

# CHINESE LITERATURE



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## The Builders

The excerpt below is taken from the second part of the first volume of the novel *The Builders*. Excerpts from the first part of this novel were published in *Chinese Literature* Nos. 10, 11 and 12, 1960. *The Builders* was first printed in June 1960. This excerpt is based on the revised edition of August 1963.

The action takes place in 1953 in Frog Flat in the Shensi highlands of north-western China. Land reform has been completed and the people of this village are facing new problems and struggles. Former poor peasants and hired hands like Blind Wang and his awkward son Shuan-shuan, young Huan-hsi who has lost his father, and Kao Tseng-fu whose wife has just died, have all received a share of land but lack the means to develop production. Thus they face hardships in the spring before the new wheat ripens. Although rich peasant Yao Shih-chieh and rich middle peasant Kuo Shih-fu have lost their former power, they still have surplus grain and they gloat over the difficulties of the others. At this juncture the adopted son of the old tenant farmer Liang the Third, the young Communist Liang Sheng-pao, comes forward in response to the call of the Chinese Communist Party to organize the poor and a few middle peasants into a mutual-aid team in order to develop production through collective strength. Before the busy rice-planting season begins, he leads the young people of his mutual-aid team to the nearby Chungnan Mountain to cut bamboos for brooms, and they plan to use the proceeds as funds for their team. Yao Shih-chieh and Kuo Shih-fu try to undermine the position of the poor peasants in the village by sabotaging the mutual-aid team in every possible way. The excerpt chosen here deals with the struggle between these two sides.

The author, Liu Ching, is about fifty years old and lives in a village near Sian. The characters and incidents in this novel are based on the people and happenings he has seen in his daily life. For more information about him please see *Chinese Literature* No. 10, 1961 in which we published a profile of Liu Ching. In the next issue we shall publish one more chapter from the novel.

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Among the wheat was goose grass; among the rice were tare weeds. Although similar in appearance, they did not produce grain kernels, only grass seed. The peasants gave them equal quantities of fertilizer, soil and water until the time they were recognized. Then without the slightest complaint they calmly pulled them up. The following year, although the peasants knew very well there were goose grass among the wheat and tare weeds in the rice, they still allowed them the same conditions as the crops. The weeds were only a tiny fraction of the grain anyway.

Unfortunately, such things were not restricted to the sphere of nature. Tseng-fu had his brother Tseng-jung. Sheng-pao had his neighbour Blind Wang.

Twenty or thirty paces west of the compound of Liang the Third, and forty or fifty paces east of the compound of Jen the Fourth and his nephew Huan-hsi, stood an old thatched hut that had no wall around it. The east wall of the hut leaned outwards. Were it not for the two poles propping it up, the wall would long since have toppled in any storm. Year after year, the hut's owner put off replacing the wall just to prove that his judgment was correct—the wall was all right, good for another ten years at least. At the same time he was demonstrating how stupid and ridiculous were those peasants who claimed that the wall was dangerous. Blind Wang was nearly eighty. Was there anything he didn't understand? Did people have to tell him what to do? Nonsense.

Quarrelsome old Wang was also known as Surly Wang, or just plain Surly. Yet in spite of his cantankerousness, the villagers were quite respectful. After the poor old fellow lost his sight, who in Frog Flat would call him by his inelegant nickname to his face?

Blind Wang was seventy-eight. Eight years before, he stubbornly survived an attack of typhoid, but he lost his sight. Wang could no

longer do any kind of work. He could only, leaning on his stick, grope his way out of the thatched hut and sit in the sunlight. Or go behind the hut to the outhouse beside the pig pen.

He had never spared himself. When he was in his prime, he used to go hoarse every rice planting season shouting at his water buffalo. The first few days his voice would override those of all the other ploughers in the paddy fields of Frog Flat. But by the end of the season Surly Wang could no longer be heard. It wasn't that he had finished his ploughing. He just couldn't produce any sound. That was the kind of person he was. He worked as if his life depended on it, as if he wished he could crawl on the ground and plough open the field with his head.

Now, a poor blind old man, he could only squat before the door of his thatched hut, or lie curled up on the stack of brushwood in front of the house, and think back emotionally on his past experiences. His clothes were ragged, he was thin and bony, but the old man was still tough. Though seventy-eight, he wouldn't let his son Shuan-shuan run the family affairs. Whenever he heard footsteps approaching the hut, the old man squatting outside the doorway would shout sternly, like a sentry:

"Who's that? Whatever you want, tell it to me. They can't settle anything."

In 1900, Wang was a young hired hand in Wang Family Village on the banks of the Wei River. Caught stealing crops from his landlord employer, he was sent up to the county magistrate for punishment. With all the elegantly dressed important personages in the great hall looking on, the bailiffs pulled down his coarse peasant pants in broad daylight and, ceremoniously counting, proceeded to smack his ugly naked backside with a long board. He was supposed to be given a hundred and twenty strokes, but because he kept blubbing and howling "Great One have mercy," they stopped at eighty. Asked whether he would dare to break the royal laws again and steal from his master, Wang, his face covered with tears, sobbingly guaranteed he would never take so much as a single straw from any landlord as long as he lived. "Mercy" was granted. He hauled up his pants and the bailiffs carried him back to the jail.

When his wounds were healed, after twenty-four days of hard labour Wang was allowed to return to his village. For many days he was ashamed to show his face. He kept out of sight, like a mole.

His physical injuries quickly healed, but the spiritual damage seemed likely to last him the rest of his life. Although his elder brother tried to comfort him, quoting the homely aphorism, "A son is not angered by his father's beating, a citizen is not ashamed of being chastised by the magistrate," young Wang nevertheless shouldered his luggage roll and took leave of his brother and sister-in-law with tears in his eyes. As he set off on his wanderings he told them he would settle down in any place in the central Shensi plain which struck his fancy and become a farmer. He would start afresh and be a loyal subject of His Majesty the emperor.

In 1902, on the nineteenth of the first lunar month, passing through Frog Flat, Wang decided to put an end to his travels. He became the neighbour and good friend of Liang the Third's father. Today even Liang the Eldest was his junior in the village. Compared to him, bald-headed old Liang was one of the younger generation. Wang was the only real ancient in Frog Flat. He still wore his hair in a small queue.\*

Although the old man's spirit was crushed in the days of the emperors, it wasn't until he lost his eyesight that he had sufficient time to reflect on the gains and losses in his life. He was grateful to the emperor's representative—His Honour the county magistrate—for those eighty smacks of the board. Wang felt he had led a blameless existence, and had done his duty by all emperors, rulers and landlords. He never stinted of his strength, never delayed paying his rent or taxes, never stole a single grain from his landlords. Never. Surly Wang's actions could "stand scrutiny by gods or demons."

When his younger sister's orphaned sons—Jen the Third and Jen the Fourth—came to him as famine refugees in the year 1912, he rented some land in his own name from Miser Lu and let them cultivate it. After the autumn harvest he insisted that they give their very best grain as rent. Cursing his nephews, he absolutely refused to let them play any tricks on the landlord. Unless a poor peasant could gain his landlord's trust, said Wang, he could simply forget about getting along in this world. But uncle and nephews couldn't see eye to eye. Although Jen the Third reluctantly continued ploughing

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\*The queue which people were forced to wear in the old dynasty and which was cut off when China became a republic in 1911.

the rented land, impetuous Jen the Fourth got fed up; he gave back the land and went into the wilds of Mount Chungnan.

"If you don't want to farm, then don't," said Surly Wang. "I'm not going to lose my good marks in the next world for your sake. No respect for the royal laws. Young wretch."

This illiterate old relic of the last imperial regime liked to explain to peasants born in the early years of the republic the profound inner meaning of the phrase "Heaven and the officialdom will reward"—a slogan peasants often pasted above their gateways at New Year's time. The trouble with the crude fellows was that they just stick it up, they didn't probe carefully into its true spirit. To Surly Wang, who had received such a blow in his youth, the words were a holy scripture. He believed that heaven and the officialdom were the highest authorities. Everyone had to obey their mandates unquestioningly. Family possessions and children were all rewards from heaven and the officialdom. Peasants were only permitted to go quietly about their work. They had no right to demand anything. "You'll bring down disaster if you're not careful. Hah!"

During the land reform in the winter of 1950, Wang was confronted with his most difficult problem in the half a century that had elapsed since 1900. The philosophy he had been evolving all his life was put to a severe test that winter. Of course had he been able to see, it might not have been so unpleasant. Unfortunately he was blind and couldn't go anywhere. Could it be that this hard-working old man who had enjoyed the respect of a considerable number of people in Frog Flat was going to turn into an object of derision?

"Old Wang, would you still rather wait for rewards from heaven and the officialdom," someone asked him mockingly, "or will you divide up the landlords' land together with the rest of us poor peasants?"

This was in the early stage of arousing the people and organizing the ranks of the poor peasants and hired hands. Wang had firmly shaken his head with its small braid of hair.

"Not me. I don't want anybody else's land. If I carried that sin with me into the next world, I'd never be able to explain it away. I couldn't even hold on to the property my ancestors left me. What do I want with anybody else's? If I were fated to have land I'd have it already, children."

Since he was blind, he had an excuse not to attend any meetings or join in community activities. If anyone notified him of a meeting, he retorted sarcastically: "Send a sedan-chair for me, children." In Frog Flat it was commonly agreed that he was a "backwater"; no wind could stir him. He was very familiar with the old society. But the new society, although he was living in it, was merely something in his imagination, something he had only heard about.

If anyone called at the door of his tumble-down thatched cottage and tried to explain things to him, he became irritable and launched a barrage of counter-propaganda, presenting a large array of facts to prove that land reform was a subversion of the proper order: In Hsiapao, so-and-so had inherited his uncle's land—over twenty *mou* of dry level fields, but in less than ten years he was bankrupt. In Wang Family Bridge, so-and-so had come into possession of someone's property—a pauper grew rich overnight. But later, with a branch for a staff, he had to beg from door to door. In Big Crossroads, so-and-so . . . etc., etc. . . . Wang never spoke in empty generalities. Every statement he made he could bolster by innumerable examples from his experience. And he was extremely positive, and full of self-confidence. Wang believed that only property earned through bitter toil was dependable. This was the only kind of possession a man would cherish. You'd get no support from any other kind.

He never dreamed that by the time the land reform was concluded his mouth, framed by a snowy white beard, would be stopped so completely. Except for the shares left for their own use, all the land of Tenant-skinner Yang and Lu the Miser was parcelled out. Whoever had been classified as a poor peasant or hired hand was given a piece of land. How could Wang be the only one to refuse?

He knew that from then on, there were no longer any landlords. Yang Family Creek became Unity Creek. Lu Family Creek became Liberation Creek. Peasants were now their own masters. They divided up the land and ran their own affairs. If Wang didn't accept a share, where could his son Shuan-shuan find a piece of land to rent? *Aiya!* The need to earn a living and other material considerations were the most merciless, the strongest, the most convincing forces in the world. The creed to which he had carefully adhered for the past fifty years he now had to abandon. With a feeling of guilt, he accepted a share of the land. But he still hadn't abandoned

his fundamental tenet—that heaven and the officialdom provided life's rewards.

"Isn't this a case of reward from heaven and the officialdom?" he demanded. "Heaven above! If it weren't heaven's will, would the paddy fields of the Yang family and Lu family, which they accumulated piece by piece, be gone in a flash just like a bolt from the blue? If the officialdom hadn't sent emissaries here to divide up the land, would the peasants have dared to touch it? You needn't talk so big. It's still heaven and the officialdom that have given us this reward."

Yet in spite of forceful arguments, he was weakening. From that day on, he was much more cautious when expressing his views on community affairs. He didn't want to make himself look silly again, as he had during the land reform. Fortunately, he now had eight *mou* of paddy field. Under his supervision, Shuan-shuan could earn them a living from it. Wouldn't they get along just as well without him spouting a lot of ideas that went against the times?

Blind Wang's deepest regret was that the wife he had "bought" at a bargain after coming to Frog Flat wasn't too bright. Shuan-shuan, the son she bore, hadn't a tenth of his own intelligence. The young fellow could carry a two-hundred-catty load easily; he didn't even breathe hard. But any problem, even if it were no bigger than a sesame seed, stumped him completely. Shuan-shuan had one good attribute—he was honest and listened to orders. He never argued with the old man. The family ran very smoothly, very harmoniously. There were no impediments in the way of the blind old man's exercise of his patriarchal authority. Wang thought Shuan-shuan ten times better than Sheng-pao.

"For better or worse, he's my own flesh and blood."

The morning of the day after Shuan-shuan went into Mount Chungnan with Sheng-pao, Su-fang, his twenty-three-year-old wife, approached the old man. A pall of dissatisfaction clouded her face. She was stitching a cloth shoe sole.

"Pa," she said, "there's something I want to discuss with you. . . ."

"What is it?" demanded the family dictator. He was seated on a pile of brushwood in the yard. Raising his head, he gazed at her with sightless eyes.

"My uncle Yao, who has that big compound in the west end of Kuan Creek Hamlet, wants someone to tend his wife for the month

after she has her baby. Why not let me do it? Shuan-shuan has gone into the mountains, only you and ma are at home. Ma can cook for both of you. By the time Shuan-shuan comes home, my aunt will be getting out of bed. I can be back before the busy farming season starts. I'll be eating there while I'm looking after her. We'll be saving grain, and I'll earn twelve yuan for the month besides."

Finishing her proposal, Su-fang smiled. Blind Wang couldn't see her, but he could feel the smile.

The young woman had lively eyes, and she was a good talker—the exact opposite of slow, plodding Shuan-shuan. If they hadn't got her as a bride before liberation, the self-assured surly old man thought, and if Shuan-shuan, under his direction and with the mother-in-law's help, hadn't given her a couple of good beatings—planned in advance—with a stout stick, Su-fang would never pass her days in the thatched hut in such a well-behaved manner. There was a "truism" which Surly Wang knew well: No matter how refractory the mule in the shafts of your cart might be, if you belaboured it enough with your whip, it would become docile—to say nothing of a human, who was a thousand times quicker to understand.

It seemed to him that this treatment was entirely reasonable. Those eighty smacks of the board in the magistrate's hall in the old dynasty had not been suffered in vain! When the old man decided that Su-fang's spirit had been sufficiently broken, he began acting quite considerately to her. He did his best to satisfy her where food and clothing were concerned, so that she should want to be Shuan-shuan's wife and bear him children. Wang knew that any woman, no matter how restless, after ten years of married life and two or three kids, would settle down and remain with the man, even though he displeased her.

But despite the fact that Su-fang had been tamed, after liberation the old man would not let her attend any mass meetings, or women's meetings, or join in any community activity. He wouldn't allow it, and that was that. Who could do anything to him—a blind old man well over seventy? If some representative or committee leader really wanted to insist on Su-fang attending a meeting, he, or she, would have to take a club and beat old Wang to death first—then Su-fang could go. Wang took full advantage of the privileges of his old age. He wasn't going to remain on this earth another seventy years, was he?

Now, the blind old man seriously considered the question his daughter-in-law had raised.

"Yao is a rich peasant. How does he dare to hire labour?" Wang asked suspiciously, his thin hand stroking his white beard.

"The land reform is over, pa," Su-fang assured him solemnly. "There won't be any more struggles against the rich."

"Your family and the family of Yao's mother-in-law are only distant relatives." The old man wasn't too keen on the idea.

"My father and Uncle Yao's wife had the same grandfather. Their fathers were brothers. It's just that Aunt Yao's father made his family prosper, while my grandfather died young and my father burned up our family property with his opium smoking."

"I know all that. What I'm saying is that it is true you are relatives. But when two families have nothing to do with each other, they become indifferent relatives."

"Indifferent relatives are still relatives. Before liberation we were poor, so they didn't want to bother with us. After liberation when they were classified as rich peasants, they were ashamed to face us. Today things have settled down again. Uncle Yao went to see my ma and said they'd like me to come. If anyone asks, we can say it's just one relative helping another; he's not hiring a serving woman, there isn't any exploitation. You get what I mean, pa?"

"I get you." Surly Wang nodded his head with its small braid. His unseeing eyes registered consent as he said: "When you put it that way, I get you perfectly."

Although he was stubborn and irritable, Wang was never inflexible where earning a living or practical interests were concerned. He had let Shuan-shuan join Sheng-pao's mutual-aid team, and although reluctantly, he had finally agreed to Shuan-shuan going with the team to Bitter Herb Clearing—deciding in both cases from the same angle.

It was seven years since Su-fang had come to this thatched hut as a bride, and she knew now how the old man's mind worked. You see how easily she convinced him. As easily as Sheng-pao convinced him of the advantages of Shuan-shuan going into the mountains to cut bamboo.

Seated on the brushwood, Wang, taking hold of the staff by his side, thought the matter over.

To save a month's grain for one person and earn twelve yuan besides—that was a good deal. If it weren't for the fact that she was related to them and that the Yaos were afraid of being labelled exploiters, how could Su-fang have found such a good job? She'd get much more than she was earning at home, stitching cloth shoe soles. Old Wang's eyes were blind, but his mind was sharp. He knew how to calculate. Nobody need think he was stupid.

"We can do it," he said to himself.

Then he remembered—before liberation Yao had been carrying on with Blue Moth. That's the only thing that was wrong with him. Just that one little thing. If Su-fang should go to his home—

But old Wang quickly reassured himself: "Yao is a rich man. He wants face. Blue Moth slept with lots of men and Yao had her too. But I've never heard it said that Yao fooled around with any other woman. It's Blue Moth's own fault for being a slut. Besides, he and Su-fang are relatives. Yao isn't an animal. Su-fang has been very obedient these last few years. She wouldn't dare get gay."

Clenching his teeth, he growled menacingly at the young woman standing before him:

"You behave yourself when you go to his house. Be respectable, you bitch. We don't want people laughing at us and saying that we don't train our women properly."

"Yes, pa." Su-fang docilely accepted his order.

And so the matter was decided. The blind old man was quite satisfied. Contact between poor relatives and rich relatives could only bring profit to the poor. Nothing bad could come of it. Pitiful old Blind Wang. The land reform had given him land and shook his inner being, but it hadn't changed his rusty old brain. To him Yao was still a wealthy man of a stature he could never attain; Sheng-pao was a mere beggar boy he had seen grow up, a person of low origin. Shuan-shuan had gone into the mountains with him solely for the practical purpose of earning money. As to whether or not socialism could be achieved, Wang just laughed and said:

"Children like to talk. I have my own ideas—a full stomach, respectability."

Shih-fu returned to Frog Flat. The grey-haired well-to-do middle peasant in his fifties, carrying a letter of introduction from the county

government, had gone to the foot of Taipo Mountain along the upper reaches of the Wei and bought 200 catties of rice seed. How proud he was! Hey! Double what Sheng-pao's brought back. Let's see what Sheng-pao has to say now.

On learning that Sheng-pao, Yu-wan and the others had gone into the mountains, Shih-fu was a bit disappointed. Nevertheless, he had his brother Shih-hua, who drove the rubber-tired cart, borrow the big crier's gong from civil affairs committeeman Blabbermouth Sun and walk along the main pathways of Frog Flat, shouting:

"Whoever wants a share of Hundred-day Ripener, come and get it. It doesn't matter whether you're in a mutual-aid team or not."

His long-stemmed pipe in hand, Shih-fu stood on the bank of Kuan Creek, watching his brother Shih-hua as he beat the gong and shouted the announcement through the paddy fields. How happy Shih-fu felt. Already wearing his white spring tunic, the well-to-do middle peasant thought to himself smugly:

"Who says I can't outstrip you, Sheng-pao, you young punk. You bought 100 catties of rice seed and divided it only among the mutual-aid team leaders, with nothing for the independents. You're good, I'm no good. I'm a go-it-aloner, a stubborn hold-out. Well, I don't make those distinctions. I share with everybody. What are you going to do about it? Any tiller in Frog Flat—hired hand, poor peasant, or middle peasant—I treat them all the same."

Shih-fu savoured the flavour of revenge. He hoped that this act of his would arouse friendliness, respect and gratitude in the non-needy peasants, that it would give him prestige among them. He wanted to make himself the centre of those peasants "to whom nothing else mattered except working from sunrise to sunset." To put it bluntly, he wanted to become their leader. *Aiya!* He had never been a glory seeker, a man active for the community weal. But circumstances were forcing him to behave in this manner. He was afraid there would be a large expansion of the mutual aid and co-operation which Sheng-pao was promoting. Things were different now than before liberation, Shih-fu knew it well. Yao was tagged with a rich-peasant label—he had to lie low. "Isolate the rich peasants. Limit their activities." Heaven above. The words were written in big letters on the earthen walls of every village. How could Yao dare to say anything, do anything?

What Yao had told him was absolutely right. He, Shih-fu, had nothing to fear. The slogan "Unite with the middle peasants" protected him. He had to stand at the head of all the new and old middle peasants of Frog Flat. Of course he couldn't spout a lot of counter-propaganda as freely as Communists and Youth Leaguers explained the advantages of mutual aid and co-operation in agriculture. But if by his conduct he could serve as a model for all the new and old middle peasants and those eager to climb into their ranks, that would be enough.

Shih-fu was confident he could play this role successfully. Although Yao couldn't show himself, he could help Shih-fu plan his moves. The rich peasant was a bit vicious, but Shih-fu was a steady fellow who knew what he was doing. He would simply refuse to accept Yao's more venomous proposals, or engage in any foolish hostile activities. Shih-fu would take the same line advocated by the Communist Party and the people's government—increase production but don't scorn the independent farmer. He decided to stress that point in any public meeting or private conversation. "Excellent," Shih-fu intended to intone. "Mutual aid is excellent—but so is independent farming. Whatever increases our grain output is good."

At other times, he might not put it so directly. He'd be more subtle, perhaps say something like: "Any ox that can pull the plough is a good ox, whether it's red or whether it's black." Peasants would know exactly what he meant. What could the Communists and Youth Leaguers do about it? Give him a dirty look? From now on he would openly admit it—he was old-fashioned, conservative. Shih-fu would explain that just like Chen-shan, chairman of the village deputies he had tagged along with the majority during the land reform, but now he had fallen behind; he couldn't keep up with members of the Communist Party and the Youth League and the young people.

Carrying his long-stemmed pipe, Shih-fu went to Yao's handsome compound in the west end of Kuan Creek Hamlet to discuss the distribution of the rice seed. He drank the rich peasant's tea, smoked his tobacco, and settled with Yao his expenditure on train fare and freight charges for the seed. He called on Yao in person, but to Chen-shan he merely dispatched his little niece, with instructions to tell the chairman of the village deputies: "The rice seed has been bought. If you'd like a share of it, come and get it yourself."

Yao was delighted to see what a great change had taken place in Shih-fu's bearing, speech and behaviour. His own walk, the way he worked and ate took on a new vigour. He even slept more soundly. Yao became aware of the joy of spring, the beauty of the scenery along the banks of the Tang Stream. For once again he was becoming a man of influence in the five villages of Hsiapao Township. In this season of Clear and Bright, the idea of strengthening himself began sprouting in the depths of his mind, naturally and easily, like the green grass on the banks of the river, on the edges of the fields and on the sides of the roads. This was a law of nature. Yao called it the will of heaven, something beyond his control.

"What does that Tseng-fu amount to, anyway?" he thought to himself. "I only have to use my head the merest trifle and I'll give him more than he can bear!" Yao was keeping his eye on Sheng-pao, now. He wasn't going to let that young punk breeze into power in Frog Flat without a breath of opposition. When the expedition went into the mountains Yao recognized his new enemy. Sheng-pao was an even more serious menace to him today than Chairman Chen-shan.

"Uncle Shih-fu," he said to the well-to-do middle peasant.

"What is it?" Shih-fu queried fondly.

"That son of Liang the Third has taken a group into the mountains. They've set up a camp and are cutting bamboo and making brooms. And he's boasting—naming names—that his team is going to raise more rice per *mou* than you are. Does that make you feel good, uncle?"

"It makes me feel bad," Shih-fu admitted frankly. Obviously, Sheng-pao's vigour was rather frightening to this well-to-do middle peasant.

Yao's eyes, with the scar on the right lid, observed his worried demeanour. The rich peasant laughed.

"Don't be a softy," he said forcefully. "We may not be as good as Communists and Youth Leaguers in preparing a struggle meeting, but we're much better at raising crops. Are big farmers like us going to lose out to that gang of paupers, uncle?"

"You're right," said Shih-fu. "That's just what I was thinking."

Yao ground his teeth. "Spread the fields thick. Sell your stored grain and with the money buy fertilizer. Spread it on the rice fields. Isn't this the kind that doesn't rot no matter how much fertilizer you give it?"

"That's what they say."

"Then what are you afraid of? The Communist Party is urging increased production. If a private farmer raises more grain they give him a bonus too. There was a whole list of high producers in the newspaper the other day. I'm a rich peasant, so I can't qualify. But heaven's on your side, you're qualified. Raise hell, I'll cheer you on."

"I've been thinking of stirring things up—"

"Right. If you can't raise better crops than these Frog Flat paupers, uncle, you won't have the face to cross the stream. You won't dare show yourself in Big Crossroads."

"That's a fact. Where are you going now?"

"Downstream. My missus is going to start lying-in in a couple of days. I hear Shuan-shuan's wife is willing to give her aunt a hand during the first month after birth."

Yao crossed the small bridge at Kuan Creek Hamlet and followed a path through the paddy fields towards the Tang Stream. In high spirits, head up, chest out, Yao felt himself a power again, a man who had strong support. He was very satisfied with the conversation he had just concluded. Formerly, he had been a trifle indignant. It seemed to him that designating him a rich peasant and Shih-fu only a well-to-do middle peasant was unfair, that Chen-shan had been favouring Shih-fu because they were relatives. Now he knew it was nothing of the sort. What's more, he was glad it had worked out that way. Having Shih-fu out in front, while he advised and encouraged from behind, was infinitely better than having to act openly. He knew that the most formidable person was the fellow no one could do anything about though everyone knew he was making trouble. Yao's dream was to be just that kind of an uncontrollable power.

"Brother," a seductive feminine voice hailed him.

Passing through a field of barley, Yao turned in alarm. Blue Moth, wife of ex-corporal Pai, stood leaning against the doorway of her thatched hut.

"Come on over, brother," she called beguilingly. "Sister has something to tell you."

Never hesitating, Yao continued on his way. He didn't want to get mixed up with her again. Although this spring his rich-peasant label didn't weigh so heavily on him as it had in the past, after all, his enemies were still in power in the village. He had to behave

discreetly, and not give them any excuse to "correct" him. Repeatedly he had warned himself—no more hanky-panky with Blue Moth. Why bring disaster on yourself for a moment of pleasure? Thus thinking, he strode along, while retorting vaguely:

"I'm busy. Got no time. Later on, maybe."

But "sister" wasn't letting this opportunity go, finding it hadn't been easy. She had been standing in that doorway for several days, waiting for her lover of three years before to pass along the road. Now he had come at last. She was still eating the rice he had given her. Recalling what it was like to be wrapped in Yao's strong arms, she felt unbearably soft all over. Of all the men she had been intimate with in Frog Flat, Hsiapao Village and Huangpao Town, only Yao had a really irresistible masculine attraction for her. She was willing to let him do anything he wanted with her. As long as she could have the love of this powerful fellow, she would be completely satisfied. To the rough peasant bachelors who sought sexual warmth from her body, she played the benevolent donor, at the same time abusing them, toying with them, making them so miserable they couldn't sleep nights. If they didn't like it they could quit coming around. Her affairs with them were all very short. Only two men in the world had ever occupied her heart for long. One was Pai, former corporal in the Kuomintang army. The other was Yao, one time local big shot. Both men were tough. She believed that only the tough had any guts, dared to take risks. These were the only kind worth loving, worth waiting for in doorways.

