raised his head:

"Hasn't Tsao come yet?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. He's been here for some time, but not wishing to disturb Your Majesty reading the reports, he waited in the office outside."

"Let him enter."

Normally Tsao reported to the emperor every day at dusk, and occasionally in the mornings. When there was nothing of importance, he would gossip about various families that his spies had been watching, since this interested the emperor. Even at night a message

from Tsao would be delivered to the palace immediately. The emperor looked at the eunuch kneeling before him and asked:

"What has that fellow Huang been saying in jail?"

Tsao replied: "As he was carried to his cell, he saw on the door the name 'White-cloud Lodge' and sighed that this was where the scholars Chou Shun-chang and Chou Tsung-chien had died."

"Damn him! Already sees himself as a martyr. What else did he say?"

"I cannot repeat it."

"Come, I won't blame you for it."

"He said you were like the ancient kings Yao and Shun, whereas he was content to die like Kuan Lung-feng and Pi Kan."

Furiously the emperor banged the desk and swore: "That old fool is really saying I'm like those evil kings Chieh and Chou. He deserves to die."

"Your Majesty, don't be so angry with him."

"What about Liu? Who goes to visit him?"

"He's refused to see any visitors, even his colleagues and former students."

"Well if he sees the error of his ways that will be excellent. I'll wait to read his reply."

After supper, the emperor considered how to deal with Huang. To kill him on a charge of slandering his sovereign would only antagonize the people who would send in petitions, and history would remember him as the king who had killed great scholars. Thus he made a decision which he wrote down on a yellow slip of paper. He wrote:

"Let Huang and Yeh be secretly executed in jail but report that they died of an illness. Inform Wu Meng-ming."

Having read the note again, he sealed it in an envelope and sent it by a trusted eunuch to be delivered into the hands of Wu, telling him to keep this a secret.

This alarmed Wu. After the eunuch had left he thought the demand over in his office. Both men were renowned officials, and Huang also as a scholar was respected by all, with many pupils in high positions throughout the empire. Wu would be condemned by all

if he condoned their murder, and his name would go down in history as such. Moreover the emperor often changed his mind and shifted the blame on to others. If there was trouble, the emperor would hold him responsible, yet he could not defend himself by producing the secret order. Whenever the situation returned to normal, he knew he would be killed like the former henchmen of the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien in the previous reign. He was in a terrible dilemma, but how could he ignore the order?

He thought for a long time before deciding to delay its execution, since it did not specify a time. It was still possible for it to be altered. He wrote a secret report which he sent by messenger at dawn to the palace, which stated: "Since these two men deserve death, better to bring them before the court of justice and have them publicly executed so that all may see the law enforced. To act otherwise will cast doubts upon Your Majesty." As soon as it was light he went to consult Tsao.

The imperial police and East Bureau were directly responsible to the emperor, but as Wu felt Tsao was closer to the throne, he always treated him with deference. If he received a handsome bribe on a case, he would always share it with Tsao, and similarly since Wu knew about the illegal transactions of the East Bureau, Tsao did not wish to offend him and get into trouble. The two men therefore helped each other. Tsao approved of Wu's caution over the emperor's secret order and promised to go to the palace to see the emperor's reaction to Wu's suggestion. If the emperor seemed angry, he would try to help Wu.

The suggestion touched the emperor's sore spot, anxious as he was to have himself regarded as a wise ruler by future generations. Should his order be made known, his reputation would be permanently damaged. Yet he was still furious with Huang for his intransigence and Yeh for defending him, and wished both dead. It was at this point that Tsao arrived. Though the emperor relied on the two organizations, he never trusted them completely and would use one to spy on the other. He wondered if Wu had been bribed by other officials and that his concern for his good name was just a pretext. After hearing Tsao's reports he asked:

"Are you a good friend of Wu Meng-ming?"

Tsao bowed and replied: "Since the East Bureau belongs to the palace, and the imperial police to the city, we only have business connections and not private dealings with each other."

"What sort of a person is Wu?"

"As the proverb says, the one who best knows the son is the father; so the one who best knows his subject is the sovereign. Since Your Majesty is wise and clever, naturally you know him better than I do. Still in my view, he is cautious and reliable."

"Do you know if he has accepted bribes?"

Startled Tsao answered: "In the past very few such officials did not accept bribes, but since Your Majesty's reign, none have dared break the law. Despite my investigations, I have no evidence of Wu's accepting bribes, but I'll make further inquiries."

