

Exchanging Seed

Introduction

This picture book is about the Green Ridge Production Team of a people's commune in the Chinese countryside. Its members had cultivated a high-yield rice seed. Many teams from far and near came to exchange their own grain for it. A man from a distant team came when they had no more seed left, except for 500 kilograms for their own use. At first the keeper of the Green Ridge storehouse did not want to exchange it. But, persuaded by the team leader and with warm support from the rank-and-file, he finally agreed.

The story praises the lofty spirit of these commune members who wanted to make things easier for others even when it meant shouldering difficulties themselves.

A cart ran along a Chinese country road. At a sharp turn, one wheel sank into a ditch. The driver urged the three horses forward. The cart still wouldn't budge.





Just then, a young man came from the opposite direction. He put his shoulder against the cart-frame and shouted, “Now, try again!”

Amid loud cracks of the whip, the cart jolted back onto the road. "Thanks a lot, you really helped," said the driver.

"Say nothing about it," said the young man. "Are you from these parts?"

"I belong to the Kuangming Production Team, and Wang Ta-chiang is my name. I've just been to the Green Ridge Production Team to get Red Heart No. 1 seed from them in exchange for some of our own grain."

Red Heart No. 1 was a high-yield strain of rice bred by the Green Ridge Team's leader Chou Shan-cheng with other members. People from teams far and near came to exchange their own grain for it.





“Red Heart No. 1 is really fine,” Wang Ta-chiang went on. “It stands up to drought and wind. But it had all been swapped away when I got there.”



“Who did you talk to?” asked the young man. “And what did he say?”

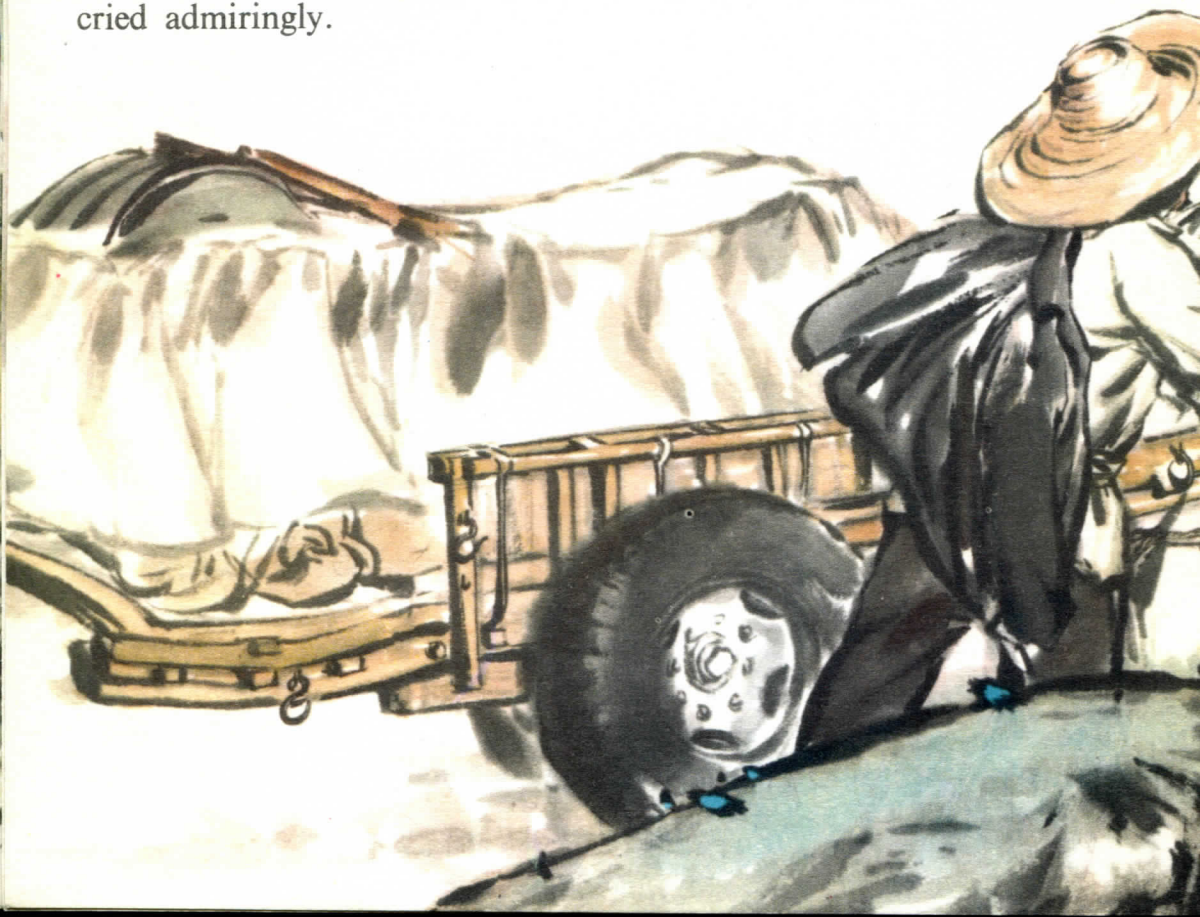
“A man with a drooping moustache. He looked like one of their head people. He told me there was only enough seed for their own use. How could I ask for something they needed themselves? So I turned my cart round without another word.”