Now, seeing that Yao had no intention of coming to her thatched hut, Blue Moth grew frantic. With the cloth shoe sole she had been stitching still in her hand, she flew after him along the path that ran at an angle from her fence to the road.

Her face was flushed, her teeth gleamed white, her handsome eyes were moist and glistening. Every part of her capable of externally expressing affection was in action, working to arouse Yao's interest.

Yao became even more alarmed. He hastened his stride upon the ox-cart road fringed by spring grass, afraid Blue Moth would ensnare him again. He'd be in real danger if that happened; he wouldn't be able to save himself. Only a worthless moron lusted after women with no regard for the circumstances. Yao was trickier than a demon. He wasn't going to fall into the net of illicit intercourse while a people's government ruled.

Hastening his steps, his heart beating wildly, he mentally beseeched Blue Moth who was hastening towards him along the path:

"Leave me alone, dear little sister. Even if you never give me your favours again, I won't ask you to return those two bushels of rice. Rest assured."

He hurried on, not even turning his head, fearing that one look at the alluring Blue Moth would weaken his resolve. A few words of endearment, and he'd be undone. It would take no more than a fraction of a second for misfortune to start. Only after Blue Moth saw that he was determined not to revive their affair and dejectedly abandoned her pursuit, did Yao slow his pace.

When he reached the yard in front of the door of Blind Wang's thatched hut, only a brief conversation was needed to settle the matter of Shuan-shuan's wife Su-fang looking after her aunt during the one month post-delivery period.

When Huan-hsi heard that his uncle Shuan-shuan's wife Su-fang was going into the rich peasant's big compound to serve the expectant mother, he couldn't restrain himself. It was as if he had been stung by a scorpion. Blind Wang's foolish decision nauseated him. The seventeen-year-old boy was so angry he couldn't even bear to keep his hat on. All the blood rushed to his head. The arteries in his temples pulsed. Rage nearly set his jet-black hair ablaze. Flinging down his carrying pole, booting an empty basket out of the way, he started furiously for the blind old man's thatched hut. He wanted to stop Surly Wang's shameless plan. It was a betrayal, pure and simple, of the stand of the poor peasants and hired hands.

His mother, who was like a sister to Sheng-pao's ma, urged him:

"Don't be that way. You're still young, child. You don't know what your grand-uncle is like. Let him do whatever he pleases. There are partners in money and partners in trade, but there aren't any partners in face or emotions. A person is responsible only for his own behaviour."

"What are you saying?" Huan-hsi glared at his mother, breathing hotly. "What are you saying? He and my grandma were born of the same mother. As a relative I ought to be ashamed for him. But that isn't what matters. He's losing face for all the poor peasants and hired hands along the lower reaches. He's making our mutual-

aid team lose face. When Sheng-pao hears about this up in the mountains, he'll burst with rage."

Although Huan-hsi was young in years and thin in stature, there was nothing weak about his determination. He spoke like a hammer driving nails—concise, sharp, with no beating about the bush, no mumbling or vagueness. After graduating from the Hsiapao primary school, he had been unable to go on to middle school. Since his father was dead, he had valiantly taken over the bulk of the family's work. Huan-hsi was beginning to understand the seriousness of life. In his speech, in his actions, he imitated the tone and the manner of adults, even copying the way they walked. A child's voice and the words of a grown-up, an adolescent's body and a man's stride—did not make Huan-hsi seem comic, but lovable. After he began taking part in agricultural production, he saw little of friends his own age, spending most of his time with the adults in the mutual-aid team. He listened to their words, watched their expressions, thinking, learning to be a man. Huan-hsi already understood a great deal, including a bit about things he had not yet experienced personally. This was entirely a result of the observations of his flashing eyes and the cogitations of his lively mind.

The boy knew that the marriage between Shuan-shuan and Su-fang was one of life's misfortunes. While only an innocent girl of sixteen, Su-fang had been seduced by a rascal in Huangpao Town. Some months after she had been bestially corrupted, when her abdomen was already visibly bulging, she went as a bride, with tears in her eyes, to a thatched hut in Frog Flat. In those days if a girl got into trouble, her parents could give her to any man who would take her. Huan-hsi and all the neighbours knew that the marriage took place only because the dull clumsy Shuan-shuan was in no position to be fussy about his bride's reputation. Surly Wang, who had just gone blind, shrewdly seized this opportunity to arrange a marriage for his son. He said Su-fang was still young, she could be beaten back into proper behaviour. So they beat her savagely, beat her until she had a miscarriage. And her parents couldn't open their mouths.

This happened before liberation. Although the neighbours all knew, nobody said anything. But just because people couldn't bring themselves to talk about the crimes of the old society, it didn't

mean there weren't things done in the old society that would make your blood curdle.

Seventeen-year-old Huan-hsi had never felt any sexual craving, but he was learning to recognize it in others. The second year after liberation, the youngster noticed that Su-fang, who was so strictly controlled in old Blind Wang's home, seemed attracted to Sheng-pao. He saw her looks of tender admiration, her odd little smiles, the way she sought opportunities to talk with Sheng-pao, her efforts to win his approval. Realizing that she wasn't too satisfied with Shuan-shuan, Huan-hsi thought: It's a lucky thing Sheng-pao's high moral calibre makes him keep cool and avoid her. Otherwise, who knows what a disreputable place this would become?

Huan-hsi knew also that not only Sheng-pao but all the decent neighbours living along the lower reaches were guaranteeing, were seeing to it, that no improper young fellow stepped in between Shuan-shuan and Su-fang. Everyone was hoping for one thing: that Su-fang would have a baby soon.

The more he thought, the more worried Huan-hsi became. Neither Sheng-pao nor his Fourth Uncle was at home, yet he couldn't just remain silent. He hurried over to the wide yard in front of Blind Wang's thatched hut. As usual, the old man was seated on a pile of brushwood, sunning himself. Su-fang was out visiting a next-door neighbour. Wang's dull old wife was inside the hut, busy with something or other.

The boy had never learned the adult way of skirting around a subject. Nor was he able to squat down beside the old peasant and, in a pleasant manner, offer him friendly advice. Unfortunately he was still just a blunt youngster.

"Are you sending Su-fang to work for that rich peasant, grand-uncle?" he demanded abruptly.

"Why, yes," Blind Wang replied confidently. He raised his head with its small braid. Although he could see nothing, he faced in the direction of Huan-hsi's voice.

"Forget it," the boy snapped contemptuously. He stared angrily at the white-bearded wrinkled face of the self-righteous old man.

"Why? She's not doing anything at home."

"Twelve yuan isn't going to last you a lifetime."

"*Aiya.*" Blind Wang was very surprised. "How can you talk like that, young fellow? Have you and your mother got so much money? Can you load a cart or fill a boat with it?"

"We're poor, but we've got backbone."

"Oh? So going out to work for somebody means you've got no backbone? Then your Fourth Uncle has no backbone either."

"But Su-fang is a woman."

"She's helping her aunt in the post-birth month. It's not as if she were going to some outsider's place."

"Yao is a rich peasant."

"Won't a rich peasant's money buy grain? Or salt? Is a rich peasant's food poison? Is that it?"

Blind Wang was angry. Twisting his jaw, he said harshly: "Where do you come off to try and teach me, boy? I'm nearly eighty. Is there anything I don't understand? The reign of the Ching dynasty emperors, the years of the republic—haven't I been through them all? You're too young to be giving me instructions, young fellow. When your father was alive he wouldn't have had any land to plant if I hadn't rented it for him."

Speechless with rage, Huan-hsi turned to leave.

"Stop," Blind Wang barked.

"What do you want?"

"Why don't you go into the mountains? Yu-yi has gone; why haven't you? Why are you idling around at home?"

"Our mutual-aid team has left me behind to raise the rice sprouts."

"Simpleton. They're all in the mountains earning money, but they've left you behind."

"I'll be getting work-points for this job."

"It won't bring you as much as you could make in the mountains. I'm not senile yet. I know how to add."

Huan-hsi turned and walked away. The difference between seventeen and seventy-eight was too great. Remould. Improve. Anything could be remoulded—anything except this stubborn old man. All he could talk about was the reign of the emperor Kuang-hsu, the days of the emperor Hsuan-tung. Let some more competent person talk with him. Huan-hsi didn't have the right magic charm.

Perhaps he was so enraged he didn't listen, or maybe he was going a bit deaf. In any event Surly Wang continued to lecture the place Huan-hsi had been standing even after the boy had left:

"What does a young squirt like you understand? I'm your grand-uncle, but do you ever ask me anything? No, instead you go to some outsider and treat him like a relative. Why? Let me hear the reason, eh. Tell me—Oh. He's gone."

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Wearing a bright blue tunic and trousers and carrying a cloth-wrapped bundle, Shuan-shuan's wife Su-fang left her dilapidated thatched cottage, its east wall propped up by two poles and entered a handsome compound whose buildings had brick walls and roofs of tile. She was delighted with the neatness, cleanliness and comfort of the place as her feet trod the smooth stone-flagged courtyards and floors. Her eyes beheld spotless walls and coloured New Year pictures, bright windows and polished tables. The rooms had none of the smoky grimy smell of her thatched cottage home. Su-fang was cleanly, prettily dressed—not because she was trying to win anyone's admiration, but because she wanted to fit in with this new environment. Her blind old father-in-law had told her several times—she must present an agreeable appearance to the eyes of the people of the handsome compound.

"Over there, it's altogether different from our humble shack. You don't want to let them think we're dirty," the old man had warned her sternly.

During her first few days with her rich aunt and uncle, Su-fang felt a bit strained, because she didn't know them well. She was afraid of Yao, and didn't dare look him in the eye. He owned over forty *mu* of paddy land and fields, a fine compound, a mule and a horse. This, in Su-fang's mind, placed him inaccessibly high. Fate had decreed him a class above her from the day he was born. She wished she knew whether he was satisfied with her work, but at most she only ventured to glance at him from the side or from behind. She didn't have the courage to meet the direct gaze of those eyes with the scar on the right lid.

Whenever she encountered him in the house or in the courtyard, she lowered her head and dropped her eyes, and servilely stepped aside to let him pass. He had only to cough gravely somewhere in the compound, and her heart would tremble as though struck by

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a thunderbolt. Su-fang had heard that Yao had been intimate with Blue Moth, wife of former corporal Pai. But his demeanour was so serious, she simply couldn't believe it. Could a diligent, frugal man like Yao be guilty of such debauchery?

At night, Su-fang slept with her aunt on the brick bed in the west room of the main building. The superstitious old lady (Yao's mother) slept with the children in the east room. Yao, his wife having just given birth, had no choice but to sleep alone. The superstitious old lady wanted her son to use the kitchen *kang* in the west wing, but Yao felt the weather was already too warm to sleep in the kitchen. So he set up a bed in the east wing and slept there.

One night when they were all in bed, Su-fang blew out the lamp and whispered:

"Aunt."

"Yes?" came the reply from the bed-clothes.

"I'm afraid of uncle. His face is so stern, so fierce, he really scares me. Is it because he thinks my work is no good?"

Yao's wife laughed. "He's always like that. A man of forty—do you expect him to be constantly grinning and smiling at a child like you? Besides, he has to run the whole farm and household all by himself. He has a lot on his mind."

That was what Yao's wife said aloud, but in her heart she thought contemptuously: "No wonder you've got a bad reputation. When you come to work in a man's house, just do your work and be done with it. What is it to you how he looks?"

But Su-fang only heard the words. She couldn't get behind their sound and expression to know what was in the speaker's mind. "It's true," she thought. "Everyone says 'big household, lots of work.' It certainly is a headache. The poor have the poor's troubles, and the rich have the problems of the rich. Now I understand."

Her respect for the serious way her uncle managed his affairs increased. Just see what a day's work he put in. Up before dawn, he tended to the stock, cleaned the manure from the animals' pen and added soil. If there was even so much as a stick of brushwood in the courtyard, he picked it up and brought it to the kitchen. After listening to her aunt's explanation, Su-fang felt a bit easier towards her uncle. She was no longer so tense when she saw him.

One day Yao and Tseng-jung were sowing rice. At noon, they came back to the handsome compound for a meal. It was then Su-

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fang heard her uncle say something which changed her opinion of him completely.

As they were eating, Yao asked Tseng-jung with a smile:

"For the past two years you poor peasants and hired hands have drawn a clear line between us. You wouldn't have anything to do with me. Today you and I soaked the paddy field together and sowed the rice. Did you find anything very hateful about me?"

Tseng-jung had no class standpoint. He gave a silly laugh.

"A lot of fuss over nothing. Seeing wolves where there are none."

"Well put." Yao was very pleased. "As long as you don't look down on my status, we can be as close as mire and water. We'll have our own mutual-aid team, like Sheng-pao's. We can take the road to socialism too. I don't know about other rich peasants, but I'm not against the people's government. My heavens, what a wonderful world this is now. No bandits, no robbers, no harsh taxes. They don't grab army conscripts, they don't make levies, they don't swear at people or beat them. In our township, we haven't seen even the shadow of an army. When the government cadres come, all they talk about is increasing production. Where else in the world do you find such good officials? I often tell my wife: Chairman Mao is better to us than a father. The new government's labelled me a rich peasant, but it's saved the lives of my whole family. Where would I be, if not for liberation? I always used to be scared that I'd die at the hands of the Huangpao Town Kuomintang 'garrison soldiers. In an out-of-the-way little place like this, we had no protection. They were soldiers during the day; at night they were bandits. If they surrounded my compound and demanded silver and money and I didn't have any, wouldn't they torture me to death? That's why I say Chairman Mao is my father and mother who gave me new life."

Su-fang, who was taking her aunt's place at cooking and serving, respected her uncle greatly for this speech. She rarely attended the mass meetings or the community activities which had taken place since liberation. Her blind father-in-law limited her strictly. Poor Su-fang's concepts and ideas were still those of the old society. To this day she hadn't been entirely liberated, or hadn't been liberated at all. Su-fang was not allowed to come into contact with any man. If her blind old father-in-law ever heard of such a thing, he would surely say that she was having an illicit affair. Su-fang was not allowed

to come into contact with any woman either. Her father-in-law would be sure to say that the woman was inciting her to divorce Shuan-shuan. Su-fang could only visit the compound of bald old Liang the Eldest, because her blind father-in-law considered the rich to be of higher moral calibre than the poor. How could Su-fang possibly gain any new ideas or understanding?

In her mind a man who had as much land as Yao, whose front building was packed with grain in the upper storey and housed a mare and a mule colt in the lower, who spoke with such deep affection of the new government, had to be a very good person. He certainly wasn't the sort you need to draw any clear line against. Of course. He harvested several thousand catties of grain each year, he paid no levies and made no contributions. His only expenditure was a very small annual tax based upon an appraised reasonable yield for his land. Why shouldn't he support the people's government?

She also remembered what she had heard said in Huangpao Town when she went to visit her mother—that certain Communists, Youth Leaguers and government cadres did things mechanically, that they were too extreme, too strict. Su-fang was convinced that her uncle was a good man. She needn't be the least worried about working in his home. Let Sheng-pao and Huan-hsi say what they pleased—she liked it much better here than at home where she had to look at the sour face of her blind father-in-law all day.

Gradually, she became accustomed to her various jobs in the handsome compound. She heated broth for Yao's wife and washed the diapers of the newly arrived baby in the creek. She took the wife's place at cooking and at grinding the grain. Yao fed the pigs himself, except when he was busy in the fields. Then his mother fed them. His eldest son and daughter were both away attending middle school in the county seat. His small son and little girl were looked after by their superstitious grandmother. Su-fang's work was very light. To the healthy twenty-three-year-old girl it seemed simply nothing. And a month passed so quickly. If her aunt were willing, Su-fang would have gladly remained in her home all her life. She thought that this rich-peasant family was a highly respectable one—some at school, some at work, some intoning scriptures. The centre room of their main building was fragrant with incense. It made you feel reverent, as if you were living in a temple.

One muggy day, Su-fang went to grind flour in the mill shed, which was in a large courtyard on the other side of a door through the eastern wall of the main courtyard. Filled with trees of various sorts, this courtyard also contained the pig pen, a shed for Yao's big cart, and the mill shed. It had a large gate opening on a lane that led to the village; this was usually locked. In the mill shed were two millstones—one for coarse grinding and one for fine. When Yao's father was alive, he hired a skilled man every winter to grind white wheat extra fine for the family table. Today, Yao preferred not to call any attention to his prosperity. The stone for the fine grinding became a resting place for the implements used when milling and sifting flour of ordinary texture.

Su-fang's good-hearted uncle led into the shed the red mare that had recently foaled a little mule, then helped Su-fang carry in the wheat and dump a part of it on the upper millstone. By the time she brought in the tray and scoop and sifter she needed, the mare was already hitched to the mill and in motion. A new white towel cloth covering her bobbed hair, Su-fang waited for enough wheat to be ground for the first sifter-full. She didn't feel as if she were working for a rich-peasant family. It was more like living with fond relatives.

"You don't have to stay, uncle," Su-fang said respectfully. "I can manage by myself."

But Yao didn't leave immediately. A prudent manager, he gave his wife's niece detailed instructions: She should be careful when she added wheat that the kernels didn't spill into the millstone channel—every grain was earned by the sweat and blood of labouring people. When she swept she should do it lightly, otherwise the dust would settle on the flour. Finally, pointing at some reeds lying at the foot of the wall, he said:

"When you're milling the second time, put two stalks in the hole of the upper millstone so that the wheat will come down smoothly."

Right. Right. Right. Su-fang accepted his orders one after another—respectfully, servilely, timidly. She wished she could see the expression on his face, but she didn't dare to lift her head, especially in this silent remote courtyard where she and her uncle were all alone. In the presence of any man, Su-fang always felt inferior.

She didn't know why she blushed, and grew tense. Egged on by her blind father-in-law, her husband Shuan-shuan had already beaten the spirit out of her. She had no courage, no nerve to do anything.

After coming to Frog Flat from her mother's home in Huangpao Town, she gradually gave up all plans, all hope, and resigned herself to being a kind of implement—an implement for working around the house and bearing children.

Poor mentally-unawakened Su-fang. Poor unemancipated Su-fang. Her most fundamental trait now was self-abasement. Where would she get the courage to look at her uncle while he was giving her his instructions? She heard only the dignity in his voice, the voice of a senior who commanded respect. Her response to this rich and competent elder relative could only be one of docile obedience.

At last Yao left. Su-fang felt as if her eyes, hands and feet had been freed.

But then he returned. From the door leading to the main courtyard, he shouted:

"Su-fang, bar this side door. I don't want the colt running in here and bothering the mare."

"Yes," the girl replied, complying. Her uncle certainly thought of everything.

Now, the remote courtyard was completely cut off from the outside world. Su-fang was alone in her little kingdom. What a serious-minded manager her uncle was. Su-fang was convinced that the tale about him and Blue Moth was only some wicked person's invention.

The mare pulled the millstone. Crushed wheat kernels fell on the stone base. Su-fang walked behind the mare, sweeping the kernels with her hand into the sifter.

She sat down on a low stool and began shaking the sifter over a tray. No one cursed her. Working this way, she was very happy.

How quiet the courtyard was. Elm petals and willow fluff brought by the breeze settled on the spring grass. Charming little birds sang in the trees. A turtle-dove cock flew down, warbled a few times, and was soon followed by a turtle-dove hen. An instant later, they took off together. The mare, thinking of her colt, had whinnied when being hitched to the mill. Now she was quiet, and plodded peacefully around the millstone. Everything was entirely satisfactory. Even this remote courtyard seemed to inspire reverence.

As Su-fang sifted the flour she reflected upon life as she saw it. By what authority, she wondered, was it decided what kind of parents, in-laws and husband a girl should have. She couldn't figure it out. Equality. Equality. Talking about it was all very well. But when

would she ever get genuine equality? After liberation, many women who were unhappy in the marriages that had been made for them demanded divorces. But could Su-fang dare do such a thing? She was prepared to accept whatever fate decreed for the rest of her days—the work she did, the food she ate, the clothes she wore. If only she weren't beaten, she'd be satisfied. After her blind old father-in-law died, life would be a bit better. *Ai!* When would he finally die?

The more Su-fang thought, the sadder she felt. In spite of herself, her nose tickled and tears sprang from her eyes. She wiped them. Alone in the remote courtyard, it was really a fine opportunity for a good cry. She had no chance to weep when others were around. Someone might ask her whether it was because she didn't like being married to Shuan-shuan, and then what could she say?

Something thudded against the earthen wall behind the mill shed. Su-fang stopped sifting. She ceased weeping and meditating on life. As the millstone ground on, she listened attentively, her heart beating fast. Had a section of the wall separating the two courtyards collapsed?

She stared rather apprehensively at the earthen walls of the shed. Were they strong enough? No matter how unpleasant her existence might be, Su-fang still wanted to live. Later, after her blind old father-in-law died and she gave birth to a child, things would be better. It would be just her luck to be killed by a falling wall after doing a month's work here. Although her marriage wasn't a happy one, she hoped some day to know the joys of motherhood.

She heard a rustling sound behind her. Su-fang quickly turned her head. Heavens! Why was her uncle coming over the back wall?

How could such a thing be happening? Was she dreaming? Heavens above!

How terrifying uncle looked. His bristle-covered mouth was open, revealing gleaming white teeth. His eyes with the scar on the right lid were half shut in an evil leer. He was simply another man. What had happened to the prudent manager, the meticulous uncle? It was a sheer nightmare.

Su-fang shrank into a ball. She was chilled, trembling, completely unprepared. Her face paled; the warm blood seemed to drain from her body.

She wanted to scream, to shout, but she was afraid. If anyone should learn about this, how could poor Su-fang face the conse-

quences? Heavens! She hadn't the strength to fight her tormenting fate. Her reputation was already bad.

*Ai! Ai!* Now it was too late to scream even if she wanted to. Her uncle had wrapped his brawny arms around her.

The hot blood returned to her body. She burned all over. Her face was on fire. It was so red, fresh blood seemed to be seeping out of her pores. She felt as if she were bound with a rope.

Her heart was chaotic. It was as if someone had stuffed her chest with pig bristles and they were pricking her painfully. "What is he trying to do?" she thought with repugnance. "It's too preposterous."

But Yao recklessly put his bristly mouth against her flaming cheek. He had sized her up when they had been preparing for the grinding and had decided that she wouldn't resist. Tightly, ardently, with one arm he pinned her arms to her sides while his other large horny hand horrifyingly crept under her blue tunic and then moved down.

Su-fang seemed stricken with a heavy illness. She was consumed with fever, listlessly weak. Her right hand, a silvered bronze bracelet on its wrist and a yellow bronze thimble-ring on one finger, timidly stopped her uncle's descending big hand.

"Uncle," she pleaded, "we can't—"

"Sure we can," he sniggered.

"If my aunt finds out—"

Yao firmly shook his head, indicating that Su-fang's aunt would never know. By then, her insistent, daring uncle had already picked her up in his arms.

The mare continued plodding around the mill, very diligent, very serious. Outside, the little birds in the trees continued to sing. Meanwhile, twenty-three-year-old Su-fang, unfortunate girl, was being ravished for the second time since her birth into this noble world. That wretched waiter in Huangpao Town had been a lowly scoundrel; he simply wasn't human. But her uncle, both in manner and behaviour, was quite a different sort. What could she do?

Su-fang, like other girls, had been a darling little baby when she first came into the world. She could open her tiny toothless mouth and smile at the grown-ups when only a few months old. At the age of five or six, mischievous, adorable, she played happily all day with the other children of Huangpao Town. She became expert at making mud horses, preparing mud food, and steaming muffins of

stone. She was unusually intelligent and clever for a child. Had she been born of different parents, she very likely would have developed into quite a remarkable girl.

But unfortunately Su-fang's father was a well-known loafer in the old society of Huangpao Town. Without the slightest regret, in the fumes of his opium pipe he dissipated away the prosperous business that had been left him. At the same time he ruined what had once been a strong constitution, together with his will-power and self-respect. He finally got to the stage that for a puff of opium, decency and propriety could go to blazes. Though he knew that opium gave his thin body comfort for only a little while, if he could get his hands on the stuff, he smoked it. Nothing else mattered, good or bad. He could close his eyes to it all and sleep. Man wasn't put into this world to suffer.

From as early as Su-fang could remember, her father kept a vegetable stall on the streets of Huangpao. He bought the vegetables from peasants wholesale. At night he frequently didn't return to their backstreet home. When she was old enough to understand, Su-fang observed that her mother was tougher, more competent, than her father. Ma often flew into a rage, throwing things, swearing at him. But pa only stood there in silence. Later Su-fang discovered that ma wasn't fond of pa—she liked another man. Whenever this "uncle" came, he talked a lot and laughingly chucked ma under the chin. Then he would lie down on the *kang* and rest, as if he were in his own home.

Su-fang was mystified by his relationship with her mother. The bright little girl noted that whenever he came, ma sent her out to pa's vegetable stall—it became a regular rule. Humans have curiosity from the time they can speak. One day Su-fang learned what her mother and uncle did together after she left.

A mother is a child's first teacher. She is the one the child first respects. Her character and temperament seep into the child's consciousness by a thousand different ways. Other than death, no force can stop this influence. The effectiveness of moral teachings, law and education is limited by the child's age. From the time she was very small, Su-fang admired her mother's cleverness and ability. She saw that everyone in Huangpao scorned her father, so she also refused to respect him. Did pa tell her not to run around on the streets? She did it just to spite him. He couldn't control her.

It wasn't very difficult for the vulgar, low, drab environment of this small Chinese town in the old society to corrupt her tender young soul.

When she was sixteen a waiter in a restaurant seduced her and she became pregnant. Her eyes red with weeping, she begged her mother not to marry her off to Shuan-shuan of Frog Flat. She wanted someone younger, livelier. Her mother said:

"Listen to ma now, Su-fang, and you won't go wrong. You can't be too fussy with your belly poking out. It seems to me you'll be better off with a husband who's a bit slow-witted. Your mother-in-law's a fool, and the old man is blind in both eyes. With a family like that, you'll be able to do as you please."

Su-fang understood. Her mother was trying to teach her by her own example. My reputation is spoiled anyhow, she thought. Her mother was really too good to her. Not only didn't ma punish her for behaving improperly—she even found her a way out and defended her. When pa grumbled, ma said:

"Hold your tongue. A girl is only young once. What girl doesn't want a taste of pleasure? You're a fine one to talk. You've smoked away your family inheritance."

Pa didn't dare say a word. Su-fang was grateful to her hard, shrewd mother.

Not long after Su-fang moved into the tumble-down thatched cottage of old Blind Wang's family on the lower reaches of the Tang Stream in Frog Flat, she discovered that young Sheng-pao, who lived nearby, was quite attractive. Only a *mon* of poplar trees separated his thatched dwelling from her own. Sheng-pao's sickly child bride was pale and thin, and seemed to be in constant pain. For all these reasons, Su-fang wove herself a beautiful dream. It was simply a "Heaven-made match." Su-fang congratulated herself. She and darling Sheng-pao would be life-long lovers—and Shuan-shuan and Sheng-pao's wife would provide them with ideal covers. Su-fang was contemptuous of Corporal Pai's wife, Blue Moth, who gave herself to any fellow who came along. Su-fang was determined to be like her mother. She would be true to one man till the day she died. Since, like her mother, she had an unsatisfactory husband, her neighbours would not consider her behaviour a reflection on her character. They would treat it rather as a normal thing in that diseased society, and forgive her.