The emperor said nothing and Tsao remained silent. After he had left, the emperor told the eunuch who had carried his secret order to get it back from Wu. Then the emperor himself destroyed it.

He decided to postpone any decision on Huang and Yeh and to let them rot in jail. He knew his irritability had got the upper hand of late, shouting at his officials in court sessions, making hasty decisions and regretting them afterwards, all of which would tarnish his good name in history. Concerned about this, he sighed and summoned Wang Teh-hua:

"Fetch the records about my behaviour and sayings for the last couple of years from the Imperial Academy and keep them in the palace. Should there be any inaccuracies, correct them carefully for the sake of truth."

Wang understood immediately the emperor's meaning and replied: "Your Majesty is most wise, reverent and pious to Heaven and the ancestors, hardworking and kind to all his people, a model for future generations. Any inaccuracies will be corrected."

The emperor added: "Inform the recorders that for affairs of state, they can use the cabinet records with my instructions in red and my edicts. History can be based on these. From today, there is no need to note down my everyday actions and sayings."

After Wang had withdrawn, the emperor received Liu's reply, and a report on the military situation from the governor of Shensi sent through the war ministry. Taking up Liu's report, the emperor muttered to himself:

"Hmm. Taken him a long time to reply. Let's see what he says."

Liu instead of criticizing himself, mentioned the evils besetting the government and even criticized the emperor directly, pointing out that the emperor based his information on reports from trusted eunuchs or generals, punished his officials harshly, and attended to trivial affairs so that the situation daily grew more critical. Unable to finish, the emperor enraged took up his pen to order a severe punishment, but calmed himself down enough to continue. Liu said the emperor threatened people with punishment and each year judged several thousand people himself unjustly. He lacked a clear overall policy which was detrimental to the government of the state. Local officials afraid of being penalized for failing to collect enough money and grain, would resort to corruption and coercion, so that more and more peasants were trying to evade tax. There was so much exploitation that people became destitute. The harsh laws and heavy taxes produced more bandits. The emperor's policy of sending eunuchs to oversee the army prevented local governors and garrison commanders from using their authority. Generals became timid, while officers feared death and soldiers were undisciplined. Thus the government could exercise no control over the local authorities either. Soldiers slaughtered innocent people instead of bandits. Liu therefore suggested getting rid of the eunuchs and increasing the responsibility of local officials. The emperor should issue an edict for reform, inviting talented men to serve in the government and punishing corrupt and tyrannical officials. Finally he made a request:

"Let Lu Hsiang-sheng who died in the course of his duty be posthumously honoured; let Yang Ssu-chang who has greatly harmed the state be executed. Then justice will be restored in the government. Let Huang Tao-chou be released that others may be encouraged to speak truthfully; let the despotic general Tso Liang-yu who has killed innocent people be arrested to appease the people. Let the increase in tax be stopped and a self-criticism made to show the

emperor's desire to reform. Let all peace negotiations with the Manchus be abandoned and the Shanhaikuan Pass defended, along with Tungchow, Tientsin, Linching and Tehchow against the Manchus' southward advance."

The emperor swore to himself, irritated most by the suggestion that he should criticize himself. The present situation he felt was more the fault of useless ministers and bad generals than himself. He had been working diligently for thirteen years while his officials had failed him. He was also annoyed by the mention of appeasing the Manchus, which he considered like Huang's as a direct attack on himself. Liu not only defended Lu who was dead, but even attempted to obstruct his policies. Furiously the emperor leapt up and paced about, thinking that no one supported him. The imperial relatives were unwilling to help, while his chief officials attacked him. Petitions from various parts of the country, requests for famine relief, reinforcements or funds besieged him.

Unconcerned whether or not Liu's vehement criticisms was out of loyalty to the dynasty, the emperor decided that he must be severely dealt with, to discourage others from following his example. Returning to his desk, he took up his pen and wrote on the report:

"Liu has not only refused to apologize, but he has also taken this opportunity to launch a bitter attack on the government and defend Huang. He is hardly impartial in the matter. He is dismissed from his post and the ministry of penalties should consider his punishment."

At this all the cabinet ministers and chiefs of the ministry of penalty came to plead for Liu, earnestly begging the emperor to be merciful. The emperor grew calmer and decided only to have Liu's name struck from the official list.