Lying on the *kang* beside the clumsy Shuan-shuan, she dreamed of raptures with her adored Sheng-pao. Every day she tried to meet him, to talk with him, to convey to him with her eyes the love that was in her heart. Su-fang would take her sewing out to the clearing in front of the thatched cottage so that she could watch him working in the fields. When he returned, shouldering his farm tools, her eyes welcomed him. She was always seeking an excuse to strike up a conversation. "Sheng-pao . . . *ai*," she would croon. In her efforts to stir him, Su-fang deluged him with alluring glances.

But Sheng-pao's heart was like a stone. Not only was he entirely uninterested—he actually despised her. For doing her sewing standing out in the courtyard instead of seated on the *kang*, for running over to old Liang the Third's compound at every opportunity, Su-fang was beaten many times. But her ardour for Sheng-pao in no way diminished. It continued right up until 1950, the year after liberation. One dark winter night, when her blind old father-in-law was lying ill in bed, she waited by the roadside for Sheng-pao to pass by on his way home.

"Sheng-pao . . . *ai*."

"Ho," he replied, approaching along the withered grass road. Sheng-pao was then captain of the village militia.

"When are you going to a meeting in town again?"

"Day after tomorrow. What's on your mind?"

"I've knitted these woollen socks for you. Put them on. Your feet are liable to get frost-bitten when you go to town. It's terribly painful if the skin splits." Her tender hands pushed the socks into Sheng-pao's big hard paws.

He blazed with rage. Rudely, he advised her:

"You just stick to Shuan-shuan and behave yourself. Don't try any of that stuff you did before you were married. This isn't Huangpao Town. We don't go for that sort of thing around here. That's all I've got to say." He strode off angrily.

Su-fang feared her rough young neighbour from then on. For a long time, she didn't dare to face him, and stayed out of his way. One day, in his capacity as a village cadre, he openly criticized her. Stiffly, he recommended that she concentrate on doing her work honestly and being a decent, proper wife to Shuan-shuan. Su-fang wept. She said she had not yet been emancipated. Her father-in-law

would not permit her to take part in mass meetings and community activities. She pleaded with Sheng-pao, as a village cadre, to intervene.

Hardening his heart, Sheng-pao turned his back on his own ideals of freedom and democracy. He retorted flatly that he would not help her obtain her emancipation at this time. When she had improved her morals, they could talk about it again.

After this, Su-fang hated Sheng-pao. She hated him with an intensity that was stronger than her love had been before. Sheng-pao was a good fellow in all other respects, but to poor Su-fang he was much too strict. He wasn't sympathetic enough. After this, Su-fang abandoned all hope. Fate had evidently decided that she should never be anything but the child-bearing machine of a Shuan-shuan who could not satisfy her emotional demands. She dreamed no longer of finding another man.

But how inadequate it was just being Shuan-shuan's child-bearing machine. Life with him was so dull. Their sexual relations were joyless, mechanical, solely for the purpose of procreation. Su-fang was very frustrated. She longed for the pleasure of tight embraces, affectionate caresses. She felt she was entitled to them, as a woman. After Sheng-pao lectured her, Su-fang—always quick to bow to fate—grew resigned. She never thought there would come a day when her uncle would press her down in the side yard of the handsome compound and her heart would flame again. With only herself to rely on, she was unable to control her passion.

Physically a man and spiritually a male animal, Yao was enormously satisfying to Su-fang. When had the honest hard-working Shuan-shuan ever enfolded her so amorously? When had he ever kissed her so hotly? So there actually was a man who didn't scorn her, who was good to her. A man who didn't beat her, or curse her, or give her dirty looks. Instead he liked her, hugged her, kissed her. How could she do other than let her uncle have his way?

His steadiness, his planning ability, amazed her. Thinking back on the episode now, Su-fang remembered with a frightened heart, as if recalling a dangerous adventure, how he had appraised her mood when they were preparing the milling, how he had shouted to her to bar the side door. Only later did she realize that he had done it deliberately to let his wife and superstitious old mother hear.

Even so, Su-fang was a bit tense that day, after she finished grinding the grain. She kept stealing glances at her aunt and the old lady.

Only when she was convinced that they hadn't noticed anything and were not in the least suspicious, was she able finally to relax and act as if nothing had happened.

As to Yao, hey!—he hadn't changed a bit. He was as stern, as righteous as ever. His cough was still dignified, he continued to issue orders in an awe-inspiring manner. Su-fang's loftier instincts had been buried by her mother when she was only a child. But her organic structure—which was feminine in form—felt the deepest respect for her uncle's skill at dissembling.

Five days later, Yao's mother-in-law—Su-fang's grand-aunt—arrived to see her daughter. Sleeping together on the same *kang*, mother and daughter naturally had a number of private matters to discuss. They were not sure of Su-fang's ability to retain confidences, and instructed her to share the *kang* of Yao's mother for a few nights. But the superstitious old lady, who already had the company of two kids, thought this would be too crowded, and told Su-fang to sleep on the *kang* in the west-wing kitchen. Since Yao maintained an air of complete respectability, his wife suspected nothing and agreed to this arrangement.

When Yao stole over from the east wing that night in his bare feet, for Su-fang it was no longer a question of being forced, coerced or having no alternative. If she could have one encounter with a man, why not a hundred? It didn't put you any more in the wrong. That was how Su-fang looked at it. Not only was her poor body attracted by this wickedness, the act even took on a character of revenge. As she lay with Yao, she said vengefully in her heart to her blind old father-in-law: "I'll teach you to tell your son to beat me."

As Yao got ready to leave the small *kang* in the west wing, he put his mouth close to her ear and whispered:

"Su-fang."

"Yes?" the girl replied softly.

"Do you want to be here just for this month, or would you like to come often?"

"What's the difference?"

"If it's just for this month, then forget it."

"And if I want to come often?"

"Why was your father-in-law always telling Shuan-shuan to beat you a few years ago?"

"Don't ask that."

"I know the reason."

"Uncle, don't talk of the past."

"I must, Su-fang."

"Why?"

"Wasn't it because he was afraid that you and Sheng-pao —"

"Yes."

"That will make it easy."

Then, in a low voice, Yao poured into the ear of this girl who had lost her soul the scheme he had thought out while working in the fields the last few days. His tone was affectionate, sweet, beguiling. When he finished, the forty-year-old man put his bristly mouth against the soft cheek of the twenty-three-year-old girl and kissed her. He waited for her reply.

Su-fang's heart sank. She didn't know why she felt so frightened. *Aiya!* How lecherous he was. He wanted to possess a woman as completely as he possessed his property. But Su-fang didn't dare become involved in anything that went beyond an ordinary illicit affair. She was afraid. She could sense the danger.

"Uncle, why do you want to hurt Sheng-pao?" she asked timidly. "He and I never—"

"So that we can get together all the time," Yao cried recklessly. He smirked. "Otherwise, what excuse will you be able to give your father-in-law?" Yao kissed her again.

Su-fang felt as if she were wrapped in the coils of a venomous snake.

She remained silent for a long time, unwilling to aid Yao in his nefarious plan to incite Shuan-shuan and Blind Wang into withdrawing from Sheng-pao's mutual-aid team. That would be too cruel a blow at Sheng-pao. Nor did she want Shuan-shuan to end up like 'Tseng-jung—tilling the land together with Yao. That would make them too conspicuous.

In a depressed voice, she pleaded: "Uncle, that's too—"

"Too what?"

"Too harsh. Sheng-pao is a good person. But you—" Su-fang hadn't the courage to tell him to his face that he was evil. She only smiled miserably, worried over the risk of having anything more to do with this demon.

As the rich peasant was leaving, he tried to give Su-fang five yuan. He made it clear that this was in addition to her twelve yuan wages,

which he would pay her openly. Su-fang refused the money. If she took it she'd feel low, dirty. She simply wouldn't be human. What she wanted was another man in her life, not to sell herself. What good would the money do her? Anything she bought with it would only arouse suspicion and soil her reputation. Her mother had never accepted any money from her lover. On the contrary, she used to make him cloth shoes, and knit him socks. Whenever she had anything good to eat, she always kept it for him. His real wife—a simple honest woman—and Su-fang's ma were on quite good terms.

In Frog Flat, Blind Wang knew less about what was going on than anyone. Although he wouldn't admit it, he was the dullest of men. His ideas, his emotions, his temperament, his attitude, were fundamentally at variance with the post-liberation new society. There were many old men like him in Hsiapao Township. They ate their food and took no part in anything, just living out their old age. Occasionally, they might make a few mild comments on national policy or affairs. Since their remarks did not evoke any strong reactions, no one thought much about them. But Blind Wang exercised complete authority over his family's work and daily life. The contradictions between him and the new society, therefore, were strikingly apparent.

He didn't learn that Sheng-lu had sown his rice seed separately from the rest of the mutual-aid team until a week later. Immediately, his heart sank. So far as he was concerned, this was an extremely serious matter. What could be worse than for something affecting labour or food to go wrong?

He couldn't lie still on the pile of brushwood his son Shuan-shuan had cut for fuel. He grasped the staff at his side and struggled to his feet. Feeling out the familiar path with his staff, he went personally to Sheng-lu's thatched cottage compound.

In the abject voice people use for wheedling favours, he addressed Sheng-lu's father, Liang the Eldest:

"Your family is doing very nicely. Won't you give a hand to your blind old neighbour?"

"Ah?" bald-headed Liang the Eldest exclaimed pompously. "Nothing to eat again?"

"It's not that. I hear your family has sown its rice separately from the rest of the mutual-aid team."

Liang's triangular little eyes stared. "What's that got to do with you?"

"Plenty, Eldest, plenty. Are you planning to quit the team?"

"Not us," Liang retorted angrily. "And even if we did, it has nothing to do with your family. What are you yelling about?"

"My dear Eldest. If you want to quit, our two families ought to quit at the same time. My Shuan-shuan and your Sheng-lu can work the fields together. We have no draught animal, and you're short of manpower. But together our two families can manage fine—"

Bald Liang the Eldest burst into rage.

"Listen to the man babble. Humph. Trying to mislead my Sheng-lu, are you? Even if we leave the team, he won't work with your Shuan-shuan. We're not going to get ourselves accused of breaking up a mutual-aid team. That's a crime. Go on home. In this society it's better for everyone to attend to his own business. We won't get you into any trouble, and don't you go involving us."

Very dejected, Blind Wang groped with his staff along the path back to his ramshackle thatched cottage. He sank down on the pile of brushwood at the front door with a heavy sigh. What to do? If Sheng-lu pulled out, who would give Shuan-shuan work?

Blind Wang was very unhappy. For three full days he didn't leave his tumble-down cottage. He lay curled up on his *kang* feeling miserable. He had long since decided that the Communist Party would never accomplish much. They used all such crude simple people. Who ever heard of officials who didn't beat or swear at people solving any problems?

Huan-hsi was terribly busy. The whole being of the young primary-school graduate was immersed in the sowing of the mutual-aid team's rice. After sunning the "Hundred-day Ripener" seed of every family in the team for four or five days according to custom, he brought it all to Sheng-pao's courtyard. With the enthusiastic help of Sheng-pao's mother and his own, and under the friendly eye of old Liang the Third, Huan-hsi and Comrade Han, the agronomist, mixed a hundred catties of water with twenty catties of soil and dumped in the seed. Those that floated to the surface were eliminated. The remainder they sieved out and washed in Liberation Creek which flowed by Sheng-lu's compound. Then, chatting and laughing, they carried the seed back to Sheng-pao's yard and soaked it

for half an hour in a hundred catties of water to which two catties of formalin was added. Next, the seed was piled on a straw mat and covered with rice stalks and gunny sacks. Comrade Han said this would kill any bacteria in it.

These simple measures added wings to seventeen-year-old Huan-hsi's dreams of the future. When all the land was tilled collectively with scientific methods there would never be any more grain shortages.

Unfortunately, Huan-hsi's happiness lasted only a few days. When his mother told him she had heard from Blind Wang's wife that the old man was brooding over the possibility of Sheng-lu leaving the team, Huan-hsi's brain went practically numb. To Blind Wang he was just a kid. How could he crack the old man's thick skull sufficiently to let in a bit of light from the new society? A man's mind wasn't the sort of thing you could dismantle and take down to the Tang Stream for a wash.

He decided to ask Comrade Han to lecture the old man, and see what kind of result that would produce.

After telling the young agronomist all he knew about Wang, he brought him to the old man's ramshackle thatched cottage.

"Comrade Han the agronomist has come to see you, grand-uncle."

"Ah, ah." The old man sat up on the *kang* in the low-ceilinged room and stared with his sightless eyes. "Have a seat, have a seat."

In spite of the dirtiness of the *kang*, the tall young agronomist sat down on the edge of it.

"Aren't you well, old neighbour?" Han asked in a friendly voice.

"It's nothing."

"Are you sure? I hear you haven't been out of doors for several days."

"Feeling poorly."

"What's wrong? Tell us about it and you'll feel better."

"Worried."

"Worried that if Sheng-lu leaves the team it will hurt your family's output and livelihood?"

"Yes," the blind man admitted. He gloomily rubbed the *kang* mat with the palms of his hands.

"Is that anything to worry about? Forget it. Your mutual-aid team has a bright future. Comrade Sheng-pao has taken the team members into the mountains to cut bamboo for brooms. We here at home are sowing rice. They're earning money; we're doing close

planting. We have to put in as much effort on one *mou* this year as we did in the past on two. We won't have to work for well-to-do middle peasants any more. You're worried that your son won't have any extra jobs? That your grain harvest won't give you enough to eat?"

"Every *mou* of land is going to yield two *mou* of grain," Huan-hsi, who was standing beside Han, chimed in.

"If you include the wheat crop we'll plant on this land next summer, an annual return more than double previous years' will be quite common," said the agronomist. "Quitting the team leads nowhere. Whoever leaves will want to return. The collective strength of the mutual-aid teams is going to beat the well-to-do middle peasants."

"Heh." Blind Wang cut him short with a snort of derisive laughter.

"What's the matter?" said Han. "Don't you believe me?"

"Talk doesn't make your legs stiff or put a crick in your back. It's not like work. Talk is easy."

"How can you say that?"

"Why not?" Blind Wang was very agitated, "I've tilled the land all my life. Maybe you can fool other people, but don't try that stuff on me—you're just wasting your time. I know the name and disposition of every kind of wild grass that grows by the stream, to say nothing of rice plants. Don't try to kid me. I know where the sun rises, and where it sets."

To such a stubborn old codger, what could Comrade Han say? All he could do was smile and depart with Huan-hsi.

Alone once more, Blind Wang again lay down on his small *kang* and went on feeling sorry for himself. If Sheng-lu did indeed leave the team, he didn't know whose fields Shuan-shuan could till. From the tone of bald-headed old Liang the Eldest, it sounded as though they were definitely quitting. Wang hated his blindness. If he could see, he'd go into Hsiapao Village and find Shuan-shuan a good employer. Everyone knew Shuan-shuan was a hard worker.

That afternoon Su-fang returned. Blind Wang sat up angrily on the small *kang* in the low damp room.

"What are you doing here, Su-fang?" he barked.

"I heard you weren't feeling well," she replied respectfully, "so I've come back to see how you are."

"There's nothing wrong with me. When you work in a man's house, you're supposed to do a good job. You eat his food and take his money; don't let him be displeased with you. Who told you to come back? Hussy, do you want us to lose face?"

He spoke so harshly, the young daughter-in-law couldn't raise her head. The hateful old man made Su-fang feel even closer to the uncle who held her in his arms and kissed her. Out of sympathy for her father-in-law, she had returned to see him, as was only proper. Who knew he would turn on her like that? She was grateful to her uncle for the warmth he gave her, for putting a little joy in her life. A girl with no class consciousness, who still didn't realize the dignity of labour, from what other angle could she judge people?

Standing before him with enmity in her heart, she turned to go. The blind old man shouted sternly:

"Wait. Has Yao sown his rice seed yet?"

"Yes."

"Did someone do it for him, or did he do it himself?"

"He and Tseng-jung together."

"In mutual aid?"

"No."

"Tseng-jung worked for wages?"

"No."

"How then, you bitch? Spit it out."

Su-fang had to tell the truth:

"The two families have teamed up."

"What?" the old man cried excitedly. He suddenly had hope. "Tseng-jung can team up with a rich peasant—why can't my son do the same? Su-fang, tell your aunt to sound Yao out: If Sheng-lu quits the mutual-aid team, Shuan-shuan can team up with him too. All we want is to be able to borrow Yao's horse to work this little bit of land of ours."

The angry expression on Su-fang's face changed to one of alarm. She didn't want her husband and her uncle co-operating with each other. She had never expected that her blind father-in-law would propose it. Flurried, she asked:

"You mean Sheng-lu is leaving the team?"

"It's ninety per cent sure. You find out about Yao. Save me the trouble of travelling two *li*."

Distressed, Su-fang said nothing.

"Bitch, do something human for once. If you don't ask, I'll go myself."

Su-fang had no choice but to agree.

She felt terrible. Would the old man's fanatic stubbornness push her down a road of no return? On her way back to the handsome compound she worried that her relationship with her uncle, now that it had gone beyond the bounds of an illicit affair, would lead to an irremediable disaster. It wasn't the moral or ethical aspect of the matter that troubled her. She had stopped being a decent girl at sixteen—she didn't care about such things. Nor did she feel that she had in any way wronged her blind father-in-law or her dull husband. The old man often reprimanded her harshly and Shuan-shuan had beaten her so severely that she couldn't get out of bed for days. All she wanted was a peaceful quiet life, to bear children, to be a mother, right up until the time she became an old woman. She had nothing against the new society. She began to regret that she had ever gone to work in the handsome compound. Her uncle was too awful, too horrible!

## 22

White cloth puttees from the knees down, woolly bindings and hemp sandals on his feet, a big blue turban upon his head—hey, the very picture of a competent, agile, bold young fellow. Dressing for work in the mountains, Sheng-pao put on the same kind of clothes he wore when hiding to avoid being grabbed and forced to serve in the Kuomintang army before liberation. He looked like a typical mountaineer.

Lowering his head, Sheng-pao emerged through the doorway of the thatch-roofed inn. He shouted across the meadow of withered grass into the ravine:

"Frog Flat neighbours. Assemble."

"Frog Flat neighbours. Assemble," the echo floated back from the groves of birch high against the blue sky on the slopes above.

To men from the plains, the echo was quite amusing. The band of poor peasants and former hired hands had arrived at Bitter Herb Clearing the previous night and put up in the South Millbase Ravine inns. Now, having finished breakfast, they were chatting in the

meadow and smoking their pipes. They laughed, then gazed so appreciatively at the outfit of their bold young leader that he became embarrassed.

"I haven't been to the mountains in the three years since liberation," he said. "It seems very strange. Another world."

The others agreed. "That's a fact," they smiled. "It seems strange to us too. But we'll get used to it in a couple of days."

Everyone made some laughing comment: As soon as you entered Tang Stream Gap, you felt tiny compared to the lofty sides of the sheer gorge. The sky grew narrow and so did the earth. . . . But sound became much louder. It was like being in a huge cellar.

As they chatted, more Frog Flat peasants, also dressed for the mountains, came out of two other thatch-roofed inns. Others returned from a nearby grove of wild pear trees. Now, having heard Sheng-pao's call to assemble, all went back to their various inns and brought out their belongings, long since tied together in readiness. Each person carried bedding, clothing, a sickle, grain, cooking utensils, and an extra pair of sandals—as if he were moving house. Serious, they stood waiting for orders, spruce and neat, every one.

The morning sun, rising over the tree tops on Stout Fellow Ridge east of Bitter Herb Clearing, cast warm red beams into South Millbase Ravine, burnishing the sixteen men of the small expedition. When they had surrounded Sheng-pao in the moonlight the night the meeting for low-interest grain loans\* in Fifth Village, Hsiapao Township failed, and begged him to lead them into the mountains, they had been only a few individual peasants. Now, gathered here, they were an eye-catching entity. Though still few in number, they were strong in spirit. Yesterday morning, entering through Tang Stream Gap, they had plunged into the high-walled gorge and followed a twisting path upstream, threading their way through boulders and brush. They crossed the stream a hundred and twenty-four times, over logs, stepping stones, wooden bridges and bridges made

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\*A form of mutual aid in the countryside after land reform when the peasants with extra grain were asked to lend their grain at low interest to those who were short to prevent exploitation by usury. The grain was loaned in spring and returned in autumn. The meeting mentioned here was one at which the local rich peasants and well-to-do middle peasants such as Yao Shih-chieh refused to lend their extra grain.

of chains. After passing Tiger's Lair and what was known as Forty *Li* Dragon's Cave, they climbed Aristocrat Ridge. In the bone-chilling mountain wind, they gazed back in farewell at their beloved Hsiapao Village. That same night they reached their objective on the other side of the ridge—Bitter Herb Clearing.

Located between the fairly moderate slopes of Aristocrat Ridge and Big Ridge (the main peak of the Chinling Mountains), Bitter Herb Clearing had a diameter of about thirty *li*. It was surrounded by desolate bluffs and ravines of yellow soil. The poor peasants and hired hands knew this place well. They looked at the abandoned rollers and millstones, at the smoke-blackened walls—proofs of previous human habitation. One said that about seventy-five years ago the former residents, unable to stand any longer the frequent bandit raids, had moved west to White Grass River Valley. Another said they had left much earlier than that. This place was fourteen hundred metres higher than Huangpao Town. All you could raise was potatoes, which couldn't be kept long enough to see you through the winter. That was why the residents had been forced to give the place up, although they had sweated blood to clear it.

Who cared which version was correct? They had come to cut bamboo not to study archaeology. They had only to remember that this was now the realm of tigers, leopards, bears and wild boars.

Every year during the third and seventh lunar months, when there was not much doing on the farms and poor peasants came up from the plains, the thatch-roofed inns were swept and cleaned to receive visitors. They provided only shelter for the night, a cooking pot and firewood. Price—twenty cents. Before liberation, on rainy or snowy nights these inns were host to gambling and drunken brawls. But after the people's government was established, the peasants' political consciousness were heightened in the various campaigns so that now no one drowned his sorrow in drink, or needed liquor to work off his depression. You could spend the night in peace and quiet.

One night was all Sheng-pao and his party intended to stay in the South Millbase Ravine inns. They wanted to get to where the bamboo was thickest and build their own thatched hut. They knew that in North Grindstone Gap beside a small stream there was an old hut foundation with ready-made low stone walls. What's more there was also a large grassy field where they could smoke their bam-

boo and tie it into brooms. They had already inquired. The place hadn't changed. Now they were assembling to set out for North Grindstone Gap.

Yu-wan had to have his little joke wherever he went. Luggage on his back, he brandished his rifle and shouted:

"Line up, everybody. Atten—tion!"

"Atten—tion!" the birch groves in the ravine threw back the echo.

The men roared with laughter. No one paid any attention to his command.

"You eat four big bowls at a meal to my three. You've got more strength than you know what to do with. Why not use it on serious business?" joked Jen the Fourth. "That's the truth. Except for you and Sheng-pao, we're all over thirty. Not a sturdy young fellow among us. That's the truth. You may be the militia captain, but you're here without your men. We won't listen to orders. What are you going to do about it?"

Again, they all laughed. Yu-wan had achieved his purpose. He observed their high spirits with satisfaction.

By now all the guests residing in the three inn buildings had come out to see this new phenomenon. Men going into the mountains in an organized group. That never happened before liberation. A number of persons hurried over and stared at the group with admiring eyes.

"Comrade Lu, their Communist Party branch secretary in Hsiapao Township does a fine job."

"This isn't his work."

"Whose is it, then—yours? Aren't these people from Fifth Village, Hsiapao Township?"

"Yes, but this still isn't Secretary Lu's work. I'm telling you. It's Secretary Wang of the Communist Party committee of Huangpao District who has to be thanked for this."

"How do you know?"

"Of course I know. Secretary Wang stayed at Frog Flat for half of the first lunar month, and this is the result. I'm telling you. These fellows are from Liang Sheng-lu's mutual-aid team. The team leader couldn't take them into the mountains so he appointed his cousin to do it."

"Oh—" his listeners nodded credulously. "What a good cousin Sheng-lu has."

Sheng-pao, who was about to announce his plan, waited a moment. He wanted to hear what the men were saying. Listening to this colloquy, the bamboo gatherers from Frog Flat laughed. Sheng-pao was very pleased. This was the work of the district committee Communist Party secretary. That was a hundred per cent true. Unfortunately, the speaker was not entirely accurate. What he should have said was: Secretary Wang couldn't take them into the mountains so he appointed candidate member of the Communist Party Liang Sheng-pao to do it. Yu-wan wanted to correct this incomplete report, but Sheng-pao prevented him.

"Neighbours," the young leader began, "Yu-wan, Ta-hai and I have talked it over, and this is what we've roughed out. How's this: Yu-yi, Uncle Jen the Fourth and I will go first to North Grindstone Gap and get our cauldron going. Yu-wan will take Kuo Suo, Sheng-pao, Iron Lock Wang and Shuan-shuan to a place five *li* from the gap to cut saplings for rafters. The innkeeper says there are good poplars there. The remaining seven—I don't have to name you—will go with Brother Red Face Ta-hai and cut thatch for the roof. Does that sound all right?"

"Fine," the men chorused in one voice.

"Fine." The echo from the birch-covered slopes boomed magnificently.

"Then let's go." Yu-wan handed his rifle to Sheng-pao. Swinging his arm, he cried: "Rafter cutters, come with me."

"Thatch cutters, come with me." The voice of Red Face Ta-hai was solemn and he spoke like a big brother.

Shouldering their gear, the men set out in groups. Sheng-pao, Jen the Fourth and Yu-yi, in addition to their luggage, were also carrying the vines everyone had cut the previous day. The innkeeper hastened out of the thatch-roofed hostel. Waving his hand as they marched up the sloping path, he called:

"Comrade Sheng-pao, if you can't get your hut finished by dark, come back and spend the night here. Strangers at first meeting, friends at the second."

"Right. Don't worry about us," Sheng-pao shouted back. By then, only his voice could be heard. He was virtually invisible, hidden by the wild pear trees and by his load of luggage, vines and the big cauldron.

With his two companions, he waded through the brush, treading on last year's fallen foliage. He could hear the voices of Yu-wan and Red Face Ta-hai and their group, but he could no longer see them.

How strange were the wooded Chinling Mountains! On the plain, by the time spring's Clear and Bright festival day had passed, the fields were onion green and the trees were shady. But here, although the many different kinds of trees and shrubs were burgeoning, they had not yet leafed. *Aiya!* Long icicles still hung on the high cliff faces. As he trudged along, Sheng-pao kept hearing chunks of ice drop off and crash into the ravines, startling the pheasants on the slopes into flight. Though he could hear water gurgling beneath his feet, he couldn't see it. *Aha!* The stream was flowing under a layer of thick ice that was covered by twigs and leaves.

Yu-yi and Jen the Fourth, as they walked ahead with their gear and vines on their backs, were discussing the differences between the weather in the mountains and the weather on the plain. This kind of conversation was an important part of the peasants' life. Although they chatted about it every day, and to the casual listener it sounded dull, peasants, whether walking or at work, never failed to exchange views earnestly on the subject. What else would you have them discuss? The Korean war, or the First Five-year Plan? About these, the knowledge of forty or fifty-year-old peasants was then still extremely limited. Their neighbours' shortcomings? That was gossip for women, a bad habit and of no interest. An old peasant could talk about dull subjects for a thousand years, but he'd never say anything offensive.

Sheng-pao, laden with his gear, a bundle of vines, Tseng-fu's cauldron and Yu-wan's rifle, walked behind the two older men. He neither joined in their conversation nor listened to it. He was involved in his own thoughts, which to him were highly entertaining.

That badly informed fellow back in South Millbase Ravine was funny, really funny. He evidently had a lot of respect for Party leaders, and he quite correctly connected the organizing of the poor peasants and hired hands for an expedition into the mountains with the district secretary's stay in Frog Flat when he was overhauling the mutual-aid teams. Where he went wrong was in saying that he, Sheng-pao, was leading the group at the behest of Sheng-lu, his well-to-do middle-peasant cousin. That was certainly comical. Sheng-pao couldn't repress a chuckle.

"What are you laughing at?" Jen the Fourth turned his head to demand. He added firmly: "I know what I'm talking about. Your father says so too: In 1722, there were over a hundred families living on Bitter Herb Clearing."

"Right, absolutely right. He did say that," Sheng-pao replied placatingly. Jen the Fourth was very pleased. He resumed his research into the history of Bitter Herb Clearing with Yu-yi, who was walking in front.

Sheng-pao continued meditating. It didn't matter that the stranger obviously had little regard for him. Young Sheng-pao was determined to learn from the broad-mindedness of Communists with long-range spiritual goals. He wasn't thin-skinned. It didn't matter a bit whether people considered him important. But the thing intrigued him. Why? Secretary Wang had put his finger on it exactly during the Party rectification. The secretary said that in the great sea of the small peasant economy, the well-to-do middle peasant was the most respected. He usually had a fine horse, or a large household, or someone in the family earning a good salary as a middle-school teacher. His prestige in the surrounding countryside was high. But, Secretary Wang asserted definitely, in the socialist society of the future, the system of private property would be eliminated. In the villages, this ridiculous situation would naturally also change.

"How right Secretary Wang is," Sheng-pao thought in astonishment. Sheng-pao often noted practical proof of revolutionary theory in his daily life. Now, marching through a mountain forest, he had made a new discovery regarding revolutionary theory, and it increased the spring in his step. How fascinating life was! He loved it ardently.

From the position of the sun in the blue sky, Sheng-pao could tell it was about the time peasants usually ate their noonday meal. Together with Jen the Fourth and Yu-yi, he set up the cauldron and chimney in the area enclosed by the low stone walls in North Grindstone Gap. Then they swept the place clean of its rubble of leaves, twigs, stones and dirt. Covered with dust, Sheng-pao insisted on tying branches together to make a long bed platform. On this, he would heap thatch, so that the men could sleep warm and dry, off the damp ground. Jen the Fourth had brought an old dog-skin robe, but the others had nothing that could serve as a

mattress. If exposed too long to the moisture, they would develop sores, their bones and ligaments would ache. In that case, how could they finish the job in the time planned?

When they had finished all preparation work before setting up the thatched hut, Jen the Fourth, his pipe in his mouth, squatted before the cauldron and set some water on to boil. When the others arrived with the rafters and thatch they were cutting, they'd have a hot drink to wash down their dry muffins.

The never-resting Yu-yi took a mattock and went out to clear a path to the stream. Otherwise someone might trip, he said, when he went for water.

Because everything was progressing smoothly, harmoniously, Sheng-pao was very stimulated. He pulled out his short pipe and smoked it proudly, viewing the scenery of North Grindstone Gap with much satisfaction.

It was indeed a wilderness. Ten *li* from South Millbase Ravine, it was thirty *li* of mountain path to White Grass River Valley—the nearest human habitation. Desolate spot!

A couple of abandoned old grindstones gave you your name. Standing in a field of dry grass that faced the sun, Sheng-pao saw rising behind him darkly wooded slopes of pine, dim and mysterious. Opposite was a mountain covered with an impenetrable birch forest. Who knew what lurked within? *Aiya!* And all around were bushes and wild pear trees. No wonder no one ever settled here. Only the suggestion of a path wound down from the gap, passing through the narrow wooded valley and twisting away over the ridge.

As though he were the master of North Grindstone Gap, Sheng-pao asked the two older peasants grandly: "Not bad, eh? If you send a hundred men, this place could hold them easily."

"It's wide enough. You could set up three thatched huts without any trouble," Yu-yi agreed, as he cleared the path to the stream with his mattock. "But who would be able to send so many?"

"I'm talking about after the mutual-aid and co-operative movement expands," Sheng-pao explained.

Jen the Fourth, tending the fire, asserted: "It depends on what's on the mountain. If there weren't enough bamboo, what would the hundred men do? Admire the scenery?"

Soon, Yu-wan arrived leading the sapling-cutters. Not far behind were Red Face and his men, with loads of thatch on their backs. In

the twinkling of an eye, the field that Yu-yi and Jen had cleared of brush was heaped with piles of thatch and saplings. The fragrance of the wood and the dry dusty smell of the thatch pervaded the field.

Untying their towel head coverings, the men mopped their sweaty faces and necks. Everyone was smiling cheerfully. They were pleased with this place, pleased with the preparations that had been made for the erection of the hut, pleased with the boiled water. Just see how pleased they are! As they examined the cauldron that had been set up and the bed platform Sheng-pao had constructed, North Grindstone Gap rang with their laughter.

In the nearby forest, the tigers, leopards, bears and wild boars were annoyed. Their round eyes burned through the undergrowth as they watched this band of strangers. When the first three outpost builders came and began readying the ground for the hut, the bold brave clumsy denizens of the mountains had crouched quietly in the dense woods observing them contemptuously, perhaps waiting for one of them to wander off alone, so that they could bring him down in a swift fierce charge. But now the wild beasts realized what the men were up to. They weren't merely three passers-by. They were part of a large strong group which had come to stay. Very irritated, the animals began leaving their disturbed North Grindstone Gap. Hark: in the surrounding forest they were stealing away, their paws and hoofs rustling the thick layer of fallen twigs and leaves that had accumulated over the years. Oho! A wild boar in the birch grove opposite as he departed kept turning his head to look back. His piggy eyes stared hostilely at the men of the expedition.

"So he doesn't want to go?" Spotting the boar, Yu-wan ran over and picked up his rifle. He took a cartridge from his pocket and shoved it into the breech. Dropping prone into the grass, he took aim, muttering: "You don't want to leave? All right, I'll keep you here. We'll put you in the pot for the celebration feast for our new home."

"Don't shoot. Don't shoot." A poker in his hand, Jen the Fourth dashed up and pulled Yu-wan's arm. "What do you think you're doing?" he yelled angrily. "If you don't kill him with one shot, he'll rush you. There are plenty of them in the mountains. They don't attack you if you leave them alone—thank heaven and earth."

Like an actor on the stage, Jen recited the words of a mountain song for everybody's benefit:

Pity, oh pity the mountain dweller poor,  
His work for the year, oh, it never ends.  
The result of the seed which he sows o'er the ground,  
On heaven, on wild beasts, on them it depends.  
Guarding his crops all day and all night,  
His eyes go red, he shouts himself hoarse,  
But harvest brings only a famine year,  
One picul the bears steal and eight pint the boars.

"You see? The mountain folk shout themselves hoarse, but they never provoke them. Why should we outsiders? If you can't control your hunger, better fatten your face with a few good resounding smacks. You have the nerve to talk about a celebration feast for our new home. Now there's a phrase that's really resounding." As he lectured Yu-wan, who was lying in the grass, Jen's anger cooled, and he ended up with a jest.

Everyone laughed. They agreed with Jen's policy of mutual non-provocation. By this time, the boar had disappeared. Grinning, Yu-wan rose and put his rifle back. The men proposed to Sheng-pao, who was busy inspecting the saplings, that the gun be used only to defend themselves against any marauding beasts which might raid the hut in the night. Their mission wasn't to hunt wild beasts.

Sheng-pao happily agreed. It hadn't been because he was looking for honours that he had organized all these people. Now, their collective approach warmed his heart. His confidence in the group's strength increased. Smiling affectionately, he said:

"Let's eat our corn-meal muffins and barley-cakes. Then we can start building our home."

All sixteen of them untied their bed rolls and took out their food and drinking bowls.

After the meal, they held a conference. It was decided to divide into two teams. One would tie the thatch into small bundles, the other would build the peaked roof frame. Then all hands would join in affixing the thatch to the frame with the vines they had brought.

The work proceeded simply and smoothly. No one tried to pick a light task, or pulled a long face if his job was heavy. All went at it seriously and diligently. Sheng-pao could see that the men attached great importance to this hostel they were building. Back in the village, there was never such collective spirit in constructing a home for

any private individual. Even poor peasants and hired hands still behaved like peasants unless united by some common interest or ideal. No amount of wages could produce the frame of mind with which they work as their own masters for a common good.

There, Red Face Ta-hai was solemnly teaching his team how to select and tie the thatch. Here, Yu-wan was vigorously wielding his axe, cutting the silver-barked saplings into even lengths, sending chips flying in all directions. To improve their appearance, he also trimmed them neatly. Like a couple of old master carpenters, Yu-yi and Jen the Fourth supervised the remaining men in building the roof frame. Under their orders was Sheng-pao untying the bundles of vines and delivering them where needed.

The men's warm mutual affection, their good cheer, stirred the young leader deeply. They were giving him a new understanding. He used to think it would take years to change the selfish individualistic peasant mentality, with long meetings every winter, running far into the night. But now he had caught a glimmering of something. Could it be that the main way to change the mentality was through collective labour? That you shouldn't wait for their mentality to change before organizing them, but rather you should organize them in order to bring the change about?

Stretching out the long vines, Sheng-pao cut them into sections and brought them to those tying the thatch. His routine job gave him time to observe these men, as well as those building the roof frame. Now a number of curious questions rose in his mind.

What makes them so unified? Why are they working so hard? Why some willingly listen to orders, and others issue them so righteously? What is the relation between these people?

Sheng-pao couldn't help smiling. It was really interesting. Just look at Sheng-mao and Iron Lock Wang over there, tying crossed rafters to the twenty-four feet long central roof beam with the other fellows. They were working face to face, pulling the vine-ropes tight, their teeth clenched with the effort. See how they grinned at each other when the rafters were tied firm. Apparently each was well satisfied with the way his partner co-operated. And Sheng-mao and Iron Lock were the ones who had argued so hotly over the boundary between their fields during the autumn sowing last year. To settle their squabble they had called out practically every cadre in the village. How they shouted at each other, faces flushed,

ears red, neither willing to give an inch. Finally, they had to be sent to the township government to solve the matter.

After they had left, Sheng-pao—one of those who had tried in vain to make peace—had shaken his head and thought: “They’ve started a feud. They were good friends, but the fields they received under the land reform are making them enemies. And they’re both poor peasants and hired hands! What a curse the private ownership of land is. Whatever goes wrong with a peasant, if you dig, you find that at the root.” But here, only a few months later, they were great friends again. Remarkable!

“How did it happen?” he wondered. “People say that those who go into the mountains are all one family. That’s it, of course. In the mountain depths men and wild beasts are divided into two hostile camps.” But then he thought: “That can’t be the reason. If they were able to earn a living, they wouldn’t have come to these forsaken wilds in the first place. The government didn’t urge them to come. I didn’t drag them here. They came of their own accord.”

Sheng-pao was sure there was something significant in all this. There had to be. He remembered how these men had surrounded him after the plan for low-interest grain loans for Frog Flat had failed to go through, how they had pleaded with him to lead them. He recalled the talks of Secretary Yang of the county Party committee and Secretary Wang of the district Party committee. Yes, the working class was the leading class of all China. And in the countryside the poor peasants and hired hands were the class the Party relied on. Secretary Wang had put it well:

“During the War of Liberation, the poor peasants and hired hands gave the sons they had raised with such difficulty to form the People’s Liberation Army. They sent the grain their families had grown to feed this army at the front. They joined stretcher teams that carried PLA wounded from the front to the rear. In the common struggle to liberate themselves, they were able to forget whatever differences existed between them.”

“Right,” Sheng-pao said excitedly, smoothing out a vine and handing it to Yu-yi. “You’ve got to rely on the poor peasants and hired hands.”

Jen the Fourth laughed. “Who are you talking to, Sheng-pao?” he asked curiously. “Yu-yi? Didn’t you classify him as a middle peasant during land reform?”

“He’s not talking to me,” the honest Yu-yi said. “This leader of ours is a thinking man. While his hands work, his brain never stops. You’re talking to yourself, aren’t you, Sheng-pao?”

Sheng-pao admitted with a smile that he was. Jestingly, he said: “Everyone is concentrating on his job. I’m the only one whose mind is wandering.”

“You go right on making plans for us. No one will say you’re not putting your heart in your work,” Jen urged him earnestly. “That’s the truth.”

All of the men building the roof were very satisfied with their young leader.

Before the afternoon was half over the roof frame was completed and the thatch tied on. Eight men standing on each side, shouting a rhythmic work chant, they raised it on to the low walls that were only half as high as a man. Then, laughing and shouting, they crowded into the thatched cottage and hung their ration sacks, clothing bags and pickled vegetables on the rafters.

That night Sheng-pao called a meeting. A detailed plan for division of labour was worked out. The experienced bamboo cutters gave the others some technical pointers. After breakfast the next morning, leaving Jen the Fourth behind to cook and prepare for the broom binding, fifteen men started up the slope, carrying ropes and sickles.

No work on Mount Chungnan was more arduous than cutting bamboo. With lowered heads protected by towel coverings, the men climbed the slope and parted a path through the brush with their hands. The sharp branches tore their clothes, cut their hands and faces. But that was nothing. In their hands were sickles bright as snow, and the ground beneath their feet bristled with another kind of sharp knives—the stubble of previously cut bamboos. Standing on the steep side of the mountain, you could reach up and touch the blue sky. And when you looked down you saw a valley so deep it made your head spin. While hewing, you had to beware of the leopards and bears which peered out from the nearby woods. Tigers seldom appeared, and the wild boars didn’t attack humans as a rule, but the leopards and bears were a nuisance—one over fierce, the other over stupid. You had to be careful.

"Better to cut a little less each day and finish the job a few days later. Safety is the main thing, Comrade Sheng-pao," the district Party secretary had told him, his voice serious and concerned.

Their first day of work was very confused, really quite worrisome. So the next morning Sheng-pao divided them into two groups, led by Red Face Ta-hai and Yu-wan respectively. That was better. It was agreed that no one was to wander more than ten feet from his group. Under no circumstances was a man to get out of sight of the others. Kuo Suo was greedy. When he saw a clump of good bamboo he was always drifting over, alone, without a word to anyone. The men warned him never to forget that he was in the mountain wilds; he absolutely must stay with the group.

Shuan-shuan did everything slowly. When the men moved from one place to another, he invariably fell behind. Sheng-pao took on the task personally of looking after him. He walked in Shuan-shuan's rear, ready to help him on an instant's notice. Shuan-shuan was Blind Wang's one and only son. Sheng-pao dared not be careless for a moment. Can you blame the young fellow for acquiring a maturity and competence after being placed in this position of responsibility? His manner, his speech, his mood, were those of a man ten years his senior.

Shouldering the burdens of the masses of people and working for the collective cause so that they themselves had neither the time nor inclination to think about home and private matters was the reason an earlier generation of Communists had won the people's confidence during the twenty years of fighting. Sheng-pao in his contacts with county Party Secretary Yang and district Party Secretary Wang saw this spirit in their manner, speech and mood. In the three years since liberation Sheng-pao observed that many leading comrades had this spirit, and he was determined to be like them. He didn't know what this conduct was called. He sought nothing for himself in the bitter struggle. He wanted no special benefits from the collective cause, nor had he any desire for others to make him a leader and respect him.

After three days of cutting, they delivered the first batch of bamboo brooms to the thatch-roofed inn in South Millbase Ravine. The bellowing innkeeper loudly informed them that the teams of two and three from Huangpao District who were going into the mountains all

envied their method—setting up a camp, sticking together through thick and thin.

"By heaven! The average poor peasant or hired hand never spends more than five days in the mountains on one trip. The bamboo he cuts on the slopes and ridges, he strips and smokes and binds into brooms in the mornings and evenings right here at the inn. When he carries them down the mountain and sells them in the Huangpao market, he's lucky if he gets 20 catties of corn meal to take home for gruel. There isn't a poor peasant cutting bamboo in Bitter Herb Clearing who doesn't admire the way the mutual-aid team from Fifth Village, Hsiapao Township, is operating. And when they hear what your team is going to earn on its brooms, their mouths drop open as big as bowls." The big-voiced innkeeper mimicked their gape of astonishment.

Was Sheng-pao happy to hear this? Of course. According to the original plan, only the mutual-aid team was supposed to go into the mountains. But later several peasants from the upper reaches also joined them. And now so many others admired and approved. Hey! It just showed how pleased the people were with the path the Party was pointing out. In the course of bitter struggle the approval of the people was the highest reward a Communist could desire. Seven hundred and fifty yuan—that wasn't what mattered most. Only vulgar persons saw nothing but money. Sheng-pao felt vastly encouraged.

If our team's plan for a large output succeeds this year, the poor peasants and hired hands who've joined us to cut bamboo will be members of our team next year. Or maybe it would be better if we formed a federation of mutual-aid teams, like they did in Tawang Village.

But then Sheng-pao immediately corrected himself: Quit always thinking about next year. It's liable to make you careless about the present. Don't get a swelled head just because people say we're doing well. Keep your feet on the ground. Suppose you mess it up? It doesn't matter much to you personally. The whole township can still remember when you were just a kid called Little Precious and never had any special ability. It isn't a question of whether you personally lose face. The main thing is this will have a big influence on the Party, because it's the road the Party's recommending.

When Sheng-pao realized how heavy his responsibility was, he calmed down. A sense of duty to a collective cause gives a man self-control. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with age.

Sheng-pao admired Yu-wan's cheerful nature and stalwart body. Yu-wan joked and rioted with everyone. He was always singing local opera arias—badly but loud. It seemed to Sheng-pao that this cheerfulness was a great help to their life in the mountains.

On their way back to North Grindstone Gap after delivering the brooms, Sheng-pao walked together with him, purposely letting the others go on ahead. Thoughtfully he said to Yu-wan in a low voice: "The men look kind of bored."

"Yes. As time passes they run out of words."

"That's no good. When a man doesn't talk, he gets homesick. I asked the innkeeper to tell Tseng-fu to bring us a set of chess."

"Fine."

"But before it comes, when we're not working see if you can make everybody laugh, will you? You know the art. I don't."

Yu-wan gave Sheng-pao a shove. "Who are you trying to kid? You call that an art? But if it will do any good, I'll make a fool of myself. It doesn't cost anything."

And so, when the men were resting after lunch one day, noticing Shuan-shuan was gazing abstractedly at the grove of birch on the opposite mountain slope, Yu-wan asked:

"Who are you thinking of?"

"Nobody," Shuan-shuan replied earnestly, turning his big head.

"I don't believe it," Yu-wan retorted loudly. "You were absolutely in a daze, you were thinking so hard. How can you deny it? Are you planning to sneak off and run home?"

Shuan-shuan gave an honest laugh. "Why should I do that?"

"To see your Su-fang. Right? Confess."

Shuan-shuan blushed. An embarrassed smile trembled on his thick lips. Everyone, except Jen the Fourth, roared with laughter.

Sheng-pao was examining the bamboo the men had cut. Anything not suitable for making brooms was consumed as firewood. He didn't know what the men were laughing about. It's fine if Yu-wan can cheer them up, he thought. Life in the mountains is too lonesome.

To enliven life in the thatched hut he proposed that Jen the Fourth tell a story from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Carefree Iron Lock Wang could imitate the cries of horses, cows, chickens and dogs.

He was best at rooster crows. At Sheng-pao's urging, he crowed lustily. While everyone was laughing, Sheng-pao checked over the brooms to see whether they were up to standard.

But in his idle moments, Sheng-pao thought of home. During the day, he climbed the slopes and scaled the ridges with the others. At night when, after a session of jollity, the fifteen men were snoring peacefully, Sheng-pao lay on his bed of boughs and grass listening to the wind moaning through the trees on the opposite mountain slope and wondering how Huan-hsi was doing with the rice sowing. Had the agronomist come yet? How was Huan-hsi getting on with Sheng-lu? The sowing was another important matter in their life, Sheng-pao felt. As to the war in Korea and the armistic negotiations at Panmunjom, as to the country's industrialization, he didn't understand much about that. Anyway, we have Chairman Mao who would take care of such things.

Calamities happen in a flash. One afternoon Sheng-pao and the fifteen men were hauling bundles of green bamboo down from the ridge. Their faces to the sun slowly sinking in the western hills, the men descended the slope in high spirits. As the bundles were dragged rustling through the brush they stirred up a cloud of dust and fine bits of rotted leaves and twigs that had been dried by the sun after the snow had melted. This irritated the men's nostrils, making them cough. Sheng-pao who was walking behind Shuan-shuan, heard a sudden yelp. Quickly halting, he peered through the dusty haze. Shuan-shuan's tattered cotton-padded tunic was impaled on the sharp branch of an old pine tree, and Shuan-shuan was hanging in mid-air.

"Wait. Don't move. I'll get you down," Sheng-pao shouted. Tossing aside his bundle, he ran forward. He was afraid that when Shuan-shuan dropped, he might miss his footing and roll down the steep slope into the gorge. That would be terrible.

But just as he was running, Sheng-pao heard a thud. Shuan-shuan's heavy body had already hit the ground. The simple fellow began howling with pain.

"That does it," Sheng-pao muttered. "Wretch! I told you to wait. What was your hurry? Have you twisted your leg? Or have you sprained an ankle?"

Sheng-pao raced up to him. It was much worse than a twisted leg or a sprained ankle. Shuan-shuan was holding a foot in two big hands. Bright red blood was gushing through his woollen sock and hemp sandal. Shuan-shuan's body was powerful but his will was weak. Seated on the carpet of fallen twigs and leaves he was weeping loudly, tears coursing in rivulets down his dusty face.

"*Aiyaya! Aiyaya! Mama,*" he bawled. His cries pierced Sheng-pao's heart like knives.

Sheng-pao viewed him with apprehension. By this time the others were far ahead.

Squatting beside him, Sheng-pao removed Shuan-shuan's sandal and sock. *Aiya!* Blood was flowing rapidly from the fleshy part near the centre of his foot.

"*Aiya!* How did you do that?"

"Oh! Oh! Stepped on the sharp stump of a cut bamboo! Mama, it hurts!"

"Don't cry. How deep is it?"

"Right to the bone! *Aiyaya!*"

"What rotten luck!" Little beads of sweat broke out on Sheng-pao's nose.

He felt around nervously first in this pocket of his padded tunic, then in that. Here it was! The first-aid kit the clinic in Huangpao Town had given him, containing iodine, mercurochrome and alcohol, the three bottles held together with adhesive tape. Hastily, the emergency nurse began cleaning Shuan-shuan's wound and applying medication. "Maybe a flesh wound will heal quicker than an injury to the bone or ligament," he thought hopefully.

By then the others, discovering their absence, came back. Because of the slope's terrain they couldn't approach the two, but stood in brush to their waists, staring up at them.

"What happened?"

"Stabbed his foot on a bamboo stump."

"Why didn't he look where he was going?"

"Got hung up on a pine tree branch."

"He should have called for help."

Everyone was talking at once. They were quite upset.

"Enough, enough. Quit the chatter. It'll be dark before long. Let's get him bandaged so we can move on down the mountain. Who'll hold the medicine bottles for me?"

Yu-yi, who was standing nearest, was very unhappy. As he squatted down, his horny hands gripped the bottles with a superstitious reverence.

Acting on the instructions he received from the nurse in Huangpao Town, Sheng-pao washed around the wound with cotton soaked in alcohol. Next he tore open a small envelope and sprinkled some of its contents on a pad of sterile gauze. After attaching this with adhesive tape, he put some cotton on the outside, then bound the whole thing with a bandage.

During Sheng-pao's awkward ministrations, poor Shuan-shuan, lying on his back on a bed of brown pine needles, groaned mightily. As soon as he lay down and raised his leg, the wound stopped bleeding. Shuan-shuan's face was very white, perhaps because he had lost a good bit of blood, or maybe it was due to fright. Although his eyes were shut, tears continued to well from the corners. He was a pitiful sight. There must have been a bucket of tears in that heavy body of his. If someone had told him honestly about all the things that concerned him in this world, three days and three nights would have seen no end to his weeping.

"Do you feel better now with the dressing on?" The good-hearted Yu-yi wiped his own tears as he handed the bottles back to Sheng-pao.

"It still hurts," Shuan-shuan cried, clamping his lips.

"Don't feel badly," Sheng-pao urged, putting the first-aid kit in order. "The doctor in the Huangpao clinic said a flesh wound heals in five or six days." Sheng-pao's tone was positive.

Actually, the accident made Sheng-pao miserable. But could he weep along with Shuan-shuan and Yu-yi? He had no right to be the same as the others, and display his weakness. He had to manifest complete staunchness, and thus arouse staunchness in Shuan-shuan.

But no matter how he tried, the dusty-faced Sheng-pao could not conceal his discouragement. He discussed with the men on the slope below—their faces also caked with dust—how to distribute among them the bamboo he and Shuan-shuan had cut and drag it down to camp. He would carry Shuan-shuan on his back. The others wanted to take turns, but Sheng-pao wouldn't agree. He was the youngest and healthiest. He wanted to make sure that the wound wouldn't start bleeding again while they descended the slope. He would carry him high on his back, with Shuan-shuan's legs sticking up so that his feet were higher than his knees. Of course this position

would be very tiring for Sheng-pao, but he said he couldn't feel at ease if anyone else carried him. The others finally had to give in.

Carrying the simple clumsy Shuan-shuan—he weighed over two hundred pounds—Sheng-pao started down the mountain. He was extremely sorry for the excessively simple fellow. Shuan-shuan worked like an ox, never tiring, as if he were born to labour. It was due to his goodness that no one bore him ill feeling. He gave the impression that he thought the whole world could be trusted. Of course his own father should be trusted most of all.

It was due to this goodness that Sheng-pao became so irritated when Su-fang made eyes at him. He wasn't such a heartless beast as to take advantage of a friend's goodness to fool around with his wife. On the contrary, he considered helping this weak fellow his natural duty. His only regret was that old Wang was blind in more ways than one, and actually warned his son to beware of their virile neighbour, Sheng-pao.

Step by step, Sheng-pao plodded down the slope, his hands behind him, supporting Shuan-shuan. He could picture the stubborn expression in the eyes of the irascible old Blind Wang.

"It's your own fault," he imagined Blind Wang saying. "Who told you to go running around with Sheng-pao? If your leg is crippled, you can go live with him. Let him support you."