Heavy rain that night cleared the air the next morning. After breakfast Liu came to hear the imperial edict and had to leave the capital without going to the Meridian Gate to bid farewell to the emperor. Though aggrieved by the circumstances of his departure, he still felt loyal to his sovereign. A great landowner and Confucian scholar, he was a firm supporter of the Ming Dynasty with whose fortunes his own were linked. He knew he would never appear at court again and feared that he would witness the collapse of the state. Dressed

in plain clothes and a small cap, he went outside the Meridian Gate to kneel on the wet ground and kowtow respectfully towards the north. Tears sprang into his eyes at the thought he might never see the emperor again and he almost wept.

When his colleagues, secretaries, former students and friends heard that he was dismissed, they wanted to give him a farewell feast, but he refused to see anyone wishing to avoid all fuss. After ceremoniously thanking the emperor, he and his wife stepped into a waiting covered carriage at their back door and driving out of the Chaoyang Gate went to Tungchow to board a boat.

The water in the Grand Canal had risen and was rough. The rain had cooled the air and a fresh breeze was blowing. Dressed in a worn blue silk gown with a round collar and a grey gauze cap like an ordinary scholar without official rank, Liu sat in the small boat looking at the scenery. He said to his wife: "I always wanted to return to the college at Chishan and now thanks to His Majesty's kindness my wish is fulfilled." He recalled the beautiful scenery of mountains and streams to the north of Shaohsing where his college was situated. There were ancient temples and memories of past scholars like Wang Hsi-chih, and his discussing literature with his teacher and fellow students. Suddenly he thought of Huang and Yeh in jail and wondered if they were dead or alive. It grieved him to think that his dreams of serving his country had been in vain. At the Meridian Gate some lines of a poem had come into his mind, and now grinding some ink and spreading out a sheet of paper, he began to write:

> Taking leave of my sovereign, tears stained my clothes.
> For my crimes I deserve nine deaths.
> I always hoped to serve my lord well
> And regret I have no plan to make improvements.
> With white in my hair I leave the Forbidden City.
> Even in my dreams my heart remains loyal.
> Chishan is more than a thousand miles away,
> Where I shall peruse my books at the cold window
> In the autumn rain.

Having read his poem twice, he inscribed a title, "Impromptu lines written after taking leave of my sovereign" and gave it to his wife to

read. He knew that Yang would fail to crush the insurgents and that the situation would become worse. Even in exile he might be unable to enjoy a peaceful scholarly life but witness instead the downfall of the dynasty, upon which according to Confucian tradition, he would be expected to commit suicide rather than seek to live in disgrace serving a new dynasty. He had a premonition that all was over and feeling mournful, he remained silently standing at the prow leaning on his bamboo cane and gazing at the hills housing the Ming tombs. He shed tears for the lost dynasty.

Suspicious that officials were forming factions, the emperor worried over Liu since he had been a high official with a good reputation as a scholar and many of his students held positions in the government. The emperor told the East Bureau and the police to investigate whether or not Liu was being feasted or if people were criticizing the edict, upon which they should be arrested. Agents kept a close watch on Liu as he departed, and both Tsao and Wu were relieved to report that nothing had happened. The emperor felt eased and asked Wu:

"Has Hsueh Kuo-kuan also left the capital?"

"This morning he left for his old home in Hangcheng with much luggage. Since he was guilty of embezzlement, none dared to see him off except for Wang Pi-yen, the cabinet secretary, whom the police caught at Hsueh's back door and put him in jail."

The emperor said: "Then have him tortured to find out what he knows about Hsueh's embezzlement. Investigate whether or not other officials close to Hsueh also accepted bribes. What are the people saying?"