The thought of the old man gave Sheng-pao goose pimples. When the Wangs joined the mutual-aid team, it had been a bit of an effort for him to accept the idea. If it were just Shuan-shuan, he would have been completely pleased, even if it meant working himself to death. But that wretched old man was too narrow-minded. He always imagined that people in the mutual-aid team were not being fair to his son. No matter how Sheng-pao looked after Shuan-shuan, Blind Wang was constantly suspecting that his family was being imposed upon. Whenever they met, he would say to Sheng-pao: "My boy's a simpleton. . . . My boy's a fool. . . ." As if he had a bellyful of doubts he couldn't voice.

Sheng-pao felt like saying, "If it worries you so much, your family can quit the team." But he remembered Secretary Wang's advice, and he patiently endured everything. Once his sister Hsiu-lan told him that Blind Wang had even tried to instigate Shuan-shuan to dawdle on the job. "Why sweat when you're working for somebody else?" Wang had said. "If you tire yourself out, will his family buy you

medicine?" Sheng-pao nearly exploded when he heard this. That was the kind of education the old man was giving his son! He decided to have a talk with Blind Wang. But as he was leaving his thatched cottage, he changed his mind. "He won't admit it," Sheng-pao thought. "That blind old rascal. Why should I pay any attention to him? I'll just go on like Secretary Wang told me." He went back inside.

"Comrade Sheng-pao." Whenever his personal moods came in conflict with his good sense as a Communist, he seemed to hear the friendly voice of Secretary Wang. "Comrade Sheng-pao, it takes a lot of patience to lead backward peasants along the road to socialism. Without patience, you may bring your revolution right up to the threshold, but you'll never get it into the door. A lot of comrades after conferences in the county seat return to the villages full of determination. But the minute the busy season starts on the farms they bump their noses and they cool off. You must understand. This is going to temper you."

At one time Sheng-pao stated that if he could pick eight or ten families from along the upper and lower reaches of the stream, excluding people like Blind Wang, he'd guarantee to form a model mutual-aid team. Secretary Wang had laughed heartily.

"That's a fine idea! What would happen if every Communist wouldn't lead the people immediately around him but went elsewhere to choose his own masses? Chen-shan says he couldn't get a mutual-aid team going because the people in Kuan Creek Hamlet are backward. He says, 'If I lived on the lower reaches like Sheng-pao, you'd see what a team I'd have.' And you? You want to pick through half a village. What about the people who are left? Blind Wang, for instance. Who's going to lead him? Shall we give him over to the rich peasant Yao? If all the old society left us was poverty, our Party could build communism in a shorter time. But it's left us something else—ignorance. That's the worst thing the enemy has bequeathed us. The backward elements among the masses, Comrade Sheng-pao, and the backward aspect of the common folk—these are the real burdens we Communists must shoulder. You must understand. The enemies who've run off to Taiwan, and those who are still here, are scheming in every way to utilize these burdens of ours. We must not shirk our responsibility, Comrade Sheng-pao. We must never let the enemy make use of these burdens."

Now, in the depths of the mountain wilderness, carrying Shuan-shuan on his back down the slope, Sheng-pao seemed to hear Secretary Wang's words once again. Have you ever had that experience: finding sustenance in the words of a Party leader whenever you run into a hardship or danger, the way a sick child thinks of its mother?

As he walked carrying his burden Sheng-pao thought: "What does the word 'hardship' mean? What is it, actually?" Then he understood—a ghost! Each time, every moment he kept his objective clearly in sight, there was no such thing as hardship. During the Party rectification people spoke of the Red Army men on the Long March. That was how it had been with them. As they drew nearer their destination day by day, all of their hardships turned to joys. And each time they made camp at the end of the day, a new joy was added.

"Right," thought Sheng-pao. With peasants also, that's the way it was. The year he and his father rented eighteen *mou* of rice paddy from Miser Lu, his work hadn't seemed difficult. He had been quite cheerful, in fact, because he was intent on building up their family fortunes. Only when the autumn harvest was over and he discovered that this was impossible, did his labour, in retrospect, become a frightful hardship. Today, he was striving for socialism. Although he had Shuan-shuan on his back he was happy.

When they reached the gently sloping meadow of dry grass at the foot of the mountain, Sheng-pao let the men hauling the brooms go on ahead, while he slowly followed with Shuan-shuan.

They were in a ravine which the rays of the dying sun couldn't penetrate. Hazy shadows of the mountain heights shrouded the valley. Rooks flew cawing overhead, returning to their nests.

"Sheng-pao," said Shuan-shuan.

"What is it?" Sheng-pao asked sympathetically.

"Rest a while."

"Having pain?"

"No. You're tired."

"I'm all right. It will be dark soon. We mustn't stop."

Sheng-pao trudged on. At a turn in the path, Shuan-shuan again called:

"Sheng-pao."

"Now what's wrong?"

"Rest a while. Your forehead's all covered with sweat."

"What's a little sweat to a peasant?"

"The road's level here. Put me down. I can crawl."

"What are you talking about? If your wound starts bleeding again, then what?"

Shuan-shuan said no more. Sheng-pao could feel his uneasiness. The honest fellow couldn't express his gratitude in words.

"Ho! Sheng-pao!"

As Sheng-pao, dripping perspiration, his head down, walked bending forward with Shuan-shuan on his back, he heard Yu-wan and Jen the Fourth calling him in the bushes beyond. Yu-wan wanted to take over his burden. Jen was also worried about his cousin Shuan-shuan.

Sheng-pao set Shuan-shuan down on a boulder covered with dry moss. As he stood beside him, his perspiration-soaked clothes sticking to his body, he felt very cold.

Needless to say Yu-wan and Jen had already heard what had happened from the men who returned first. Jen agitatedly patted the legs of his tattered cotton-padded trousers.

"You, oh you! You're never careful," he berated Shuan-shuan. "It's lucky you only got stabbed with a bamboo stubble. Suppose you rolled down the slope?"

"Forget it." Yu-wan cut him short, annoyed. "Is this a time to talk like that? Come on, Shuan-shuan. I'll carry you."

While Yu-wan was putting Shuan-shuan on his back, Jen asked Sheng-pao:

"Did he step on a newly cut stubble, or an old?"

"*Aiya!*" Wiping the sweat from his neck with his waist sash, Sheng-pao suddenly realized his omission. "It's certainly true, 'In a tight spot, brains go to pot.' I forgot to look."

"You'd better find out. If it's new stubble, he'll be all right in four or five days. If it's old stubble, the wound will probably fester. It may give trouble."

"Right. I know that. Let's go back up the slope and see."

As Yu-wan carried Shuan-shuan to the thatched hut, Sheng-pao and Jen the Fourth, each with a gleaming sickle in his hand, started up the mountain through the dusk.

Bad luck! When they got to the old pine tree, they found that the stubble was of bamboo cut the previous year. They returned to the hut just at dark, and Sheng-pao gave Shuan-shuan penicillin tablets,

as the doctor had directed. Nevertheless, Shuan-shuan's injured foot swelled during the night. To Shuan-shuan the mental agony was much worse than the physical. He moaned and groaned and sobbed. What worried him was that his earnings would be small because he couldn't cut much bamboo and his blind father would upbraid him.

"You concentrate on getting well. The days you can't go up the ridge whatever I cut will count as yours," Sheng-pao said.

This generosity moved the good-hearted Yu-yi. He stared at Sheng-pao admiringly. A middle peasant in his forties, Yu-yi could easily have made a living working his own land. He joined the mutual-aid team only because of his fondness for Sheng-pao. So far as he was concerned, the team was simply an interesting experiment in a new situation. If it failed, he would have no regrets. But every demonstration of Sheng-pao's spirit of self-sacrifice stirred him to support the team more firmly, more enthusiastically.

During those same dark nights when Shuan-shuan was suffering in the mountains with the pain of an infected foot, in the eastern wing of a handsome compound in Frog Flat, rich peasant Yao was sleeping with Shuan-shuan's wife Su-fang. Sheng-pao gave Shuan-shuan penicillin tablets at fixed intervals, boiled water for him to drink, comforted him. He also told him as much as he could remember of the history of the development of society, both to educate him and to take his mind off his pain. The infection wouldn't last ten days. Seven if the foot got better fast, eight if it were slower, nine at the very most.

*Translated by Sidney Shapiro*

*Selections from the Classics*

*Hsin Chi-chi*

Poems

I Climb Shanghsin Pavilion in Chienkang

— to the melody *Shui Lung Yin*

A southern sky and a clear sweep of autumn,  
Water brims to the skyline, autumn knows no bounds,  
While the distant hills,  
Jade clasps on a girl's coiled tresses,  
Only conjure up grief and pain.  
High in the pavilion I watch the setting sun,  
Hear the cry of a lonely swan,  
A wanderer in the south, gazing at my sword,  
I beat time on the balustrade,  
With none to know  
What passes through my mind.

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For an introduction to this selection see the article *Hsin Chi-chi and His Poetry* on p. 73.

True, this is the season for perch,  
But will the west wind  
Blow the wanderer home?\*

Those who grub for houses and land  
Must blush to meet a noble-hearted man.\*\*  
Ah, the years slip past  
Lamented by wind and rain,  
And even the trees grow old!  
Who will summon a green-sleeved maid  
With red handkerchief  
To wipe the hero's tears?

### Written on the Wall at Chaokou in Kiangsi

— to the melody *Pu Sa Man*

Past Yuku Tower flows the Ching  
Bearing the tears of countless wayfarers,  
And I gaze northwest towards Changan  
Dismayed by all the hills that lie between.

Green mountains are no bar  
To the Ching flowing on to the sea,  
But as dusk falls on the stream my heart is heavy  
When I hear the cuckoos calling deep in the hills.

\*An allusion to Chang Han, a Tsin dynasty (A.D. 265-420) scholar who gave up his office to return home when he saw it was autumn and the time to eat perch in the Yangtse Valley.

\*\*At the end of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) Chen Teng ignored Hsu Fan because the latter was only interested in looking for good properties to buy, regardless of the fate of the empire.

### A Night in Wang's Hut at Poshan

— to the melody *Ching Ping Lo*

Famished rats scuffle round the bed,  
Bats flit round the lamp,  
Wind from the pines lashes the roof with rain  
And torn window paper whispers to itself.

All my life I have travelled north and south  
And am now returned white-headed, my face haggard;  
Waking under my cotton quilt this autumn night  
I still see our magnificent land stretching to infinity.

### Written on the Wall on My Way to Poshan

— to the melody *Chou Nu-erh*

As a lad I never knew the taste of sorrow,  
But loved to climb towers,  
Loved to climb towers,  
And drag sorrow into each new song I sung.

Now I know well the taste of sorrow,  
It is on the tip of my tongue,  
On the tip of my tongue,  
But instead I say, "What a fine, cool autumn day!"

## Life in the Village

— to the melody *Ching Ping Lo*

The eaves of the thatched hut hang low,  
Green, green the grass by the stream:  
What tipsy white-haired couple have we here  
Billing and cooing in accents of the south?

Their first-born is hoeing the bean plot east of the stream,  
The second is making a hen coop;  
Their best-loved, youngest scamp  
Sprawled out on the bank is peeling lotus seeds.

## To Chen Liang

— to the melody *Ho Hsin Lang*

Chen Liang came from Tungyang and stayed with me for ten days. I took him to visit Goose Lake and we arranged to see Chu Hsi at Tzuhsi, but he did not come and my friend had to go back east. The day after his departure I missed him so much that I started out after him. In Egret Wood, however, the snow was too deep and the path too slippery for me to go on. I did some solitary drinking in Fang Village and remained for a long time depressed by my failure to bring him back. Late that night I found lodgings in Ssuwang Pavilion belonging to the Wu family in Chuanhu, and the plaintive fluting from the next house made me pour out my feelings in a song written to the tune *ju-yen-fei*. Five days later a letter came from Chen Liang asking me for a poem. It is rather amusing that far apart as we were both of us were thinking along similar lines.

Cup in hand we talked before parting,  
You a second Tao Yuan-ming\*  
High-hearted as sagacious Chuko Liang.\*\*  
From the wood came flitting a magpie  
Scattering flakes of snow from the pine branches  
To add white to the hair  
Below our tattered hats.  
Dwindling stream and meagre hills were not much to look at,  
Barely making a picture with sparse branches of plum,  
And the few wild-geese winging past  
Seemed lonely too.

My friend kept tryst but left me all too soon;  
I gaze disconsolately at the Ching,  
Too cold to be forded today,  
Deep and packed with ice.  
The road is cut, cart-wheels bog down in ruts,  
Causing grief to the traveller!  
Who sent you, friend,  
To rend my heart like this?  
All the iron on earth was surely spent  
To forge so great a weight of pain and longing;  
Beware lest it shatter the flute  
This long, slow night.

\*The great fifth-century poet who gave up a government post and chose to live as a hermit.

\*\*A statesman of the third century who made repeated attempts to regain the central Chinese plain.

## A Poem in a Heroic Vein for Chen Liang

— to the melody *Po Chen Tzu*

Half drunk I lit the lamp to look at my sword  
After dreams of the bugling in our army camps,  
The roasted oxen shared among our men,  
The harpist's melody from the northern border.  
It was autumn, we marshalled our troops on the field of war.

Horses sped as if on wings,  
Bow-strings twanged like thunder,  
And we carried out the emperor's behest  
Winning fame both in life and in death. . . .  
But now, alas, my hair is turning white!

## Written in Jest When a Friend's Impassioned Talk of Achievement and Fame Made Me Think Back to My Youth

— to the melody *Cheb Ku Tien*

In my youth ten thousand men flocked to my standard,  
In brocade coats we galloped north and crossed the Yangtse;  
The Tartars at night checked their quivers inlaid with silver,  
Our men in the morning shot arrows tipped with gold.

I long for the past and grieve over my present state,  
What spring wind can turn my white beard black again?  
In place of memorials on destroying the Tartars  
I read my neighbour's manual on growing trees!

## Written for Fun

— to the melody *Hsi Chiang Yueh*

In my cups I want nothing but fun and jollity,  
What time have I for care?  
Of late I begin to see the futility  
Of trusting in those books by the men of old.

Last night by the pine I staggered tipsily  
And asked the pine, "How drunk am I?"  
When I imagined the pine sidling over to support me,  
I pushed it off saying, "Away!"

## Thinking of the Past at Peiku Pavilion in Chingkou

— to the melody *Yung Yu Lo*

In this ancient land  
What trace remains of Wu's brave king Sun Chuan?\*

Towers and pavilions where girls danced and sang,  
Your glory is swept away by wind and rain;  
The slanting sunlight falls on grass and trees,  
Small lanes, the quarters of the humble folk;  
Yet here, they say, Liu Yu\*\* lived.  
I think of the days gone by  
When with gilded spear and iron-clad steed he charged  
Like a tiger to swallow up vast territories.

\*A third-century king who reigned in Chingkou.

\*\*The first ruler of the Southern Sung dynasty in the fifth century and a native of this city, who led successful expeditions against the northern Tartars.

In the days of Yuan-chia\*  
Hasty preparations were made  
To march to the Langchuhsu Mountains,\*\*  
But the men of Sung were routed from the north.  
Now forty-three years have passed,  
And looking north I remember  
The beacon fires that blazed the way to Yangchow;\*\*\*  
Bitter memories these  
Of sacred crows among the holy drums  
In the Tartar emperor's temple.\*\*\*\*  
Who will ask old Lien Po \*\*\*\*\*  
If he still enjoys his food?

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi  
and Gladys Yang

\*A.D. 424-453.

\*\*In Inner Mongolia, reached by the Han army after defeating the Huns in 119 B.C.

\*\*\*In 1161 the Nuchen Tartars occupied Yangchow.

\*\*\*\*When Northern Wei, a Tartar dynasty, defeated the Southern Sung troops in the fifth century, their emperor built a temple near Yangchow.

\*\*\*\*\*A brave general of the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.), who to prove his ability to lead an army in his old age rode out in full armour after a hearty meal.

## Hsin Chi-chi and His Poetry

A new verse form known as the *tz'u*\* appeared towards the end of the Tang dynasty and was improved on during the Sung, notably by Su Tung-po (1037-1101). Thus the well-known thirteenth-century critic Liu Chen-ong wrote, "In the hands of Su Tung-po, the *tz'u* gained prodigious vigour and resonance, becoming more like the classical verse or prose in its scope, embracing all the wonders of heaven and earth." Su Tung-po's bold experiments widened the range of subjects for this form of poetry, enabling poets to express their individuality better and breathing fresh life into poetic diction.

Teng Kuang-ming, born in 1907, comes from Lingyi in the province of Shantung. He graduated from Peking University in 1936, served as a professor in the History Department of Fudan University from 1942 to 1946, and has since taught history in Peking University. His works include monographs on the *Sung Dynasty History*, an annotated edition of the poems of Hsin Chi-chi, a chronology of the poet and *The Life of Hsin Chi-chi*. He is currently helping to compile the section on the Sung dynasty in the *Outline History of China* edited by Professor Chien Po-tsan.

\*This form of poetry originated in the eighth century as songs set to music, with definite melodies and more irregular metres than the *shih*. By the Sung dynasty, *tz'u* were no longer sung but continued to be written according to the old melodies and metrical patterns. It has become a special form of classical verse.

His new school of *tsu* was vigorous and dynamic compared with the gentle, evocative *tsu* of the past. Half a century later, Hsin Chi-chi (1140-1207) carried this virile school of poetry to greater heights. Thanks to his patriotism, heroic spirit and versatility, Hsin Chi-chi's poetry expresses yet more stirring thoughts and a wider vision, in close touch with the realities of the age. He was, however, not merely a famous poet but also known in Chinese history as a national hero.

In 1127, thirteen years before the poet was born, the Nuchen Tartars who had set up the kingdom of Chin in northeast China invaded the Sung capital Kaifeng, captured the emperor and many nobles, and overran virtually the whole of north China including Hsin Chi-chi's birth-place Tsinan in present-day Shantung Province. For a century and a half after this China was divided into two parts. The Tartars held the north while in the south the old dynasty continued to rule as Southern Sung.

At the time of Hsin Chi-chi's birth in 1140, the Tartars were still attacking Southern Sung and patriotic generals in the south, supported by the people, were putting up a gallant resistance. But the Southern Sung court in Hangchow was eager to win a respite and, regardless of the sufferings of the people in the north under the domination of Tartar rulers, they signed a humiliating treaty of peace in 1141. The burning question of the time was how to save the people of south China and Chinese civilization from being destroyed by the Tartar hordes and how to liberate the people of northern China.

In 1161, when the Tartar king led his army against the south, the Hans in the north rose in revolt in different parts of the hilly region around Mount Tai in central Shantung. There were two bands of insurgents: one led by a Tsinan peasant named Keng Ching, the other by a young scholar of twenty-one—Hsin Chi-chi. Keng Ching's troops quickly gained popular support and Hsin Chi-chi with his two thousand followers joined them. He himself became Keng Ching's secretary and adviser. The insurgent army then grew so rapidly that the Tartar rule in northern China was shaken and the morale of the invaders undermined. When the Tartar king ordered his forces to cross the Yangtse in a march to the south, his officers revolted and killed him. Hsin Chi-chi proposed to Keng Ching that they should co-operate with Southern Sung and make use of the confusion in the enemy ranks to deal the Tartars a fatal blow. He was

sent south as an envoy of the insurgents to negotiate with the Sung government.

Unfortunately after Hsin Chi-chi's departure an insurgent officer named Chang An-kuo was bribed by the enemy to murder Keng Ching and disband their force or compel it to surrender. The Tartars then appointed Chang An-kuo as the prefect of Chichow in present-day Chuyeh, Shantung. When Hsin Chi-chi returned and learned what had happened, he called for fifty volunteers and galloped off to Chichow. He arrested and bound the traitor Chang An-kuo, surrounded though he was by tens of thousands of men, then rallied thousands of cavalry and led them southwards. They travelled swiftly, not stopping to eat or drink, until they had crossed the Huai River.

The heroic exploits of young Hsin Chi-chi won admiration from all sides and gave the people fresh courage in their struggle against Tartar domination. But the Southern Sung rulers were afraid of these patriotic forces. They relieved Hsin Chi-chi of his command as soon as he reached the south, sending him as a vice-prefect to the garrison post of Kiangyin. His troops, more than ten thousand strong, were treated as refugees and promptly disbanded.

In 1163 Chang Chun led an abortive expedition against the Tartars, after which the party in favour of resistance was dismissed from the Southern Sung government and those who advocated appeasement came into power again. Although Hsin Chi-chi was only a low-ranking official, he came forward courageously to offer advice and analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the appeasement and resistance policies. In 1165 he presented to the throne *Ten Memorials on Resisting the Tartars*, in the preface to which he pointed out that the Southern Sung troops must take the initiative and not "let the enemy decide whether to make peace or to fight"; nor must they alter or abandon the plan to recover lost territory on account of a single reversal. The first three memorials analysed the internal weaknesses of the Tartars and reached the conclusion that the enemy was not to be feared, that his disunity could be utilized. The other seven memorials contained proposals for increasing the strength of the resistance, going over from the defensive to the offensive, seizing opportunities to advance and recover lost land, as well as other specific measures.

In 1170 Hsin Chi-chi wrote another nine memorials called the *Nine Proposals*, which he presented to the prime minister Yu Yun-wen.

After recapitulating the most important of his earlier arguments, he urged that they should not aim at quick results but struggle on despite temporary defeats, that they should take full advantage of the Tartars' weak points and foment discord in the enemy ranks. Moreover, since resistance to the aggressors and the recovery of lost territory vitally affected the fate of the country and its people, he begged the emperor and prime minister not to shirk this task or put personal interest first.

The *Ten Memorials* and the *Nine Proposals* revealed Hsin Chi-chi's grasp of strategy, his patriotism and confidence in victory. They did not meet with the response they deserved, however, for the emperor and prime minister ignored them. But these impassioned arguments gradually became known far and wide, encouraging those patriots who wanted to fight the enemy.

In the first few years after he joined the Southern Sung regime, Hsin Chi-chi served as a minor government official; and even after his abilities were better known and he was regarded as a national hero, he remained a low-ranking civil officer in areas far from the fighting. Some poems in this issue like *I Climb Shanghsin Pavilion in Chienkang* and *Written on the Wall at Chaokou in Kiangsi* date from this period and express his disappointment at not being able to fight for his country. During the thirty-five years between 1172 and 1207, Hsin Chi-chi was twice dismissed from office so that he lived for twenty years in retirement in Shangjao and Chienshan in present-day Kiangsi Province. During this enforced retirement he wrote many poems voicing his discontent and frustration and his dream of wiping out the national disgrace. These poems give a vivid picture of his life and show the gradual maturing of his art. *A Night in Wang's Hut at Poshan, Life in the Village* and *Written for Fun* all belong to this period.

In 1203 the new prime minister Han To-chou decided to increase his prestige by sending an expedition against the Tartars, and he enlisted the help of prominent men for this great enterprise. That summer Hsin Chi-chi was appointed Commissioner of the East Circuit of Chekiang, and in 1204 he became the prefect of Chenkiang. As soon as he took up this post he started preparations for the expedition, sending scouts north into enemy territory to find out all they could about the military strength, strongholds, generals and supplies of the enemy, and enlisting men for the army. However, the prime minister and his followers were rich officials with no experience of

war and the public enthusiasm for the expedition made them confident that it would prove an easy task. Unwilling to share the credit with other people, less than fifteen months after Hsin Chi-chi went to Chenkiang and before he had completed his preparations, they dismissed him on a charge of "rapacity and licence." The aging but still vigorous poet had to return home to live in retirement again. Soon afterwards Han To-chou led the expedition against the Tartars and was thoroughly defeated, just as Hsin Chi-chi had feared. And the poet died in 1207 at the age of sixty-seven without fulfilling his lifelong ambition of helping to wipe out his country's shame.

Hsin Chi-chi wrote many poems in his long life. Only about 620 have been preserved, but these cover a wide range in style and subject-matter. Some express the poet's mood, others describe an incident or expound his philosophy. In tone they vary from gentle and lyrical to tragic and heroic. No other poet of the Sung dynasty wrote so many *tz'u* or poems so rich in content.

Since Hsin Chi-chi was pre-eminently a great patriot and fighter with high ideals, even the verses he wrote for his own amusement were closely linked with political reality and this is a distinctive feature of his work. His passionate hatred of the Nuchen Tartar rulers who occupied north China and his ardent desire to avenge the nation's disgrace gave a vigorous, positive tone to all his writing in different periods, and served to encourage and inspire others, his good friend Chen Liang, for instance, who was a noted scholar and patriot but was not taken seriously by the authorities. When Hsin Chi-chi heard that he had met with misfortune, he wrote *A Poem in a Heroic Vein for Chen Liang* published in this issue. Another poem here was written in the winter of 1188 after he had enjoyed a visit from Chen Liang at his villa in Chienshan. The day after his friend left, Hsin Chi-chi started out after him, hoping to bring him back for a longer stay; but he had to give up the attempt because the path was snow-bound. He spent that night at Chuanhu and was kept awake by the plaintive music of a flute. Then he wrote the poem *To Chen Liang* which reveals his love for his friend and his grief that those in power were following a policy of appeasement detrimental to the nation.

Most members of the Southern Sung ruling clique lived solely for pleasure, and many scholars of that period also led a decadent life. Hsin Chi-chi often attacked such trends of his time. Occasionally he made fun of his own frustrated ambitions or gave vent to his in-

dignation, as in the poem *Written in Jest When a Friend's Impassioned Talk of Achievement and Fame Made me Think Back to My Youth*. He was always deeply concerned over the fate of his country, and inevitably this finds expression in his writing.

Significant too during his terms of office were the great attention he paid to the welfare of the people and the measures he adopted to alleviate their sufferings. Certain of his poems also show his concern for the peasants and his interest in the harvest, whether good or bad, and the villagers' griefs and joys.