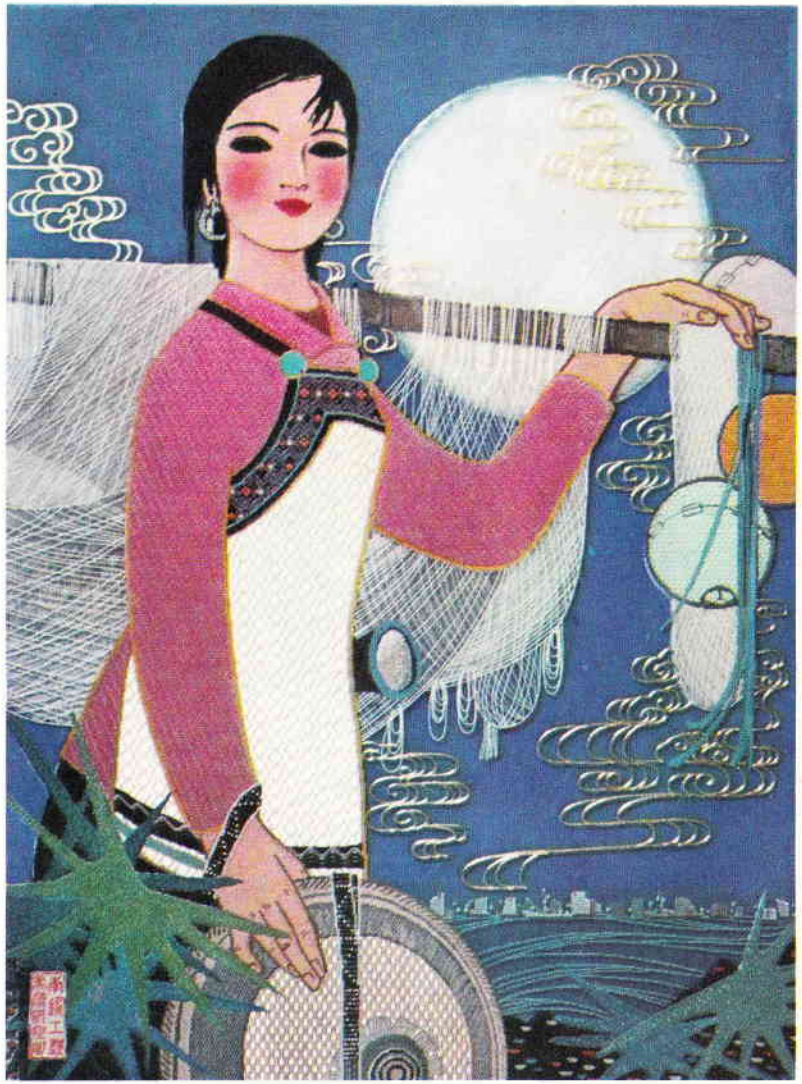
Wu knew that Hsueh's fall from favour had pleased the imperial relatives while the ordinary people felt quite differently. Some criticized the court for suppressing frank speech; others felt that Huang and Liu were simply scholars who had risked their lives for nothing; while even more felt that the despotic and opinionated manner of the emperor could only lead the country to disaster. Over a dozen citizens had already been arrested and beaten till they were half dead, or fined or jailed. Wu, however, dared not report this and said instead that all were praising the emperor for his wisdom and far-sighted

policies, that Huang and Liu were pedants blind to the emperor's difficulties and since they criticized the emperor openly, their punishment was just. Pleased at this news, the emperor dismissed Wu. Yet distrustful lest Wu had deceived him, the emperor asked Tsao the same questions, and since Wu and Tsao had discussed the matter beforehand, Tsao's reply was practically identical. Reassured at Tsao's honesty, the emperor felt delighted. He thought: "After all he is a family slave and should be more reliable than the others." Again the problem of raising funds for the army troubled him as he paced round and round the pillar in his room. He muttered to himself:

"We need more money and since all of the marquis' properties have been confiscated, whom shall I ask next?"

(To be continued)

Illustrated by Fan Tseng



Returning by Moonlight (embroidery) **Kiangsu Province**

Arts and Crafts

The Poet Chu Yuan (porcelain) **Fukien Province**

Chung Kuei, the Demon Catcher (wood carving) **Fukien Province**

Off to See Patients (ivory carving) **Kiangsu Province**

Tsai Wen-chi (porcelain) **Fukien Province**

The Rain Is Over (ivory carving) **Fukien Province**

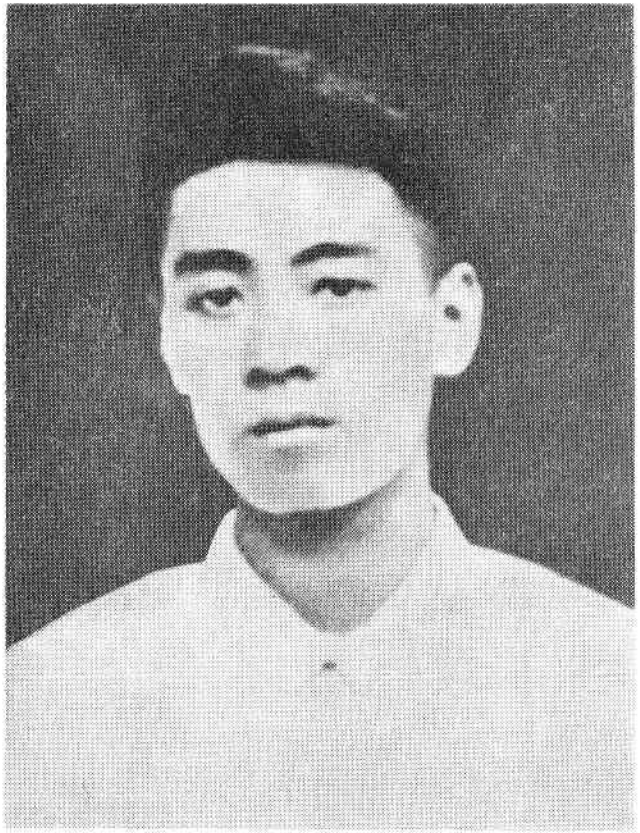
Agate Vase Hopei Province

Chao Pu-chu

On Reading Poems Written by Premier Chou in His Youth

Of the few poems left to us by Premier Chou En-lai, most were composed between the age of sixteen to twenty-two. About a dozen in all, they reveal his youthful thoughts and aspirations, about which little was known before and which is of prime importance, especially for future generations, in studying the premier's fine qualities and revolutionary spirit.

His poems were written mainly in the critical period from the 1911 Revolution to the May 4th Movement of 1919, which witnessed the transition from the old democratic revolution to the new. A true revolutionary force was gathering strength, maturing and manifesting itself throughout China, first among the more progressive people and youths. Premier Chou, then a schoolboy, was an outstanding example of the progressive youth of the time. His poems clearly show the aspirations of the young people eager to "uphold justice", while "the motherland asleep" was "shrouded in a murky haze". He saw that only in their revolutionary will lay hope for the future.



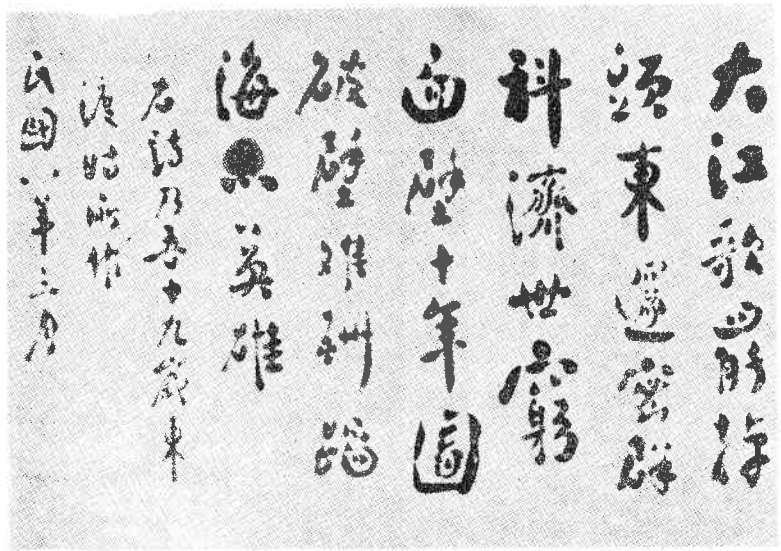
Young Comrade Chou En-lai

to "break new ground" and "relieve suffering". He expected communism to flourish. This spirit dominates those times.

Before the May 4th Movement, Premier Chou En-lai wrote in the traditional Chinese classical poetry style poems of power and breadth. After that he wrote free verse, also of a high quality. Since this is well-known, it is not a matter for discussion here. What is remarkable, however, is that the premier not only had a gift for poetry, but he also worked hard to improve his technique. From the magazine he edited in which he published some of his poems and from those poems he wrote for friends, the premier's deep interest in poetry is evident. At that time he was just a young man aged about twenty. In the subsequent fifty years after his studies in Europe, he devoted all his energies and talents to the cause of proletarian revolution and never again wrote poems for publication or spoke of poetry. If he took up his pen to write a verse, it was for an exceptional reason, and once written he immediately discarded it, never keeping the original. Had not his old friends for many years preserved his poems and other dedicated people collected them, then the premier's gifts as a poet would have remained unrecognized. Why should the premier have sought to hide his talents? The answer is to be found in his poem, *Parting in Life or Death*, written in 1922 on the occasion of the death of Huang Ai. He wrote:

> Armchair talk
> Is no substitute for action!

Having Sung of the Yangtse, I Turn Eastward in the author's handwriting



He concluded:

Reflections on life and death have shown,
Death as well as life
Demands total commitment.
Why grieve over eternal parting?