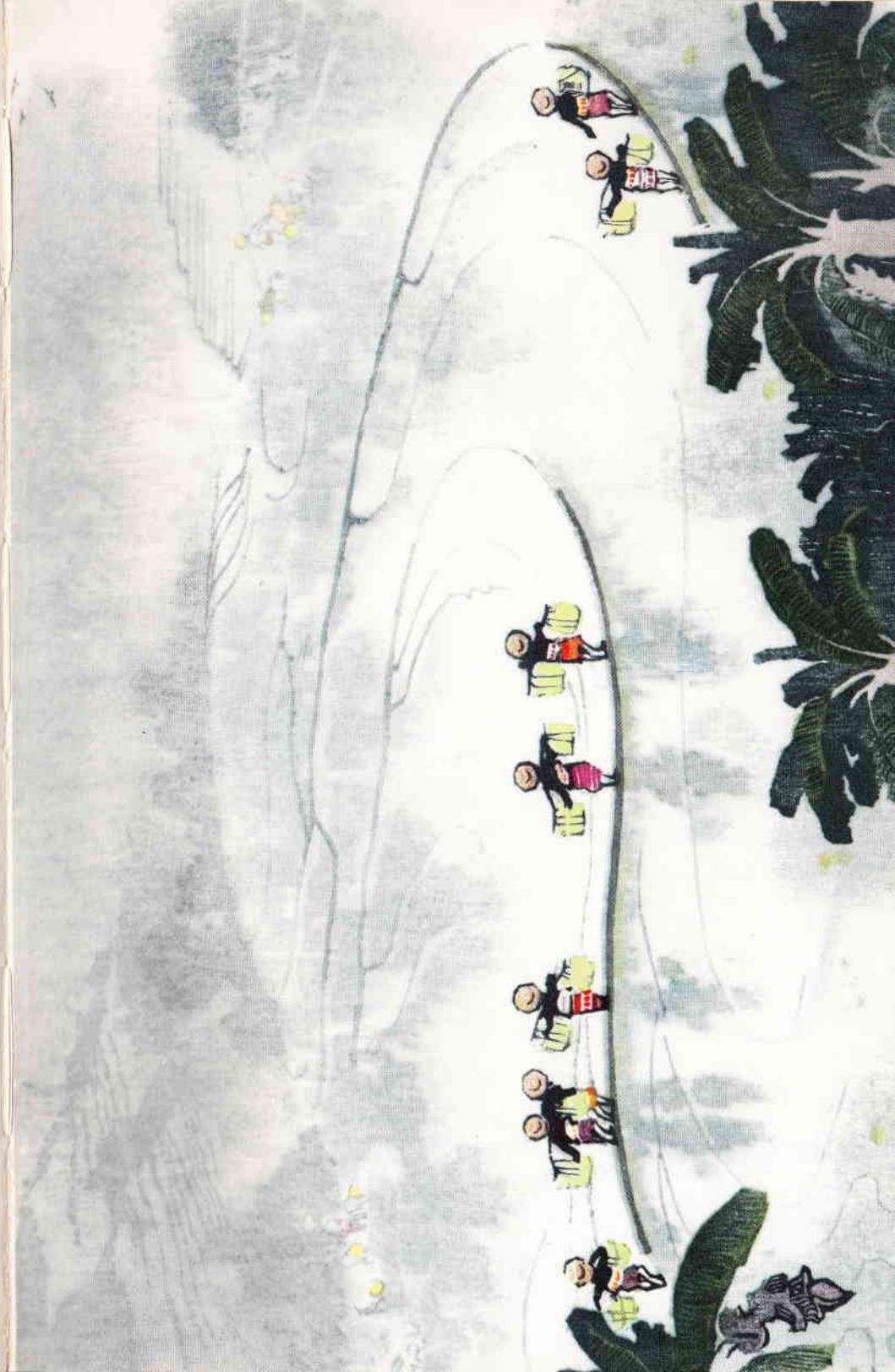
Hsin Chi-chi used the *tz'u* not only to express personal feelings but also to describe natural scenery, relate incidents and put forward opinions. He wrote in different metres with complete mastery and ease. Extensive reading and an excellent memory enabled him to draw freely on earlier works so that a lavish use of classical allusions is another feature of his poetry—one which makes many of his poems untranslatable.

His poems with their realistic content, strong feeling and vigour created a distinctive school of *tz'u* poetry unlike those gentle lyrics which were still in vogue. Even during his lifetime his writing became a model for other patriotic poets.

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*Spring Drizzle* by Tang Chi-hsiang ▶

Tang Chi-hsiang, born in 1940 in Nanhai, Kwangtung Province, graduated from the Canton Institute of Fine Arts in 1962. He is now working in the Foshan Institute of Folk Arts and doing research on woodblock prints of the decorative folk New Year pictures.



*Yang Chen-sheng*

### Three Stories

Yang Chen-sheng, born in Penglai, Shantung Province in 1890, was one of the better-known short-story writers in the twenties, when China's new cultural movement began. He died in Peking on March 7, 1956.

In 1919 his first short stories appeared in *New Tide*, a progressive magazine. Some, such as the *Fisherman*, *Wang the Miller* and *Li Sung's Crime*, described the people's hardships; others, like *One-sided Wedding*, exposed the evils of feudal morality. Like other progressive writers of his time, Yang looked upon literature as a medium for revealing human suffering and an instrument for reforming the old society. He wrote with an economy of language, in an elegant and expressive style. His plots are lively and tightly knit.

Yang's famous short novel, *Yu-chun*, was published in 1925. The heroine Yu-chun, in defiance of her family and social pressure, refused to go through with an arranged marriage. She demands that women have equal status with men. Her rebelliousness against feudal structures was typical of some of the young intellectuals of that time. A number of the short stories which Yang wrote in the middle of the thirties, such as *On the Ramparts of Tsinan* and *A Story of a Wild Island*, paid tribute to those resisting Japanese aggression. After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, he wrote feature articles and essays about the new life and the new men and women of China.

Yang Chen-sheng did educational work for many years. He was a professor and then the head of the College of Arts of Tsinghua University. Later he became the president of Tsingtao University, and finally a professor in Peking University. He wrote many articles on classical Chinese literature.

## One-sided Wedding

Shortly before noon in late autumn a few wispy clouds scudded across the sky and sunlight glared whitely on streets that had been swept clean by the wind. Women and children stood in front of their doorways, animatedly conversing. The wind brought the call of trumpets, clear and mournful.

"See, there they come," said one of the women, craning her neck.

A ragged line of marchers approached, holding banners, followed by a sedan-chair covered with blue felt. A wooden memorial tablet reposed inside. Behind this came another blue felt sedan-chair occupied by a girl of eighteen or nineteen. She was dressed in mourning garments. The ends of a piece of black silk draped over her head dangled to her shoulders. She was very pale. Only her lips had a bit of colour. She sat motionless, staring straight ahead, like a plaster image.

"That's the Chang family's daughter," a woman announced to an old granny, pointing at the second sedan-chair.

"They say the man died only a few months after they got engaged. She never even saw him."

"*Ai*, a nice-looking girl like that. How can her parents let her—" The old granny's remarks were cut short by a spasm of coughing.

"Is it a funeral, ma?" a little boy raised his head and asked his mother.

"Hush your mouth," she chided. "They're bringing home the bride."\*

"Then where's the groom?" the child demanded.

"There, in that first sedan-chair," his mother retorted impatiently. The little boy peered, then gaped. He was about to reply, but his mother had already turned and was talking to a neighbour. Pouting, he dropped his head.

"It's only a wooden tablet," he muttered.

\*In some parts of old China when a couple became engaged and the man died before marriage, the girl nevertheless went through with the wedding ceremony and moved in with his family, where she lived out her life as his widow.

When the procession reached the gate of a large compound, two men wearing long gowns and short jackets came forward and carried the wooden tablet from the first sedan-chair. Two women, dressed in white mourning clothes, helped down the bride. They slowly advanced, the wooden tablet in the lead, the bride in the rear, tied together by a swath of black silk about ten feet long. While the band played dreary music, they stood side by side on a blue carpet—the wooden slab on the left, the girl on the right—and bowed to Heaven and Earth, then to the ancestral shrine, then entered the hall and bowed to the father and mother of the groom. Again with the tablet leading, the bride following, still connected by a length of black silk, they were escorted into the marriage chamber.

Confronting them immediately as they entered was an altar table. On this the groom's memorial tablet was stood upright. A flickering oil lamp, emitting feeble blue flames, was placed before the tablet. A plain white coverlet draped the bronze bedstead by the window. The pillow slips were embroidered with the traditional mandarin duck and drake,\* but in neutral colours.

Late that night when all was still, the bride sat in a chair beside the memorial tablet and stared at the bed. A gust of west wind blew in through the window, causing the lamp flame to dance and emit a cloud of black smoke that rose like a dark shadow. Outside, the leaves of the bamboo trees rustled noisily.

One afternoon towards the end of the following spring, the bride awakened from her nap and strolled into a rear garden. The air was laden with the fragrance of flowers. Her limbs felt deliciously soft and relaxed. Willow fluff rolled itself into balls on the ground. Startled butterflies rose in pairs from amid the blossoms and flitted by her face. Idly, she picked a few willow tendrils and sat down beside a stone in the rock garden to weave something. But she couldn't think of what.

She gazed at the peonies. They had shed half their petals. Those that remained clung precariously to their calyxes, a prey to any passing breeze. A couple of sparrows nested in the fallen petals, preening their feathers and billing and cooing in the light of the setting sun. Two squirrels jumped down from a branch, and the birds took

\*They symbolize love as they never separate from each other.

off with a whirl of wings that sent several of the petals flying. Chirruping, the squirrels also dashed away.

Coming back to reality, the girl discovered that she had broken the willow tendrils into bits. They lay scattered on the ground. She rose and straightened her clothes. Listlessly, she wandered back to her room. Her face felt as if it were burning. She looked at herself in the mirror. Her face was splotched with pink and white. Her cheekbones were like crimson flowers. She stepped back a few paces and sat down on a chair. Dully, she gazed at the wooden memorial tablet.

The next morning she did not emerge from her room, even at the hour sunlight filled the windows. A maidservant several times brought water for her morning ablutions, but the girl's door remained locked. Inside, there was no sound. The maid became suspicious and peeked in through the window. What she saw frightened her speechless. Wide-eyed, she ran to the chamber of Madame Li, mother of the groom. Only after some time was she able to blurt: "The young mistress has hanged herself."

1920

## Wang the Miller

It was a hot summer afternoon, shortly after the midday meal. The shadows of the trees lay upon the ground. Not a breath of air stirred. In the oppressively close atmosphere the earth appeared to have stopped breathing. A burning awesome sun, slowly creeping across the sky, seemed to have melted the entire world. It was frightfully quiet. There was no movement, no sound, anywhere. Grass and flowers drooped. The usually noisy birds were quiet. Only the ants had no fear of the heat; they scurried back and forth across the scorching earth. And bees buzzed diligently around the flowers. In the northeast corner of the garden stood a tumble-down thatched shack. Through the rotted frame of its window the heavy rumbling of a mill roller could be heard, breaking the death-like silence.

A man in his thirties was grinding wheat. Rivulets of sweat ran down his sallow cheeks, flour powdered his matted hair like frosty

grass in autumn. Sweat-drenched blue denim trousers, worn through at the knees, clung to his legs. He had been milling ever since his early teens, when he lost both his parents. At first the work had made him dizzy. The day seemed too long. His legs were so stiff he couldn't walk. Later, he got used to it. He became as mechanical as those two mute insensible millstones.

The stones were ground down several inches. Wang's dropping sweat wore pits in the earthen floor, his steps tramped out a groove, whiskers sprouted on his cheeks and around his mouth like weeds. But except for a neighbour's spotted dog which trotted over occasionally, wagging its tail for a bit of left-over food, Wang's only companions were those cold hard millstones.

The shadows at the foot of the yard wall gradually lengthened. A cow, lying beneath a tree, lowed for her calf. Baby rooks in a nest stretched their necks and opened their mouths wide, calling their mother home. The sun, pressing on the western mountain tops, reddened half the sky. Wang emerged from the dim mill shed, patted the flour from his hair and walked to the stream on the left for a wash. Then he sat on the bank and watched the spotted dog romping with a black one. The Changs' little boy, Prosperity, his hands black with mud, popped out from behind a tree and ran up to Wang.

"Mama wants you to grind some wheat for her. Will you have time tomorrow?"

"Yes, I'll do it first thing in the morning," Wang replied. The child smiled.

"Mama's going to make me some fritters. The day after tomorrow is Double Seventh."\* The little boy ran over to where the dogs were sporting, flung his arms around the black one's neck, and wrestled with them gaily. Then he got up and dashed north towards a vegetable garden, the two dogs racing behind him. "I've got to call papa home for dinner," he shouted over his shoulder. Soon Chang appeared, his hoe on his shoulder, Prosperity trotting before him. The boy stopped and waited for his father, raising his small face to ask some questions while tugging Chang by the hand towards the western end of the village.

\*The seventh day of the seventh month in lunar calendar when the heavenly lovers the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid are reunited in the sky.

Wang watched, entranced. The child's smiling face was adorable, his liveliness seemed to bring everything to life. The scene made a deep impression on Wang, it stirred his imagination. After he sat musing a while, Wang wandered back to his shack. Something evidently was on his mind, for he couldn't eat. He lay motionless on his bed, his eyes open. Now the heavy earth was mantled in darkness. Except for the hum of the insects outside the window and the far-off barking of dogs, all the world was still.

It seemed to Wang that he was in the mill shed. But he wasn't pushing the roller—a big donkey was doing that. All Wang did was feed in the wheat and sweep up the flour. The long-faced donkey, its big ears erect, practically flew around the millstones. Flour poured out very quickly. Wang observed this happily. A voice behind him asked:

"Papa, aren't you going to eat? Mama has everything ready." Wang turned around. There stood a five-year-old boy. It was his son, a somewhat better-looking boy than the child named Prosperity whom he had seen during the day. Wang picked him up and kissed him. He was so happy his lips trembled.

"Are you milling flour for my fritters?" the child queried, wrapping his arms around Wang's neck.

"Yes, yes, a whole string of them, and on the end we'll hang a small crab-apple. How will that be?" Wang replied. The child laughed delightedly, revealing a mouthful of even white teeth.

With the little boy in his arms, Wang came out of the mill shed. His wife, a young woman in her early twenties, was busily setting a table. The eldest daughter of the Huang family on the west side of the village, Wang thought to himself. His wife pointed to the table. "Hurry up and eat," she urged. "The food's getting cold." The sight of the steaming platters of stewed beef and cucumbers and freshly made bread made Wang terribly hungry. The meal was delicious, but the more he ate the hungrier he felt. Seated at the end of the table, the little boy stretched forth his hands for bread, and opened his small mouth for vegetables. Wang was happy beyond words. He gazed lovingly at his son through the tears that misted his eyes.

There was a flurry of advancing footsteps and his neighbour Chang burst into the room. "Prosperity," Chang shouted. "I've been looking for you all over. So this is where you are." He picked up the child and rushed out. Struggling, the little boy extended his

arms towards Wang and cried: "Papa, stop him. I don't want to go."

For a moment, Wang was paralysed with fright. Just as he was hurrying after Chang to snatch the child back, he awakened, his heart beating wildly. The room was pitch dark and deathly still. He could hear only a cock crowing in the distance and the hungry rumbling of his own stomach.

Staring, he lay motionless. Only when the paper window-pane had turned white and the sparrows twittered in the trees did he rise listlessly and resume his pacing around the millstones. But today he was different. His mind was troubled. He walked slowly. At times, without realizing it, he stopped. At times, he suddenly quickened his steps. Instead of its usual even drone, his milling sounded sporadic—now fast, now slow. Perhaps he was thinking of the child of his dreams, or of his donkey. In any event, he grew thinner by the day.

Late one autumn afternoon, when the dying sun was turning the piles of leaves in the yard a golden yellow, and the crickets in the thatched shack were chirping intermittently to their companions, Wang lay on his bed. He hadn't eaten for several days. When he first caught the flu he went on with his work, though he burned with fever. Later, his legs and back ached so painfully he had no choice but to part company with his cold, hard millstones. Though he lay on his bed, no one brought him anything to eat or drink. The dog of the neighbour across the way thought of him sometimes and ambled over once or twice. When he saw that Wang was lying down, he put his paws up on the bed, wagged his tail, barked a greeting, then trotted out again.

Wang had frequent bouts of dizziness. Finally, the room seemed to light up. He saw his donkey pulling the mill roller, and there was his wife, cooking. His little boy was playing in the yard, a smile on his darling face, holding out his hands and calling him. Wang also smiled, and hurried out to where his child was.

## Li Sung's Crime

The night of the sacrifice to the Kitchen God, the wind buffeted the paper window-panes with snow. There wasn't a soul on the streets. The icy blue-white sheen of the snow reflected only the images of a few bare willows by the roadside, trembling in the frigid wind.

Head down, Li Sung plodded home from town. For more than half a month now he had been unable to find work. As he walked, he thought of his widowed sister-in-law, his niece and his two nephews. They all were completely dependent upon him. It didn't matter that he would go hungry if he couldn't get a job. But when the children cried for food and his sister-in-law wiped her tears behind his back, *hai!* The year was soon coming to a close, and everyone was busily preparing for the New Year Festival. But what joy would his departed brother's poor children have?

Li Sung's eyes went dark a moment. Was it hunger again? If he hadn't leaned against a tree, he might have fallen into the snow. He took a grip on himself and continued walking.

His sister-in-law and the children were waiting for him impatiently when he got home. As soon as he entered the door, the kids flocked around him joyously, like fledglings around a swallow returning with food. They vied with each other to brush the snow from his clothes. His sister-in-law was about to query whether he had found any work, but when she saw the expression on his face, she didn't have the courage.

Instead she asked if he had eaten. Noticing how closely the children were watching him as they waited for his answer, he said that he had. The kids ran to the stove and took down the bowl of rice gruel they had been keeping for him. There before the stove, each taking a sip in turn like kittens, they finished it off. Li Sung sighed. He went to his own room, lay down on his bed and slept.

When he rose the next morning, the sky had cleared. A red sun was shining on the snow-covered peaks in the west. At the foot of the mountains, trains of donkeys were carrying brushwood into the town. He could hear the faint tinkle of their bells. When he observed how little firewood was left by their stove and saw that only half a bowl of rice flour remained on their table, Li Sung became a bit panicky. He paced the floor a moment, then left.

He didn't return till after the noonday meal. His expression was grim. He strode about the room like a madman. None of the family dared ask any questions. Finally he lay down on his bed, facing the wall, and seemed to sleep. He rose suddenly at lamp-lighting time. Going without a word to the corner of the southern wall of their yard, he pulled free a big stick from a collapsed gourd trellis, and went out.

Before he had gone very far, he stopped. Lowering his head, he pondered. Then he turned and dejectedly trudged home. At the compound gate, he saw the shadows of the family on the paper window-panes. His sister-in-law was stroking her children's heads with one hand and wiping her eyes with the other. Li Sung just couldn't face them. Again he turned. Carrying his big stick, he hurried to the highway and hid himself beneath a bridge.

By the following night, Li Sung was in jail. A bright red light in the corridor cast thick shadows of the bars upon the wall. Other prisoners sprawled in grotesque positions on the floor of the big cell, sleeping with their mouths open, yellow teeth fiendishly bared. Li Sung's experiences of the previous day and night seemed but a dream. It wasn't until this moment, lying like the dead in this tomb of a jail, that he could review the events with any clarity.

The first one to come by the bridge had been an old man. Li Sung had sighed and let him pass. The second one was a fellow in his prime. Li Sung had sprung forth and snatched for his purse. But several days of hunger had weakened him. While they were struggling, Li Sung fainted. When he came to, he was in the county courtroom. The magistrate questioned him sternly and sentenced him to five years in prison.

Five years. In that time what would happen to his sister-in-law, his nephews, his niece? Li Sung remembered as if it were yesterday the scene three years ago, when his elder brother was dying. Lying on his bed, his brother had gazed tearfully at the wife and children he was leaving behind. He clasped Li Sung's hand in an icy grip, trying vainly to speak. Li Sung understood. His brother was pointing at his wife and kids when he breathed his last.

As he recalled this, Li Sung wept, his tears trickling to the cold stone floor beneath his head. Gradually, he fell into a stupor. He seemed to see a hole in the corner of the cell, and he wriggled through it. Sure enough, he was outside the jail. He ran all the way home. Outside the door, he stopped and listened, but he couldn't hear a

sound. Entering, he found his sister-in-law stretched out on the floor, as if she were dead. The children were lying upon their mother's body, apparently faint from weeping. He knelt down on one knee and raised up the children. When they recognized him, they threw their arms around his neck and cried. Also crying, he held them to his chest and stroked their hair.

Suddenly, he felt a punch on the head. Vaguely, he heard someone swear and growl: "He grabs people even in his sleep." Li Sung opened his eyes and saw a dark face surmounted by a mop of hair half a foot long. Eyes as big as the sightless sockets of a skeleton were glaring at him venomously. Li Sung realized that he was still in jail.

1925

*Translated by Sidney Shapiro*

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*Plum Blossoms* by Kuan Shan-yueh ▶

For details about the artist see the article on p.108.



## An Adventure in the Forest

Some time ago, I went to Sian on business and stayed in a guest house in the city. One day returning to my room after work I switched on the wireless. The news of the U.S. imperialists' aggression against Cuba had just been broadcast when I heard someone outside the door shout: "Who the hell do they think they are?" I pushed open the door and found a group of people had gathered outside, some sitting, some standing. One of them, a tall man with greying hair, stared at me curiously. His face looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. I racked my brain for some time before I remembered that he had been one of my schoolmates in the Anti-Japanese Political and Military Academy in Yen-an during the war of resistance. "Ah, it's you!" We both ejaculated at the same time but neither remembered the other's name.

"Meeting an old friend in a strange city" is one of the four delights described in a poem of the Tang dynasty and ours was a meeting after an absence of more than twenty years. So I was dragged to his room and as we went along we recalled each other's names and

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Wo Jan, a prose writer and art critic, was born in Hsuehchow, Kiangsu Province in 1916. In 1938 he went to Yen-an, centre of the revolution, and since then has been working in the field of literature and arts in the revolutionary ranks.

former nicknames. Our laughter eased our feeling of indignation. And the people around laughed with us though they had no idea of the reason for our mirth.

It was only natural for two old friends meeting again to bombard each other with questions. There was so much to say that we did not know where to start. So we just let the conversation take its own course. First we related what we had been doing, then the whereabouts and fate of our mutual friends, finally we talked about our life in the Anti-Japanese Political and Military Academy.... Common memories of the past made us feel very close.

In the autumn of 1938 I arrived at Yen-an from the Kuomintang controlled area to study in the Anti-Japanese Political and Military Academy. I had come to the border area to do educational work but my travelling companions were set on learning military tactics and wanted me to enter the academy with them. To tell the truth, I had never meant to be a soldier. But as we had gone through thick and thin together on the way, and I thought it might be useful to learn something about fighting in time of war, I took the same course. At heart, however, I still wanted to teach.

I found many things in the academy hard—the strict army life for one thing. But philosophy, political economy, the history of the Chinese revolution and the building up of the Party were courses which attracted me immensely. Many things utterly unknown to me before stimulated my interest and exhilarated me.

Like a starving man I was eager to swallow all this new knowledge in one gulp; but much of our time was taken up by routine drills and practice. I felt more and more impatient with our organized and disciplined life: roll calls, small group meetings, field drill.... This “monotony” was not something I had expected in Yen-an.

It was at such a time that I made a new acquaintance.

Ten years my senior and taller than me by a head, with his unruly beard he was every inch a peasant. But he knew a great deal about military strategy. I can hardly describe the fascination it had for him. He seemed to like nothing better than to shoulder a gun from morning till night.

We had nothing in common as far as family origin, character and interests were concerned. It was chance that brought us together. One day it was raining cats and dogs and my schoolmates were all

studying in caves which were common dwellings by the hillside in that part of the country. It was my turn to go downhill to fetch our food. Wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat and carrying two buckets suspended from a shoulder pole, I inched my way down the slippery hillside with the aid of a stick like a rickety old man. Half-way down, crash! I slipped and fell flat on my back. My shoulder pole was thrown thirty feet away and one bucket rolled to the edge of the precipice. I was wet all over, even my eyebrows were dripping water. Behind me I heard somebody squelching down through the mud. I turned and saw a big tall man, also with two buckets, approaching. He pulled me to my feet in one jerk, picked up my shoulder pole and placed it in my hands. Then he retrieved my bucket in spite of the slippery incline and placed it before me saying:

“Just look at you, you’re like a muddy buddha.”

I burst out laughing at the sight I must look.

“Thanks,” I hastily added.

“Never mind. Keep your harness on.”

Ah, he was pulling my leg talking to me as if I were a donkey. I couldn’t help thinking how rude he was! After all I hadn’t asked for his help, what right had he to make a fool of me? But before I could think of a retort, he said:

“The others are waiting with empty stomachs. You’d better get a move on.”

I felt very uncomfortable but I could hardly lose my temper. I wanted to go on by myself rather than remain with someone who looked down upon me. But when he saw I did not budge, he snatched up my shoulder pole and raced down the hill with all four buckets. I had to lurch along behind him, anger burning inside me.

When we reached the kitchen he got a basin of water, rinsed the muddied buckets and filled them with rice and vegetables. He asked for two squares of clean cloth to cover up the buckets. Hooking them to my shoulder pole, he put the load on my shoulder and said, “Now, let’s go.”

Keeping quiet on purpose, I tried to follow behind him. But he stopped short to let me pass. It dawned on me then that he wanted me to go first so that he could give me a hand if I should fall again.

I slipped twice on the way and would have fallen if not for his steadying hand behind me each time. When we arrived on the hill top I still said nothing. He saw me all the way to my cave and

introduced himself with a smile just before he left. "My name is 'Tank,' leader of the eighth squad of the fourth district. Drop in to see me when you have time."

*Hai!* What a queer bird he was! He seemed to take everything in his stride and thought nothing of what had happened just now. I found him hard to fathom. Besides, "Tank" was not a proper name for anybody. But after a few days I thought no more of him.

Winter arrived in no time at all. Spring and autumn in Yenan are especially short while summer and winter are extremely long. As soon as we took off our padded clothes we were going about in shirt sleeves, and we changed our summer clothes for winter ones just as quickly. Soon after the Moon Festival in mid-autumn it was time for the various organizations to send men into the mountains to prepare their own supply of charcoal for the winter. There were special people to do this in government offices, but in our academy it was a task undertaken by students who usually volunteered for the Charcoal Brigade.

The romantic life of a woodcutter deep in the mountains and the much talked of winter scenes in northern Shensi appeared most fascinating to an intellectual like me, a stranger to these parts. So I volunteered. I was not accepted at first, for the school authorities thought me lacking in stamina. They agreed in the end at my repeated insistence.

A week later we were in the mountains. It was colder here than on the plain. The sky was overcast and dismal, looking like snow. We were immediately divided into teams of three or four, each of which was to camp at a work site chosen beforehand. The mountains in northern Shensi were not thickly wooded. Most of them had only shrubs. Our teams were scattered at a fair distance from each other so that we would not denude any one part of trees. Each team had to work on its own.

The teams were drawn up so that their strength would be fairly equally matched, and I was assigned to the last team and told to go to the woods on a hill top very far away. On my way to headquarters to fetch tools I ran into the tall man I had met in the rain. Carrying axes, cooking pots and other equipment on his back, he said to me with a grin:

"No need for you to go now. Just follow me, I am your team leader."

So I turned and followed him, my knapsack and rations on my back. We walked for about ten *li* and stopped at the highest hill top within sight.

"We'll stop here," he said. "Shouldn't be too close to the woods. We must watch out for fire."

I put down my knapsack without a word. I was ready to listen to orders. He put down the things on his back and walked up to me.

"There are only the two of us in our team," he said. "Because I was once a charcoal burner they decided to give me only one assistant. That's how we've come to be together again."

"All right. I'll do whatever you say," I told him.

"You start digging while I chop some wood. We'll start by building a stove and a shed to live in. You'll look after things at home, stack the wood, look after the kiln and cook our meals while I go out to cut wood. Any objection?"

I laughed by way of answer. What objection could I have? We would see later. After a day's labour, we finished building our little shed with my blanket folded to serve as a door. We built a stove inside the shed and put our cooking pot on it. He helped me to find a muddy spring nearby and pointed out to me the path to the woods.

"It will be snowing heavily in a few days and living here will be much colder than in a cave. The road is more slippery too. So be more careful, scholar, and don't tumble all over the hill like last time."

The temperature did drop after a few days. One afternoon it rained and hailed. Pretty soon snow-flakes were fluttering down. I found it very hard to light the damp wood in the stove but managed finally to cook some millet. I also made two bowls of soup with the salt we had brought. After a hearty meal, Tank and I arranged the wood and twigs we had accumulated in neat rows in our kiln and covered them up with leaves and earth leaving a ventilation hole. Then we plastered the top and the sides with mud and made a vent for the smoke.

Tank fired our first kiln of charcoal.

I returned to our shed wanting to put down my feelings about this strange new life in the mountains. I opened my diary and wrote:

The few days spent cutting wood in the mountains have already left deep impressions on my mind. We have built from scratch a little home in this uninhabited

mountain. Everything depends on our own work, proving the truth that labour creates everything. The sight of Tank's thick black beard and his tattered padded coat, torn during his trips to the woods, reminds me of Robinson Crusoe lost on a desert island. As for me, I am his man Friday. No, there are many Robinson Crusoes on this hill top at this moment, and of course I am not the only Friday....

It was getting too dark to write. The mountain people did not have the habit of working under a lamp. They just lay down to sleep at this hour. I was suddenly aware of Tank's absence and wanted to find out what he was doing. But as soon as I lifted the door flap I was nearly knocked down by a gust of wind and snow which rushed in like water from a hose. The howling wind which followed shook heaven and earth as if it would soon tear down our little shed. But far from being intimidated, I was even more eager to go out and find my companion. Bracing myself I rushed out of the shed. The next instant I was dazzled by the miraculous sight that met my eyes.

Never before in my life had I seen anything like the snow-storm on this deserted mountain in northern Shensi. Heaven and earth seemed to have merged together, a sight unimaginable in densely populated cities. The mountain peaks stretching into the distance were joined into a boundless line of white, vaster and more extensive than the rippling sea. The undulating folds of the hills shimmered in the vast sea of clouds like a myriad silvery waves. Large flakes of snow danced in the fierce north wind as if two jade dragons were fighting up and down the sky, shedding scales which rained down to carpet the earth....

I was lost in this poetic scene when suddenly I spied a small black dot on the snow-covered path moving in my direction. It was like a lonely boat tossed on angry waves, now appearing, now lost from sight. I wondered what living creature would venture out in such weather. The black dot drew nearer and toiling up our hill assumed the shape of a man whom I recognized, the companion and team leader I was looking for.

"Still not in bed?" he asked, shaking the snow from his coat. "I've been to headquarters to report that we've fired our first kiln of charcoal and to see whether they have any directions for us. By the way, I have brought back our rations for the next ten days."

His actions puzzled me. What if we had lit our kiln? Was it necessary to go and report it on a stormy night like this? Before I could say anything he produced something from his pouch and waved it before my eyes.

"Look, scholar, see what I've brought you!"

When I drew nearer and found that it was a small oil-lamp I was at a loss for words. This man was certainly hard to understand. It was an adventure in itself to go out on a night like this but he chose such a time to go and get me a lamp. I was deeply touched, but did not know how to thank him.

"I heard you tossing about, unable to sleep. I dare say you're not used to turning in early, and I can see that you like to read; you've brought so many books along.... So I told our brigade leader who agreed to give us a lamp. He's only allowed us half an ounce of oil though, and it is to last at least ten days." He paused a little before he went on, "I want to ask you something, scholar. I hadn't much schooling and I know very little. If you will tell me what you read in books, I'll be able to pick up some theoretical knowledge too...."

"All right, I will certainly help you." I was moved. "As long as you don't look down upon me as a petty bourgeois."

"Of course not," he laughed boisterously. "If that was what I thought we wouldn't be in the same team."

The snow continued to fall. In our shed, I read several sections of Chairman Mao's *On the Protracted War*\* to Tank, who listened attentively and nodded from time to time. When I reached the section "Fighting for Permanent Peace" he broke in, "What you have said so far sounds very good and absolutely right. But I doubt whether there is any such thing as permanent peace."

"In the future, I meant," I argued.

"I don't think we can lay aside our guns even in the future. The imperialists will never leave you alone."

"You are right," I said. "Perhaps I didn't make it clear enough just now. The direct aim of war is to wipe out imperialism; when imperialism is finished we will have permanent peace."

\*This series of lectures delivered by Chairman Mao Tse-tung in May 1938 at the Association for the Study of the Anti-Japanese War in Yen-an is included in the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. In these lectures Chairman Mao refuted certain people's wrong theory of national subjugation and that of a quick victory on the war. He also explained why this war must be a protracted one.

Our discussion ended there. I discovered that this man whom I had looked upon as a lover of arms on the drill ground was not so unfathomable after all. He had his own ideas about things, but being more practical than I, he did not waste time on idle thoughts the way I did. And that night I learned about his past. Ten years previously he had joined the Red Army's guerrillas in his native place and when the War of Resistance Against Japan broke out he fought against the invaders. Now he was studying in Yen-an, though he was no longer an inexperienced student like myself. After graduation he would be going back to the front.

Time slipped by unnoticed as we talked. Tank suddenly discovered that the oil in the lamp was fast dwindling. He blew out the lamp without more ado, lamenting, "This is bad, we have broken the rules the very first day. The oil won't last us five days if we go on this way. Better turn in now."

I groped to my "bed" in utter darkness. Bed was a pallet of dry branches covered with leaves. My heartfelt admiration went to the unknown fighters against the cold who had cleverly thought up such warm bedding for people like us. Naturally, real bedding was not to be had and what I'm talking about was only a way to keep those who had no bedding warm. The method was to take off your padded coat and wrap it over your body, then pull your padded trousers down to cover your feet and tie the legs up with your belt. In this way your whole body was covered. Your shoes and cap served as a pillow. This provided comfortable bedding for all the fighters on the cold, bleak northwest plateau.

Both of us slept soundly that night. Usually a dreamer, I dreamt that night that the Japanese had been driven out of China and I was in a big city where all the people were celebrating our victory with posters pasted everywhere to welcome the Chinese Communist Party and the Eighth Route Army. Then I seemed to be lying on the soft sand on the beach near my old home, feeling indescribably warm and comfortable. . . .

Still half asleep I was roused by a strange wild howling. At first I took it for the raging of the storm and ignored it. But the noise went on until finally I sat up and listened carefully.

A faint glimmer of light coming in from a slit in the door fell on Tank's bed which was empty. I was alarmed and hurried out to see what had happened. The wind had died down. The strong

glare from the snow blinded my eyes at first but soon I saw that it was already dawn. Somebody was panting hoarsely nearby, it seemed. I followed the sound to the back of our shed and saw Tank standing above the pit we had dug, belabouring something with a club. At sight of me he shouted:

"Come quick, scholar, come and look at this huge 'Japanese military lord' we've got here."

I ran over. A beast, big as a calf and plastered with snow and mud, lay in the pit. The thick steam from its nostrils reminded me of the deity Cheng Lun\* who emitted two shafts of white light from his nostrils. One of its hind legs must have been hurt in the fall, for though it struggled desperately it couldn't get on its feet.

"What a joke! Instead of staying in his blockhouse on such a snowy night, this 'lord' had to come and try to seize our grain. Now he's fallen into our 'tunnel.' Serve him right."

The beast was a big boar, a dull, furtive light in its beady eyes, its wounded leg trembling rather pathetically.

Tank kept on clubbing the boar, which tried in vain to dodge his blows. Its small eyes blinked as if in mute appeal.

"You bastard!" cursed Tank. "How dare you come raiding under my very nose? Just wait, I'll finish you off." He lashed its head with a branch.

"Why go on beating it?" I inquired.

"Don't you know that boars destroy crops? This is one of the peasants' worst enemies."

"But what's the use of beating it?"

"There's worse coming to it than a beating. I'll cut it up presently and we'll boil ourselves a leg for a feast."

"I don't think you should kill it here. Why not hand it over to headquarters?" I suggested.

"Hand it over alive? Are you going to carry this thing, heavy as a stone roller, all by yourself? Its leg may be wounded, but its teeth are still sharp. My plan is to slice it into two halves and carry it to headquarters in two trips."

"No!" I protested, looking at the pleading eyes of the "lord" who seemed to have understood. "There are only two of us and so much

\*A character in the classical Chinese novel *Canonization of the Gods*.

to be done. We're not butchers, it would take us a long time to cut it up. Why not ask headquarters to send someone down to take it away?"

"They have no hands to spare either. When I left yesterday they were just getting ready to go out and inspect the work of the different teams," Tank replied.

"That's even better. They can take this thing along when they come to our team," I argued. "It's wounded in the hind leg and the pit is deep. The beast can't possibly escape."

I succeeded in convincing Tank in the end. That day we worked hard preparing our second kiln while the wounded "lord" groaned in our "prisoners' camp."

No one came from headquarters the following day. As we had to collect more faggots before the snow melted I went out with Tank to cut wood. We came home with our last bundle of wood at dusk. Tank led the way but I lagged behind to pick up some small twigs for our cooking stove. As soon as I climbed up the hillock I saw a very much flustered Tank coming towards me.

"The 'lord' has escaped. It's all because of your soft heart, scholar! Now we are homeless," he panted, out of breath.

"What has happened?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Go look for yourself."

Throwing down my bundle, I ran at top speed to our camp. There was only a heap of sticks and leaves scattered over the place where our shed had stood; all our bowls were broken, and our belongings and grain littered the ground. . . . The top of our kiln was pitted with holes and no smoke rose from it. One side of the pit had caved in, and it was empty. The place looked like a village ransacked by a detachment from the Japanese Imperial Army.

I hung my head and leaned despondently against our wood pile, feeling at a loss.

"I will track it down," I mumbled to myself.

"Oh, confound it, how can you find it?" Tank retorted coldly, walking over to me. "Once it gets into the woods you won't even get a glimpse of its shadow."

Darkness was descending. Tank and I sat face to face on a heap of wood and made a bonfire which lit up his solemn face. We were both silent. Only the damp branches sputtered in the fire.

"It was all my fault, team leader. Please criticize me severely." At last I broke the oppressive silence.

"It's enough that you know your mistake. Why should I criticize you? A man with your education should be able to criticize himself," he said.

"What shall we do now?" I still felt heavy at heart and his tolerance did not make my sense of guilt any easier to bear.

"What shall we do? Is there any need to ask? We will have to pitch in and work hard so as not to lag behind the other teams. But I won't let that beast get off so easily. Just wait and see." He stood up right away and started to mend the kiln.

We had no supper that night and slept in the open with our clothes on. As a matter of fact neither of us did more than doze. In the next two days, we rebuilt our camp on the trampled ruins and once again set up our shed and stove. We dug another kiln, stacked wood inside, sealed it with mud, and left a hole for ventilation. Soon we had made up for lost time. By now I was doing the same work as Tank and was just as skilful at it.

At supper on the third day Tank asked me quietly, "Do you think the 'Japanese lord' will come back, scholar?"

"I doubt it," I said. "It has suffered once at our hands. Don't you think it has learned its lesson?"

"No!" Tank retorted. "You're wrong. The trouble is it never learns. Greed is part of a wild beast's nature. Especially since it didn't get much out of us here last time, I think it's sure to come back."

"I hope it does," I said doubtfully. "And this time I'll do whatever you tell me to."

"That'll be fine. Today's the third day since it escaped. Now the mountains are all snowed up, it won't be able to get food anywhere else. Boars can't live long without eating. I'm expecting it to call on us again very soon. I'll go to headquarters and borrow the brigade leader's rifle. Tonight we'll stage an ambush."

I was greatly cheered and promptly said: "This time we must finish it off. If you can kill it in one shot, so much the better. If not, let me tackle it."

"Very good. I'm surprised to hear that even you, a bookworm, want to take up the butcher's knife." Tank laughed, patting me on the shoulder.

Tank did indeed borrow a .38 gun from headquarters. He told me to wear my padded tunic with its white lining turned outwards. Later that evening he told me to cook a pan of millet with the lid off

so that the enticing aroma would spread in the tranquil night. Holding the gun, Tank crouched down behind a snow drift, making me stay behind him on a pile of dry wood to his right. He had handed me a heavy club with which to stop the beast if Tank's shot didn't kill it outright.

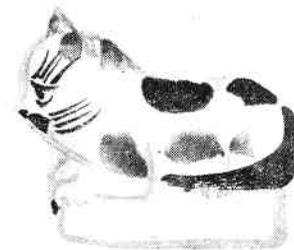
That night, the new moon was slender as the arched eyebrow of a girl and surrounded by only a few twinkling stars. I could see everything distinctly in the boundless silver world around us. It was about ten when a big black thing shambled into sight in the distance, halting deliberately every few steps as if tracking the good smell emanating from our side. Before long, heavy panting announced the arrival of the "lord." When its clumsy body appeared about a hundred metres from us, I longed to signal to Tank and alert him, but he lay motionless and silent with his back to me. The beast came nearer and nearer until I could practically see its small, blinking eyes and protruding tusks. I was so impatient that I wanted to urge Tank to take action at once, but he remained still. Another moment passed and I heard the boar crunching the snow. A dozen steps more and its snout would poke into our shed! At that very moment—bang, bang! two shots rang out in succession and Tank's bullets embedded themselves in the beast's chest before it knew where the shooting came from. Bellowing with pain, it charged forward and butted its head against the wood pile. After staggering a few steps it slumped to the ground. It was still struggling desperately to get on its feet when, I jumped swiftly down and clubbed it on the head. One last shuddering breath accompanied by a nervous twitch of the limbs told us that we had finished it off.

It was now dawn. Without pausing to rest, we carried out Tank's plan for disposing of the "lord." Having no experience at all of this sort of thing, I could only serve as Tank's assistant and boil water or do odd jobs. We handed over eighty per cent of the meat to headquarters and cooked a big pot of boar's flesh for ourselves. That same day we finished burning our first batch of charcoal after the trouble, so we held a feast to celebrate two victories. Tasting this rare dish for the first time in my life, I thought that nothing in the world could be more delicious.

Twenty-five years have passed since then. During this period, both of us have gained new and valuable experience. After my

graduation, I took Tank's advice and asked to go to the front to serve in the army. Later on I really shouldered a gun and went to the battle-field, only my job was to do political work. My old comrade-in-arms and team leader, Colonel Tien Keh (Tank) stayed on in the army. He fought many a battle, took part in some famous campaigns against the enemy, and was once wounded. After fighting on the Korean battle-field he studied in a Party school. When I met him in Sian this time, he had been transferred to work in the diplomatic service.

*Translated by Yu Fan-chin*



*Ko Ling*

## When Characters Come to Life

Man is the hub of life and also of art. The most perfect form of artistic generalization is the creation of typical characters.

To create a character calls for generalization. The better the generalization, the more typical its significance. But the soul of a typical figure is a vivid individuality, without which there can be no typicalness.

An author writing about people needs to become familiar with many people. To write about a worker or peasant, he must get to know a great many workers and peasants. Lu Hsun speaking of his experience in writing said, "My characters were often a mixture of a mouth from Chekiang, a face from Peking and clothes from Shansi." Then there is Gorky's well-known dictum that a writer must absorb the special features of the habits, interests, conversation and manners of scores or even hundreds of workers, tradesmen and officials, and

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Ko Ling, born in 1909, is a well-known writer. He also writes film scripts, of which the most popular ones are *For Peace*, *Corruption* and *Night Inn*. This article as well as *Truth, Imagination and Invention* published in *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1963 are taken from a series of critical articles he wrote recently.

embody these in a similar character to achieve typicalness. Tolstoy pointed out that the writer must observe many people of the same kind in order to create a definite type. Balzac argued that a typical character was one in which were concentrated the features of many more or less similar people, and that this served as the model of a certain type. The similarity of these great writers' views proves the importance of the method of generalization.

A writer or artist can only generalize concrete, tangible objects, he cannot sum up abstract ideas. The writer's mind should be a well-stocked storehouse, not the empty wallet of a gambler who must trust to luck to win. Personality is something integrated and alive and, speaking about the problem of the typical, Balzac made this significant comment, "The poet's task is to create types. I bring everything to life by personifying the type and making the individual typical." This is the crux of the matter: where there is individuality, there is life; where there is no individuality, there is no life.

The truthfulness of literature and art depends on the truthfulness of characterization, its accuracy and concreteness. Just as in life each person has his individual character, the characters in a work of literature or art must also possess their distinctive individuality, distinctive ways of thinking and feeling. To achieve this requires profound understanding on the part of the writer. Thus Gorky praised Tolstoy's skill in characterization which made him feel the physical existence of Tolstoy's heroes as if he could reach out and touch them. Obviously no reader could feel this unless the characters had assumed a distinct form in Tolstoy's mind. And Turgenev said, "When you feel someone standing beside you, moving and stopping with you, then a vivid character is formed. This is something like dreaming. I wander among the characters of my novel, placing myself in their midst . . . and never take up my pen until I am completely familiar with them and can see them clearly." In this kind of "dreaming" the writer creates his characters: the writer lives, laughs and weeps with them, knows all their past, understands their least quirks and foibles, and then at last they come to life under his pen. Every writer has his own method, but all agree on this point: it takes genuine understanding to create a genuine character. All abstract understanding can produce is an abstract character.

To make a character typical and to give it individuality are two different things, yet both are closely related. Profound individuality

must have a typical significance. Flowers may be grown in a hot-house but no individuality grows out of a vacuum. A genuine personality must have its root in reality and weather the storms of the age, so that it is inevitably marked by its particular society and class. The deeper the mark, the more typical the character. A successful type must also be one with a vivid character, a character unlike any other and yet possessed, to a high degree, of universality.

The concept of the typical is not just one of quantity. In daily life when we call a man typical, we mean that he embodies many characteristics of a certain category of people, of a certain environment or age, whether he is someone seen often or only seldom.

The function of art is not simply to imitate nature, and the key task of realism is to reflect life through typification so that the life reflected in art, as Chairman Mao Tse-tung pointed out in his *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*, is "on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." Typicalness calls for the unity of universality and individuality, the unity of the general and particular. However, universality pervades individuality and can only be expressed through the particular. Without individuality there can be no universality, nor can the general exist without the particular.

Without the unity of the typical and the individual, the artist cannot reveal the deep contradictions in life and there can be no real dramatic conflict.

Novalis was a reactionary eighteenth-century romantic poet in Germany, yet he was quite right when he said, "Character is fate." And Hardy, who so brilliantly depicted the tragic conflicts of capitalist society, used this sentence in one of his novels. When a novelist writes about a man he must write about his fate, thereby revealing his character and spiritual world. This is why Gorky said that the plot is the history of the character.

No man can live outside society, and since all human beings live in specific environments, the formation of the character of each is closely linked with the environment, either influenced by it or formed through the contradiction between the man and his environment. The fundamental method of characterization is to show how men act and feel under different circumstances. Life is full of contradictions and struggles either of man with society and nature, or in his

thought, will and aspirations. As the tides of these contradictions ebb and flow, history moves forward and mankind makes constant progress. When artistic means are found to concentrate these phenomena of life and make them typical, art has the power to stir men, becoming moving and splendid.

Man's relationship to his environment is highly complex. The individual is influenced by many factors both social and personal, like the family, social status, social customs, the natural environment, physical conditions, personal experience, habit, education and temperament. According to Marx, the nature of man is actually a synthesis of social relationships. The environment may influence and change a man and, conversely, he may influence and change his environment. His character is formed and develops in this dialectical relationship. The same environment may produce different reactions among people of different classes and social strata, and may even have a different significance and produce different reactions among people of the same class or social strata. The great fourteenth-century novel *Heroes of the Marshes* by Shih Nai-an describes different men in the same environment, under a government which forced them to rise in revolt, and they all travelled the same blood-stained path to Liangshan; yet each of these heroes has his own experience and reactions. Similarly the eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Tso Hsueh-chin, which depicts the prosperity and decline of a noble feudal family, shows different young people with different aptitudes and temperaments in the same Grand View Garden.

Character cannot reveal itself in isolation. Only when men are involved in specific relationships, come into conflict with each other and contrast with each other, can their distinctive individualities be revealed. A clash which does not bring out different personalities is false, and there can be no genuine character without sharp, deep-seated contradictions, without a dialectical relationship with other characters.

The depth of the characterization is often the criterion by which we judge the profundity of a work. All serious works of literature must be supported by vivid characterization. Only ideas clothed in flesh and blood have the power to move people. Weak and ineffective characters usually denote shallow thinking.

Lenin once said: We judge a person not according to his own statements or appraisal of himself, but according to his actions.

Aristotle claimed that characterization depended on action, and that only through a man's actions could others understand his character. In films and plays, the audience comes to know and be stirred by different characters through vivid action, and this is true of novels as well. But the novelist has an additional advantage: not only can he make the characters voice their views, he can also speak directly to the reader.

A well-drawn type not only reflects the spirit of the age through his vivid character but possesses genuine ideological impact. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* started a new era for the Chinese romantic novel by investing a story of sentimental love between a talented young scholar and a beautiful girl with a strong social significance and voicing the demand of young people for freedom and happiness under the stifling feudal system. Pao-yu, "busy about nothing," and Tai-yu so "prone to worry and grief" bring home to the reader their conflict with feudal morality, while the tragic conclusion of the novel not only broke with the convention of happy endings but served as a forceful denunciation of the cause of the tragedy. Balzac's work is a landmark in the Western novel, taking money for the first time as its central theme. Readers were amazed to see in Eugénie Grandet, Old Goriot and Rastignac the all-powerful god of capitalist society—Mammon! Money reigned supreme, controlling everything. The love between parents and children, between man and woman or friends, were reduced to ashes by the power of money. There was no more innocence, but hypocrisy and shamelessness reigned in men's hearts. Again, if we look at the characters in Lu Hsun's stories, whether the Madman, Kung Yi-chi, Jun-tu, Hsiang-lin's wife, Wei Lien-shu, Tzu-chun, Fourth Uncle or Ssu-ming, these men and women sometimes depicted in only a few words have the most astounding depth which forces us to ponder them carefully. Ah Q's "moral victory" is like a magic mirror, so that after the reader has laughed at the character he becomes aware of his own secret shortcomings and is shocked, thus learning the lesson.

A typical character not only combines the general and the particular, but is also a synthesis of the writer's objective descriptions and subjective thinking. On every character he creates, a writer must inevitably leave his own mark.

A writer's choice of material is not comparable to a cook's marketing or a girl's purchase of clothes: he has to draw on his own experience.

It is no use skimming over the surface of life. The subject that appeals to him most, with which he is most familiar, must be something that has made a deep impression on him, that has become part of his life. The misfortunes in Lu Hsun's childhood, which made his family take refuge in the country, helped him to sympathize strongly with the lot of the peasants whom he depicts in his stories. Similarly, because Dickens grew up among London slums he was able to write with warm compassion about the poor and helpless, and his unforgettable portraits of children owe much to his childhood memories. Balzac, too, wrote penetratingly about usurers because he himself was constantly in debt.

The writer observes people with his eyes and even more with his heart. When he depicts characters with warm sympathy, passes judgement on them and expresses his own ideals, he inevitably adds a subjective colouring to them. The characters depicted by Lu Hsun make clear his passionate indignation, just as the fun he pokes at Ah Q shows his pity for the unfortunate and his anger because they would not stand up and fight. Tolstoy's characters are eternally searching for the meaning of life. The thirteenth-century Chinese dramatist Kuan Han-ching depicted the goodness and staunchness of many humble women in feudal China, while the women in Balzac's *Comédie humaine* are mostly victims of the capitalist system.

All men have their limitations, and the greatest writers and artists are no exception. They are limited not only by their age but by their life, temperament, understanding and tastes. A writer can only write about what he has experienced, contemplated and felt, what he loves dearly, knows and understands. His talent may lie in one direction, not in another. The fatal thing for a writer is to have little or no relationship with the masses, because this will lead to the withering of his art. An ivory tower is no place for him. All writers and artists who understand this try to break through this limitation, for it can and must be done.

Chih Ko

## Kuan Shan-yueh's Paintings

To renew art one must break with the old idea of the "sublime."  
Truth is all important in folk forms.  
Through truth one enters a realm of fancy  
Where the commonplace becomes sublime.

These lines were inscribed by the poet Kuo Mo-jo as a colophon on the painting *Camel Bells North of the Great Wall* done by the painter Kuan Shan-yueh when he was travelling in the northwest in 1943 during the War of Resistance Against Japan. In this painting a boundless sandy waste stretches towards the horizon beneath a sullen sky. A small camel caravan plods along against the wind-whipped sand. It is not a large scroll but it truthfully depicts the desolate yet magnificent scenery north of the Great Wall and expresses the painter's own melancholy and indignant sentiments at that time. The poem that accompanies it well expresses the salient features of the Lingnan School of painters who advocated the combining of the "sublime" and the "commonplace."

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Chih Ko, a young art critic, was born in Ningtsin County, Hopei Province in 1925. At present he is teaching in the Canton Institute of Fine Arts.

That was twenty years ago. Kuan Shan-yueh, then a young artist, is now over fifty years of age and a veteran master in the traditional style. He is also the best exponent of the Lingnan School ideas. But before we go on to discuss his paintings, it is necessary by way of introduction to say a few words about the Lingnan School itself.

The Lingnan School came into being at the end of the last century. At that time Chinese traditional painting was undergoing a great change. Many painters were making bold experiments aimed to create new styles based on the traditions of the national art. Artists in Kwangtung Province in the south of China were also engaged in such attempts. Among them were the noted painters Kao Chien-fu (1878-1951) and Chen Shu-jen (1883-1948) who learned the recognized techniques of sketching from Chu Lien, an outstanding Kwangtung bird-and-flower painter. Meanwhile, then and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the diverse schools of modern art were taking shape in Europe. Painting in Japan, influenced by European art trends, was undergoing a change too, absorbing certain Western techniques and methods. This in turn influenced Kao Chien-fu and Chen Shu-jen, both of whom lived in Japan for some time. When they returned to China, they began a movement in Kwangtung for a new style of traditional painting. They worked together with Kao's younger brother Chi-feng (1889-1933) and were also active in training a number of younger artists. Kao Chien-fu set up his "Spring Slumber Studio" and Kao Chi-feng his "Heavenly Wind Pavilion" and here they taught students and developed and expounded their new ideas about painting. They advocated a renaissance of Chinese painting which would be based on the national art traditions and the absorption of foreign techniques to create new forms. They put great emphasis on sketching and took nature as their master. Their themes and subjects became more varied.\* They wanted their works to be appreciated not only by the intellectuals, who were a minority, but also by other strata of the people—mainly the townspeople.