The premier had completely understood the true meaning of life and death. He envisioned a great future and dedicated himself to liberating his people. Personal interest counted as nothing in his actions. Throughout his life he fought for this end. At his death, he requested that his ashes be scattered in the rivers and streams of China that nothing of his mortal remains would exist. This great Marxist and outstanding proletarian revolutionary feared no difficulties, gave no consideration to his personal safety and never sought gain, credit or honour for himself. He never thought of himself. He was truly a heroic, noble, honourable and excellent man.

Deeply moved I read and re-read the premier's poems and with love and respect I have written and dedicated this poem to him:

Fulfilling your vow to change the world,
By a life of noble action,
You grasped life and death's significance.
Working hard for the people to the last,
Your death is weightier than Mount Tai.
Dedicating your life to your country
Abandoning all beautiful poems and dreams;
Disinterested in preserving your poems,
Which like brilliant feathers have been gathered
For ever to shine resplendent.

Some Works from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition

More than ten thousand exhibits were on display at the National Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Peking this spring, including some of China's most recent and best works. Presented in this issue are a few examples.

An ivory carving, *Off to See Patients*, depicts a Han woman doctor, her first-aid box slung over her shoulder, at night on horseback. She is being guided by a Uighur girl and followed by an old hunter. Their three galloping horses, their backs bent low over the saddles, suggest there is an emergency. It represents the deep friendship between the different nationalities in China.

The Rain Is Over, also an ivory carving, portrays a happy young woman going to visit her mother after a rainstorm. In 1962, the artist carved another figure based on a folk dance, entitled *Returning in the Rain*, showing a newly-married girl holding an umbrella and walking back to see her mother in a heavy rain. The followers of the "gang of four" in the art world asserted that in 1962 Chiang Kai-shek was clamouring to return to the mainland, and accused the artist of wishing to welcome him. On such an absurd pretext, they persecuted the

artist. After the downfall of the "gang of four", the artist in his delight carved *The Rain Is Over*. The young woman half closes her umbrella and gazes into the distance. The carving has a feeling of freshness after the passing of the storm.

Returning by Moonlight is a traditional folk embroidery of a fisher-girl wearing a pink jacket and white apron returning from work by moonlight. Over her shoulder is a fishing net, hanging from her belt is her torch, while in her hand she carries a bamboo rain-hat. In the background, distant hills act as a foil to banana trees. Since such folk embroidery is normally sewn on pillow-cases, pockets, shoes and suchlike articles, this is one of the first attempts to create a piece purely for decoration.

Chu Yuan, the first of the great ancient Chinese poets, and a patriot, was born into an aristocratic family in 340 B.C. in the Kingdom of Chu. He lived during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), when seven powerful kingdoms, namely Chu, Chi, Chao, Yen, Han, Wei and Chin, were struggling for supremacy. The Kingdom of Chu in central and southern China gradually declined and its ruler, King Huai, adopted a policy of uniting with Chi against Chin. Chu Yuan was appointed by him as his deputy prime minister concerned with domestic and foreign affairs. Later dissension and slander among the Chu aristocracy led to Chu Yuan's dismissal and exile. His political strategy in ruins and his patriotism scorned, Chu Yuan took up his pen to write several magnificent poems. Then he finally committed suicide by drowning himself in the Milo River. To commemorate his death, people south of the Yangtse each year hold a Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, competing with each other in boat races symbolizing the attempts to rescue the poet, and eating glutinous rice wrapped in leaves, some of which they throw into the water to prevent the dragons from eating his body.

The white porcelain figure, *The Poet Chu Yuan*, is based on his famous poem *Li Sao*. The poet, dressed in the wide flowing robes of the Kingdom of Chu, is leaning his thin body against his horse, gazing at the sky in deep thought. His thinness suggests his uncompromising spirit and patriotism.

Tsai Wen-chi, a coloured porcelain figure, depicts the renowned Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) poetess, Tsai Wen-chi. An accomplished woman, she was also talented in music. Her father Tsai Yung was a well-known writer. In 189 A.D., a high official Tung Cho attempted to seize the throne and there was chaos in the country. The King of the Huns took the opportunity to launch an attack, taking Tsai Wen-chi as captive and installing her as his concubine. She bore him two children. After twelve years, the wise statesman, Tsao Tsao, took compassion on her both for her talents and sufferings and ransomed her from the Huns. Tsai Wen-chi then married a low-ranking official Tung Ssu. Her *Poem of Grief* feelingly describes her unfortunate experiences and sorrow.

The porcelain figure has attempted to portray some of her inner thoughts and melancholy. Wearing plain white clothes, she stands by the lute, her sleeve hanging over the edge of the table. Her expression is one of profound grief.