These painters who created works according to their own original artistic ideals were immediately attacked by the academic conservatives for rejecting the "sublime" and descending to the "commonplace." Nevertheless, their original way of painting and their distinctive

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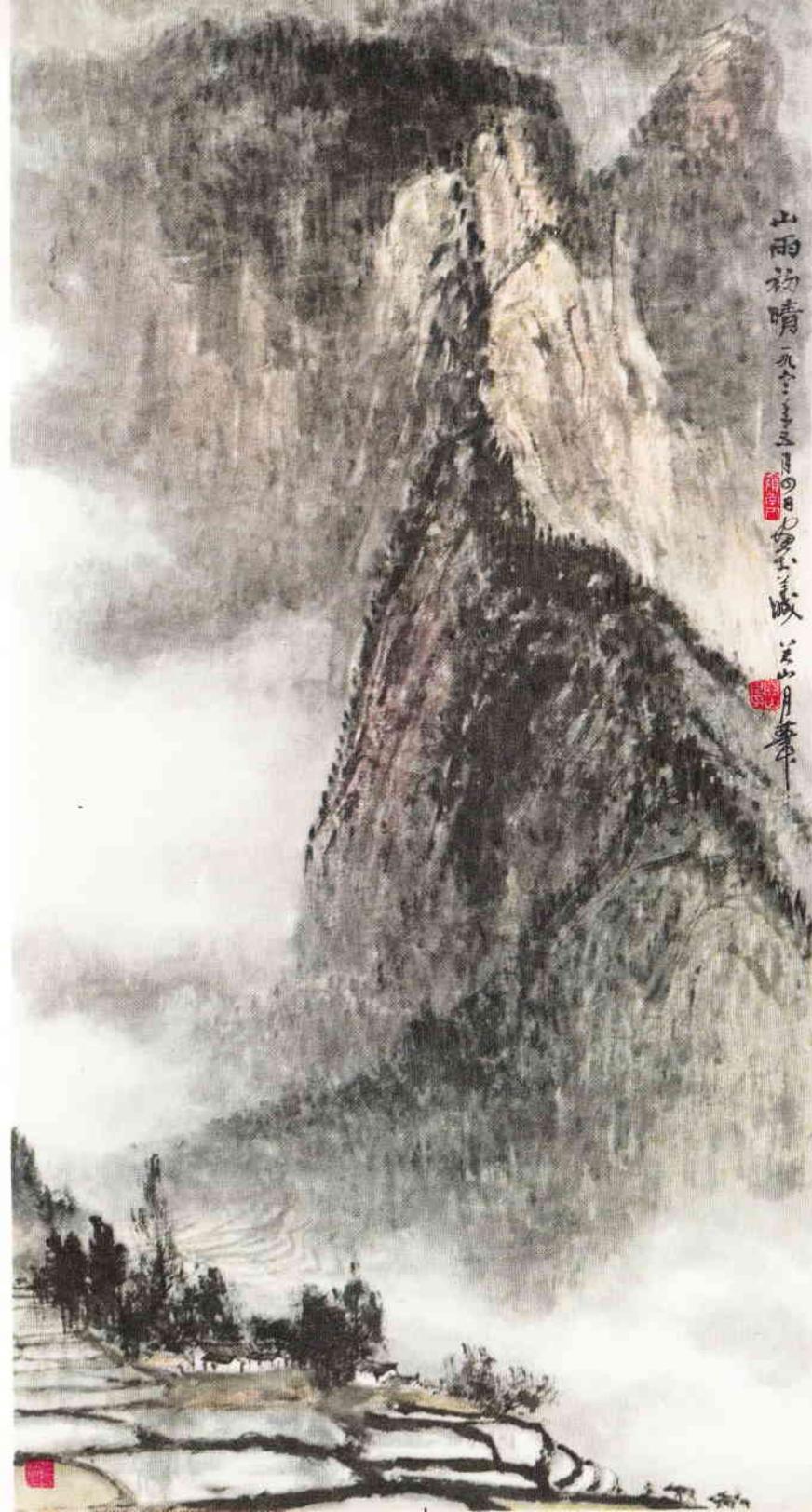
\*Kao Chien-fu was one of the first Chinese artists to introduce aeroplanes and factories as themes in his traditional style paintings.

styles gradually gained the critical acclaim of the people. As they all came from Kwangtung, south of the Wuling Mountains, and their works had broken through the old set forms of their predecessors to express new sentiments and the local colours south of Wuling, they were called the Lingnan\* School. Kuan Shan-yueh was a student of Kao Chien-fu, one of the outstanding painters of this school.

Kuan Shan-yueh was born in 1912 in Yangkiang, Kwangtung Province, a place famous for its folk handicraft art, and especially lacquer ware. As a child, he was much influenced by the folk handicrafts of his home town and conceived a great passion for painting. The early Lingnan School painters, limited by their time, did not carry their innovations far enough. Kuan Shan-yueh, however, was put by Kao Chien-fu on to the road of learning how to depict real life with the techniques of traditional painting. He was an earnest student. He made a deep study of the techniques of twelfth and thirteenth century masters such as the landscape painters Ma Yuan and Hsia Kuei; later he learned much from a study of the powerful and precise style of the fourteenth-century painters Wang Meng and Shih Tao. Absorbing certain foreign techniques to enrich his own strong armoury of traditional methods, he set out to depict real life with the same skill which the ancient masters had used to depict the life of their day. For many years he travelled widely, and sketched indefatigably. Seeing and hearing new things broadened his mind and vision and on his scrolls there began to appear a new world such as the earlier Lingnan painters had aspired to but failed to attain.

From traditional painting Kuan Shan-yueh inherited an emphatic bias towards lyricism in his art. But the lyricism in his works is quite different from that found in scrolls of the old masters. A saying about ancient Chinese painting runs: "The concept leads the brush." That is to say, the painter's brush expresses the painter's thoughts and feelings. However, in old China most of the scholar painters were limited by their time, and their attitude towards nature was static and submissive. A great bulk of their works, consequently, conveys a sense of detachment, desolation and solitariness. What Kuan Shan-yueh gives expression to in his landscapes and bird-and-flower paintings is a new sentiment—the dynamic, positive and pur-

\*Lingnan means "south of Wuling."



poseful attitude of the labouring people towards nature, a strong and splendid beauty.

*When the Rain Is Over* is representative of the artist's style at its most magnificent. A grand and rocky mountain dominates the vertical scroll, its peak soaring up and out of the picture space. "A mountain is not high if the whole of it is visible," said an ancient Chinese painter. Here, the mountain with its invisible peak induces in us a sense of grand and sublime beauty. To paint the undulating mountain flanks and dense forests that clothe them the painter has used superimposed washes of black ink mingled with dark green laid on in such a way as to present the cool freshness of nature after rain. Glittering patches of paddy fields appear below the misty foothills. Brilliant after the rain, they are like gems set into the earth by the hands of the working people.

One of Kuan Shan-yueh's favourite themes is the poetic feeling for nature that comes from a knowledge of the fruits of labour. His *Spring Sowing Time*, depicting a typical village scene in southern China, vividly expresses the artist's warm feelings for the countryside. The composition and conception of this painting strike a note very different from the traditional paintings on the same subject. Rows of

*Spring Sowing Time*



graceful palms give strength and variety to its composition. A few strokes suggesting their inverted reflections bring out the limpid clarity of the water in the paddy fields. A group of commune members are taking rice seedlings out to the paddies. A peasant guides a buffalo pulling a plough. Small as the figures are, they add buoyant life to the scene.

Kuan Shan-yueh likes to paint the virile things and scenes of nature. For instance, in his *Picture of Propitious Cranes* he has employed a vigorous and powerful brush stroke to depict a huge, shady banyan tree which has withstood the wind and sun for a hundred years. Its intertwined branches stretch out luxuriantly covered with thick green foliage. Some boatmen have tied their sampans beneath it and rest in its deep shade. A great flock of cranes wheel over the top of the tree which they made their home. The theme of propitious cranes was once used by the twelfth-century Emperor Hui-tsung of the Sung dynasty; he painted a picture of twenty white cranes, ten on each side, in symmetrical array, like respectful guards flanking the golden roof top of a palace encircled by propitious clouds. Emperor Hui-tsung chose the symbol of the "propitious cranes" as an invocation for the stability of his monarchy. His elegant style of painting is strongly expressive of the aristocrat. Kuan Shan-yueh adopted the same name for his painting, perhaps with the intention of contrasting it with that of the emperor. On his scroll the cranes are depicted so freely and naturally and the banyan tree is so magnificent that the whole picture breathes a simple genuine sentiment.

*East Wind*, one of Kuan Shan-yueh's bird-and-flower paintings, depicts the abounding vitality of nature. The artist uses a strong, heavily-charged brush to depict a cluster of palm leaves bending in the wind. Above them, three small swallows are shown flying speedily, head on against the wind. The contrary directions of the lines of the palm leaves and the path of the swallows convey the conflict of two opposing forces, bringing out the inner contradiction of the theme; giving the painting its force and sense of dynamic motion. It is customary for Chinese painters to stress the use of blank space. In this painting a big space is left blank on the upper right-hand side, suggesting that the wind is blowing fast and strong from that direction. The title *East Wind* is significant in that it shows the painter is striving to achieve a level of pictorial poetry beyond the commonplace; not just any wind blows but the east wind in early spring making

the flowers bloom wherever it blows. The painting does indeed convey a sense of the strong east wind, sublime and stimulating, announcing the coming of spring.

The sub-tropical climate of Kwangtung gives its scenery distinctive features all its own. There is a strong local flavour to the works of the Lingnan School painters in depicting scenes of their native province. Kuan Shan-yueh loves his native land and delights in painting its southern scenery—palm groves, banyan trees, paddy fields in the mountain valleys and boats on the water. Portrayal of these scenes with their striking characteristics has contributed to shaping the painter's own distinctive technique and artistic style.

It is by no means the case, however, that Kuan Shan-yueh limits himself exclusively to the scenes and life of Kwangtung. On the contrary, he has travelled widely all over the country in recent years, and made pictures of the snow-capped Changpai Mountains in the north, the misty mountain cities in the northwest and other beauty spots of China. His *Coal Town*, done in 1961 after a visit to the Fushun open-cut mine in the northeast, is one of his outstanding and representative works. In an inscription on the painting he has written, "Deeply impressed with the magnificence of the mining area and the complexity of the structure of its coal seams, I feel that even if I had all the technique of brushwork and colouring of the ancient masters at my finger tips I would not be able to depict them; such new content calls for new forms." New content indeed spurs on the quest for new forms. As a result, the painting is a bird's-eye view of the rock-like outcrops of coal; smoke and dust rise like misty clouds veiling the tortuous turns of the rails and the precipitous cuts in the hillside. The mining area with its cluster of buildings is bustling with life. Though the painter uses no more than the traditional paper, ink, brushes and colours of Chinese painters for ages past, he had gone far beyond the traditional techniques used by the ancient masters in depicting landscapes and clouds. Employing new techniques and inspired with a passionate love for his subject the painter extols the great achievements of the working people.

I remember once hearing Kuan Shan-yueh remark, "I do not like to paint mechanically or to make a formal draft before I paint." He is accustomed to express himself freely and fluently. Nevertheless, his is a dedicated attitude to creative work; his romanticism is embodied in realistic images. Intensive training over the years has given

him the ability to grasp swiftly the salient features of what he sees. He once remarked: "The waters of the Likiang River in Kwangsi are quiet and a man on a raft punts from the stern. But the Tomen River in Kirin is turbulent and rapid so the raftsman punts from the prow." The habit of such careful observation enables him to retain deep and lasting impressions of things; he is able to create paintings by drawing on the material in his memory even after many years.

Kuan Shan-yueh usually takes up his brush only after he has thoroughly thought out the conception and composition of the painting he intends to do. But then, in the process of painting, he often makes changes on the spur of the moment. In practising his art he never ignores a chance to explore and search for the new. An ancient saying has it that "the mind conceives and the fingers will bring out wonderful forms." Kuan Shan-yueh once said: "New explorations may end in failure. But every new achievement and discovery means the greatest happiness and satisfaction for the artist." Perhaps it is this creative method that enables him to produce works which are always full of life and emotion.

## *Recent Publications*

**The Boundless Grassland (Part I)** by Malchinhu  
Writers' Publishing House, Peking

Malchinhu is a young Mongolian writer well known for his stories and prose sketches. *The Boundless Grassland (Part I)* is his first full-length novel. Published in 1957, it has now been republished in a revised edition.

The herdsmen of the Inner Mongolian grassland lived in wretched poverty under the dark rule of their feudal princes and the Kuomintang. This novel describes their struggle in 1946 against reaction and for national liberation. The hero of the story, Timur, was in 1944 forced by the local chief Gungur to join the puppet army under the Japanese. Now he comes back to his home on the Chahar steppe. Having lost his parents when a child, Timur was brought up by a hunter called Dorzh and fell in love with the old hunter's daughter Sechen. He returns eagerly to his sweetheart only to find that she has been taken by Gungur to be his concubine, while Uncle Dorzh has lost his eyesight through weeping. But the misery and injustice which confront Timur merely strengthen his resolve to revenge his dear ones and fight for the liberation of his people.

The Inner Mongolian grassland is as turbulent as a storm-tossed sea. The association for Inner Mongolia's liberation led by the Chinese Communist Party is sending out work-teams on all sides to arouse, educate and organize the herdsmen to join in the revolutionary struggle. Timur and his friends fearlessly join the Mingan Banner

Cavalry Brigade in the people's army led by the Party, and so this lad who has tasted such bitterness takes the path of armed struggle and becomes a revolutionary fighter.

It is hard, however, for a young man used to a nomadic life to adapt himself to the strict discipline of the revolutionary army. Again and again he evinces splendid courage, but he shows himself immature and reckless too. One day when pursuing a band of Kuomintang troops, he leaves his men without instructions and single-handed kills six of the enemy and captures many weapons. He is nearly killed by the enemy himself. His superior officers and his comrades take him to task for his foolhardiness, but he does not learn a lesson. Soon afterwards, told to skirt round the enemy to deliver an important message, he performs an amazing feat of horsemanship by charging through the Kuomintang ranks underneath his horse's belly—recklessly endangering the success of his mission.

In the summer of 1946, Chiang Kai-shek launches a large-scale offensive against the liberated areas and the Liberation Army led by the Communist Party. That winter the Kuomintang occupy Kalgan, strategically situated between the north China plain and Inner Mongolia, and Timur's cavalry brigade is ordered to withdraw from the grassland to the desert region in the north to avoid a clash with the enemy's main strength. Timur, who does not understand the overall strategy, goes home instead with his friend Shagdar to protect their home district with a handful of men. He is captured by Gungur and the Kuomintang, and here the first part of the novel ends. Before Timur becomes a seasoned Communist and revolutionary soldier, he must undergo more severe tests; and the development of his character will be unfolded in the second part of the book.

Timur's experience and character are the product of his time and environment. His is the fate of many of the herdsmen of Inner Mongolia and the path he takes is one trodden by them all. They are forced to this by scoundrels like the local chief Gungur. Gungur worked for the Japanese as a police superintendent when the Japanese imperialists invaded China; in 1945 after the Japanese surrender, he organized an army to "protect" his district and by keeping in with the Kuomintang retained his power and continued to oppress the people. In order to counteract the growing influence of Timur's cavalry brigade, he slanders it and tries to split its ranks. He even sends out a contingent in the name of the Communist Party to burn,

kill, rape and pillage, hoping to trick the Mongolians into opposing the revolutionary army. However, his plot is soon exposed. Malchinhu has given a penetrating portrayal of this traitor willing to betray his country and people in order to retain his position as ruler and exploiter.

But such traitors are a small minority, and the majority of the Mongolians are like Surun, the political commissar of the cavalry brigade and a member of the Communist Party. She is one of the most outstanding figures in this novel. The association for Inner Mongolia's liberation sent Surun to the Mingan Banner to set up the first contingent of the people's forces here. Thanks to her correct implementation of the Party's nationalities policy and her own wisdom and courage, she wins broad and genuine support for the revolution. Surun never thinks of herself, only of the revolution, the people and the country. The herdsmen like her for her frankness and warmth, for the clear way she explains important policies to them in simple language. Under her leadership the cavalry brigade makes rapid headway. Unwavering in her faith, quick in understanding, she never falls into the enemy's trap, and when Kuomintang bandits disguise themselves as a Communist force to ravage the grassland, she resolutely leads the inexperienced cavalry brigade to route the enemy in a surprise attack.

Other unforgettable characters are Timur's sweetheart Sechen, the warm-hearted, shrewd young widow Sebelma, Brigade Commander Gombo, Timur's comrade-in-arms Shagdar and miserly Ocher. Malchinhu is at his best in descriptions of life on the grassland. This novel does not merely depict a historical scene but enables readers to enter into the life and feelings of the Mongolian people.

— Chao Hsueh-ling

### **A Trading Post in the Mountains**

by Lo Pin-chi  
Writers' Publishing House, Peking

This collection of fifteen short stories written between 1952 and 1962 reflects the changes in the life in the rural and mountain districts from the time of mutual-aid teams through the period of agricultural pro-

ducers' co-operatives down to the establishment of people's communes. Much space is devoted to the change in women's outlook as a result of their new life. Peasant women in old China were looked down upon and badly treated because they were economically dependent. It was only after the liberation that their human dignity and rights were restored and they began to enjoy a free life.

*Father and Daughter* is a story on this theme. Pretty, clever Hsiang-chieh married at seventeen but her husband died within three years, leaving her with a child. She remained a widow because it was not considered respectable in the old society for a woman to marry again, and she was held up as a model in this respect by the feudal-minded villagers, among them her father. Liberation brought changes to the countryside. The former poor peasants and hired hands stood up and the land reform was carried out. Women started to demand equal rights and free choice in marriage. Hsiang-chieh was affected by the new ideas and smiles began to appear on her hitherto solemn and apathetic face. But the diehards objected to this strongly. One day she wore a tiny yellow flower in her hair. "Take that bit o' grass out of your hair. Throw it away! Look at yourself! Who is it meant for?" scolded her old father, regarding this as a serious breach of propriety in a widow. Like a tender sprout withered by sudden frost, Hsiang-chieh relapsed into her old dull way of life until, not long afterwards, something unprecedented happened. One day on the way to the fair she met Chang Ta, captain of the village militia. They had a pleasant chat in the course of which he urged her to join the mutual-aid team just set up in their village. His encouragement and concern touched and stirred her. Her old subservient life became unbearable to her and eventually, defying her father's displeasure, she joined the mutual-aid team and married Chang Ta. Thus this young woman, all but buried alive by feudal ideology, regained her youth in the new society and lived more happily than ever before. This story is interesting reading thanks to its minute and penetrating descriptions of the conflicts between the old and new represented by the father and daughter.

*Mother Wang*, another story in this collection, deals with an old woman who was a widow too. Her sole property was two *mu* of poor land which could not support her and she had no choice but to go and stay with her married daughter in another village. Her daughter's father-in-law was such a skinflint that although Mother

Wang worked hard all day long he showed no appreciation and made it difficult for her to stay. Fortunately, her home village was liberated, after which she was allotted arable land, fruit trees, goats and sheep. She joined the mutual-aid team, became head of its crèche and began to enjoy herself, winning respect and praise for her hard work. For three years she did not go to see her daughter. Then, taking a few days' leave, she paid her a visit. This time the stingy old man gave her a warm welcome, but she only stayed for one night before hurrying back to her work which meant so much to her. This story is not a general account of Mother Wang's life before and after the liberation. The stress is on the difference between the old and new societies as well as the change in people's way of thinking, as reflected in Mother Wang's satisfaction at being able to support herself.

While *Father and Daughter* and *Mother Wang* portray women liberated from the old society, the title story *A Trading Post in the Mountains* presents a girl brought up in New China. Tsao Ying, head of a trading post in the mountains, had been through primary school. Bright and vivacious, she dealt frankly and warmly with all who came her way. When she had to make a business trip, she left the trading post in the charge of Grandpa Wang, their elderly buyer. It was time for buying grapes, and crate-loads of grapes were waiting to be shipped off but the post had no transportation. Grandpa Wang decided not to buy any more so as to save loss for the state, but the commune members would suffer if they could not sell their grapes. As both sides were arguing, Tsao Ying returned. She thought hard and suggested making the grapes into wine, a proposal which was approved by the leadership as well as the commune members. But as soon as this problem was smoothly solved another problem cropped up. A section chief from another commune had come to sell ginseng and Grandpa Wang, with his old ideas of bargaining, offered an unrealistically low price. Of course the other man turned it down and the transaction was about to break off when Tsao Ying took a hand in the matter. Confident that a commune cadre would not take advantage of a state-run trading post, she bought the ginseng at his price, which she considered fair and reasonable. Her trust made a deep impression on the man and helped to remove his old prejudice against buyers, while Grandpa Wang learned a lesson too. In both cases, Tsao Ying had considered the good name and interest of the state as well as the welfare of the people. Here the author has given

us a convincing picture of a warm, straightforward and competent young woman cadre.

*Moonlit Night in the Suburbs of Peking* describes village life on the eve of the Big Leap Forward in 1958 and consists of five parts, each of which can be read as an independent story. Other works in the collection such as *On the Steppe*, *Under the White Birch* and *After the Storm* deal with life in the Greater Khingan Mountains in northeast China. All these tales show us something of socialist construction in the Chinese countryside.

Lo Pin-chi is a talented and experienced writer, who penetrates through the surface of life to reach the hearts and minds of his characters and by conveying their inmost thoughts and feelings succeeds in reflecting the changes of the outer world. His devotion to the new men and women and new events in the countryside gives his stories a refreshing buoyancy.

— Wu Shan-hsiang



### Examples of Modern Revisionism in Art

The November 1963 issue of *Wenyi Bao* (Literary Gazette) published an article by the critic Chang Kuang-nien entitled *Examples of Modern Revisionism in Art*. In his article, Chang Kuang-nien criticized *The Forty-first*, *Ballad of a Soldier* and *The Clear Sky*, three recent films with war as their theme produced by a representative figure in the Soviet film world, the film director Grigori Chukhrai. In this context he discussed the problem of how a work of art should reflect war and peace.

The article points out that in an article called *Keeping the Old on Their Toes* published in the October 1962 number of the English magazine *Films and Filming*, Chukhrai, following the example of the "Western new wave" in films, advocated a "Soviet new wave." The article further points out that the "Soviet new wave" films championed by Chukhrai, especially the three already mentioned, always reiterate the same message: the revolutionary wars the proletariat and the revolutionary people were forced to wage were incompatible with the individual happiness of the masses, while the collective interest of the revolution was incompatible with the individual interest. The formula that war destroys personal happiness and love is most clearly demonstrated in these films.

Chukhrai's films, the article states, obscure the just nature of the civil war in the Soviet Union to smash the counter-revolutionaries who were staging a come-back; they obscure the just nature of the anti-

fascist Patriotic War, vilifying such wars as "inhuman" and regretting that these wars should have been waged. *The Forty-first*, in particular, puts a woman revolutionary fighter in the position of a renegade while it makes the White officer out to be a good character with superior qualities of mind and spirit. Thus it shows positive things as negative, and sings the praises of the bad as if it were good. We can see that in *Ballad of a Soldier* Chukhrai created the Alyosha type of hero as the antithesis of the Matrosov or the Young Guard type of hero. The director completely eschews showing the young soldier being awakened politically or growing up mentally but emphasizes his state of terror and his instinctive search for ways to survive. This is to mock at the fair word "hero." *The Clear Sky* makes an individualistic character who is opposed to socialism a "hero."

The article says, "Chukhrai's main philosophical concept and the philosophical foundation of the 'Soviet new wave' he advocates is abstract humanism which obliterates class, and is in essence bourgeois humanism with extreme individualism at its core. This humanism is to replace 'communism without humanism'... It hopes to substitute bourgeois ideology (bourgeois humanism and the bourgeois theory of human nature) for proletarian ideology (the Marxist-Leninist theory of revolution)... The 'Soviet new wave' as represented by Chukhrai has completely betrayed the revolutionary tradition of the Soviet cinema and has, in fact, become an appendage to modern Western bourgeois art."

This issue of *Wenyi Bao* also published as an appendix to this article the whole text of Chukhrai's *Keeping the Old on Their Toes*.

An abridged English translation of Chang Kuang-nien's article was published in *Peking Review* No. 50, 1963.

### Publication of Books in Minority Languages

Apart from the Nationalities Publishing House in Peking, practically every national autonomous region in China has a publishing house to produce books in its own national languages, and of these the Sinkiang People's Publishing House is one of the largest.

This publishing house, set up in 1951, had by August last year brought out 2,545 books totalling nearly thirty-eight million copies

in the Uighur, Kazakh, Mongolian, Sibo and Khalkhas languages. In addition to printing text-books, this publishing house pays special attention to the folk literature and modern literary works of the fraternal nationalities. It has, for example, edited and published ancient epics, folk tales and popular sayings of the Uighur people, the songs of Kazakh folk singers and the poems of Lotpulla Mutanllip, the outstanding revolutionary Uighur poet of this century. Other fine post-liberation works by Uighur and Kazakh writers have been published in several languages. The Sinkiang People's Publishing House also introduces modern works by well-known Han writers as well as Chinese classics translated into minority languages.

### Folk Music Concerts

Early last winter the folk music band of the Vanguard Song and Dance Ensemble of the Chinese People's Liberation Army gave forty concerts in Peking. These performances aroused particular interest because they used solely traditional Chinese instruments and played nothing but Chinese compositions. The instruments included twenty-nine gongs; stringed instruments set in vibration by bows like the *kao-hu*, *erh-hu*, *chung-hu* and *ta-hu*; stringed instruments which are plucked like the *liu-chin*, *yan* and *san-hsien*; and wind instruments varying in pitch from high to low like the *sheng*, *kuan*, *ti*, *hsiao* and *sona*. Some of these are improved traditional instruments. Thus the twenty-nine gongs were evolved from the nine gongs used in sacrificial music at the temple of Confucius in Shantung. Most of the items performed were adapted from folk tunes, folk songs and local operas; others were original compositions with a folk flavour. The musicians had collected tunes and songs from shepherds on the grasslands, woodcutters and foresters, boatmen, veterans of the Red Army and people in the old revolutionary bases. On the basis of these songs learned from the people, they revised old tunes and composed new melodies. The success of their performances has great significance for the development of China's national music and the adaptation of traditional instruments to interpret modern themes.

### **Sixtieth Anniversary of the Hsiling Seal Society**

At the end of October last year, members of the Hsiling Seal Society in Hangchow celebrated its sixtieth anniversary by the West Lake. Seal-cutting in China has a long tradition and is closely linked with painting, many outstanding Chinese artists having excelled in it. This society was founded in 1904 and headed by the distinguished painter Wu Chang-shuo (1844-1927). Its members meet every year at the Chingming Festival in spring and the Chungyang Festival in autumn. Every ten years they hold an exhibition of seals, paintings and calligraphy at which they exchange experience, study each other's work and help to develop the art of seal-cutting. In the last sixty years this society has studied and preserved many valuable works of art and published monographs as well as reproductions of the work done by its members. It has compiled and published several hundred books of reference on seal-cutting alone. Since the liberation the Hsiling Seal Society has received government support enabling it to set up a museum to display sculptures, inscriptions and other cultural relics, to enlarge its grounds and promote research and creative work.

### **Repair of the Gadan Monastery in Tibet**

The Gadan Monastery built on a hill top 4,000 metres above sea level east of Lhasa has just been rehabilitated. The repairs carried out were the most extensive since its establishment 554 years ago. According to historical records, this monastery was built by Tzong Khapa, the founder of the Yellow Sect, the largest sect of the Lamaist faith in Tibet. This monastery contains an image of the founder, his throne and pagoda, the clothing and sutra he used. The architecture has the distinctive features of fifteenth-seventeenth century Chinese architecture, and is one of our priceless old monuments. Among its many cultural relics is a huge coloured tapestry of Buddhist images supposedly the work of Princess Wen-cheng, the daughter of Emperor Tai-tsung of the Tang dynasty in the seventh century. Because she married the Tibetan king Srong-tsan Gampo and brought the advanced feudal culture of the Hans to Lhasa, she was highly respected in Tibet.

Last year the Draipung and Sera Monasteries, both built later than the Gadan, were also repaired. These three monasteries are known as the Lhasa "Big Three."

### **Ballet in Peking**

Early last winter the Experimental Ballet Troupe of the Peking School of Dancing gave performances in Peking and Shanghai of *Swan Lake* and *Esmeralda*, and showed remarkable progress in their technique and interpretation of the themes. This company, established in 1959, already includes in its repertoire *Swan Lake*, *The Corsair*, *Giselle*, *Vain Precautions*, *The Fountain of Bakchiserai* and *Esmeralda*. In 1962 the young ballet dancers toured Burma and were given a cordial welcome.

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