The wood carving, *Chung Kuei, the Demon Catcher*, is based on a popular Chinese legend about a Tang Dynasty emperor, Hsuan-tsung (685-762 A.D.), who fell ill and was unable to sleep peacefully because his dreams were plagued by little demons. Suddenly an ugly giant caught and ate all the demons. When the emperor asked his name, he answered it was Chung Kuei. He had often failed in his court entrance exams and when he saw many ignorant men being appointed he felt so enraged that he committed suicide by dashing himself against Mt. Chung. After his death he had become a giant devil who gobbled up all smaller demons. When the emperor awoke, he ordered the artist Wu Tao-tzu to paint a picture of his dream and then had it hung in his room. He never again dreamt of demons and recovered. He then designated Chung Kuei as a posthumous Third Degree Graduate. This story, passed down through the ages, expresses the people's appreciation of the good and their dislike of evil.

The artist carved the work from a single piece of boxwood, vividly depicting Chung Kuei's fierce expression, his eyes flashing angrily and his beard bristling. He is dressed in flowing clothes, with boots and a long sword.

Hsiao Chao

Odsor, a Mongolian Nationality Writer

Odsor, the author of the story *Spring Rain* published in this issue, is an outstanding Mongolian writer. During the period when the "gang of four" suppressed all cultural or literary activity which did not conform to their absurd theories, Odsor, like many writers popular during the years before the advent of the Cultural Revolution, had his works refused for publication and his books banned from bookstores and libraries. It was only after the downfall of the "gang of four" in October 1976, that Odsor's writings were once more available to the public. *Spring Rain*, which reflects the new life of the Inner Mongolian people, is part of a collection of his short stories, *The Distant Gobi*, recently re-published by the Peking People's Publishing House.

"It never occurred to me to be a writer," said Odsor, "but I was so moved by the people's heroism during the war and then by socialist construction that I felt the urge to take up my pen and write."

It is interesting to know something of Odsor's life.

He was born in 1926 into a well-off herdsman's family on the grassland of Palintso Banner in Shaowuta League, Inner Mongolia. The

Odsor and his wife

life of the herdsmen was a very simple pastoral one. For example, in an area of a hundred square miles, not one man would be literate. The cultural activities of the people centred around sports such as wrestling or horse-racing, or story-telling and folk-singing. The latter two had a certain influence on Odsor's subsequent literary development.

In the 1940's, a school was established to which Odsor went and where he started to learn Mongolian. Before his middle-school studies were completed, his homeland was liberated by the army led by the Chinese Communist Party in August 1946.

Odsor like many other youths joined in the revolution. In the autumn of 1946, the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek launched an all-out civil war in China, and the Kuomintang troops invaded the Inner Mongolian liberated areas massacring many poor herdsmen and revolutionary fighters. Outraged, Odsor requested to fight at the battle front against the enemy, and so from 1946 until he left the army in 1958, he served in the cavalry. He fought in many battles winning

honours; but for the most part of his army years, he worked on propaganda and made his first attempts at writing plays, operas and songs. The downfall of the "gang of four" has spurred him into writing again like so many other former authors. Now, together with his wife, he is writing *Song of the Cavalry*, a novel about the lives of the cavalry in Inner Mongolia during the War of Liberation. The novel will be published later this year.

Shu Hua

Chan Tzu-chien's Painting "Spring Outing"

In this issue we present a reproduction of the classical Chinese landscape *Spring Outing* painted by Chan Tzu-chien more than 1,400 years ago to portray sight-seers, some on horseback, some in a boat, and others on foot, going out to enjoy the beautiful scenery in spring time. In the centre is a large lake. On its left bank are undulating hills with trees and flowers, and a broad road by the lake winds up to the mountains. In the right corner two men are riding, one behind the other, along a track which appears to be blocked by a rocky slope and some woods. However, if we look beyond the woods, the road comes into sight again. By it is a house with a woman standing in front of it. Obviously, she is not a sight-seer but a villager alarmed by the horsemen. The one in front has reined in his horse to look back at his companion who has lagged behind. This man, a crossbow under his right arm, is riding towards a red wooden bridge, followed closely by two young grooms. Behind the bridge is a waterfall. To its left stands a neatly tiled house, while to its right — in the distance — a monastery nestles among towering peaks above which

float white clouds. On the left side, undulating hills stretch off to the horizon.

In the foreground the ripples in the lakes are clearly depicted, while in the distance they become blurred and vanish. A sampan on the lake not only disturbs its calm surface but also links it with both banks in one organic whole. The sampan has an awning but no cabin. In it sit three women. The one in front is pointing to the distance while turning back to talk to the other two. A man at the stern is rowing them in a leisurely way towards the shore.

In the left corner of the painting is a village surrounded by wooded hills. Two sight-seers are strolling along the shore, enjoying the trees and flowers.

The green mountains, the blue water of the lake, the red peach-blossom and the drifting white clouds, together with the small groups of people and horses, make up a picture redolent of spring.

On the painting there is an inscription by the Sung emperor Chao Chi (1082-1135), a famous collector and connoisseur of paintings. He attributes this work to Chan Tzu-chien, who was active towards the end of the sixth century. A well-known painter, Chan Tzu-chien painted many murals and scrolls and excelled above all in his depiction of figures, paying great attention to detail and fidelity to life. His standing horses seem poised to gallop off and the recumbent ones ready to spring up. In addition, he was adept at painting buildings and landscapes. People said of him, "He mastered his craft so well, he presents a whole panorama in a few inches."

Prior to Chan Tzu-chien, there had been many well-known painters in China, the most famous of them being Ku Kai-chih who lived about two hundred years earlier than Chan Tzu-chien and was celebrated for his portraits. Though these earlier artists painted mountains and rivers, they did so simply as backgrounds for the figures, not solving the technical problem of how to link mountains and rivers far and near in one organic whole. Very often their figures were bigger than their mountains. During the two centuries before Chan Tzu-chien's time, artists explored different ways of painting landscapes. But it was he who made this an independent genre and this is his main contribution to the development of Chinese painting.

Spring Outing by *Chan Tzu-chien*

In *Spring Outing* Chan Tzu-chien abandoned the "close-up" method used by his predecessors in favour of "panning", so as to present a whole panorama. Though the mountains, lake, trees, figures and horses are all on a small scale, the relationship between the vast lake and the scenes on the shore is well handled, while the sampan on the lake as well as the people and the horses on the banks are also well-proportioned. The whole scene seems very natural and gives the impression of a panoramic view. This landscape shows that by the sixth century Chinese artists had basically solved the problem of how to interpret nature and handle perspective.

In *Spring Outing* Chan Tzu-chien used the method of first painting the outlines, then applying colour-washes. His preference for blue and green colours helped to give his work its distinctive style, and many later artists adopted this "blue-and-green" manner of his and further developed it. *Spring Outing* is one of the earliest examples of the genre known in Chinese painting as "blue and green" landscapes.

Spring Outing is the only painting by Chan Tzu-chien now extant and one of the most ancient paintings in China. It is preserved in the Palace Museum in Peking.

The Play "Loyal Hearts" Staged in Peking

The five-act drama, *Loyal Hearts*, written by an amateur playwright, Su Shu-yang, was performed by the People's Art Theatre of Peking. Well-known actors such as Cheng Jung, Yu Shih-chih and Hu Tsung-wen took part in the production, which was well received by the audiences.

The play has as its theme the work, life and struggle of Chinese medical workers, who, under the personal direction of Premier Chou En-lai, persisted in their research to combine western and traditional Chinese medicine to produce a new medicine for coronary disease. The characterization is strong and the action realistic.

Youth Theatrical Festival in Shanghai

To encourage young artists, a festival was organized by Shanghai Municipality, in which they were asked to give performances. The first part of the festival was devoted to vocal and instrumental music, dancing, acrobatics, puppet shows and *chuyi* (ballads and story-telling). Plays and operas were staged in the second part. All the young artists were chosen beforehand, three hundred of whom performed in the first part. Most of the items were contemporary ones, though the programme also contained some traditional and foreign pieces.

Many elderly and middle-aged actors and actresses helped in choosing the young artists and in advising them.

Exhibition of French Paintings Held in Peking

Sponsored by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, an exhibition, "Peasants and Landscapes of France, 1820-1905", was recently held in Peking.

French art has a long history and in the nineteenth century achieved outstanding heights. On display were more than 80 paintings by 60 well-known artists including Courbet's *The Countryside in the Snow*, Corot's *A Forest Path in Spring*, Millet's *The Feed*, Bonheur's *Ploughing at Nivernais*, Rousseau's *Descent of the Cattle*, Bastien-Lepage's *The Hay Field* and Lhermitte's *Reward for the Harvesters*. Open for one month, the exhibition was admired by Chinese artists and other visitors.

Lhermitte's *Reward for the Harvesters*

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