“Comrade,” said the young man, taking the whip from Wang Ta-chiang. “Let’s turn right back. You can’t go home without some Red Heart No. 1!” And he reversed the cart again.

“Which team are you from?” Ta-chiang enquired. “Do you have Red Heart No. 1 there too?”

“I’m Chou Shan-cheng of the Green Ridge Production Team.”

“Say, you’re the man who bred that strain!” Wang Ta-chiang cried admiringly.

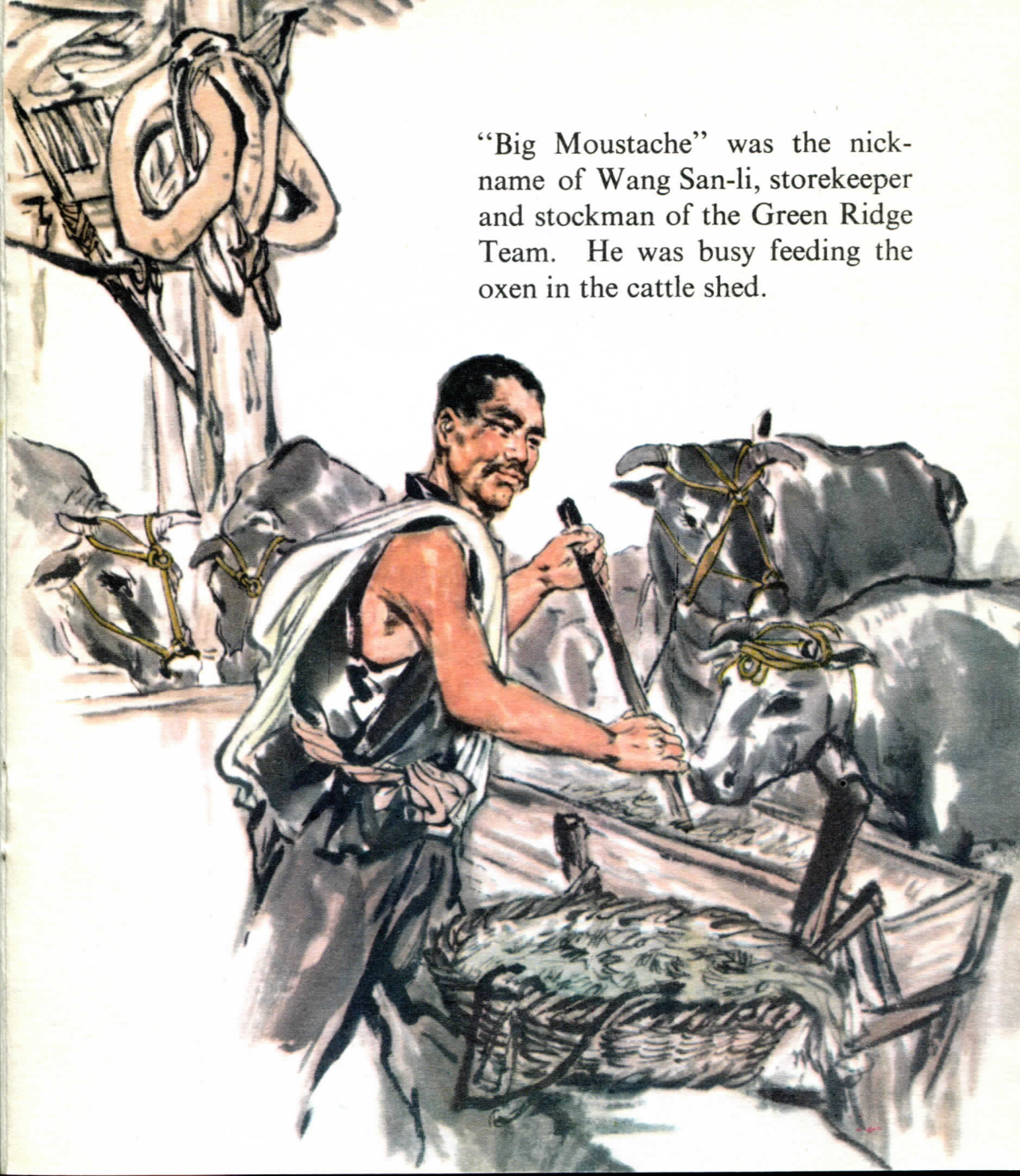






Bringing Ta-chiang back to the village, Shan-cheng asked him to rest under a big locust tree in front of the storehouse. Then he went to look for "Big Moustache."

“Big Moustache” was the nickname of Wang San-li, storekeeper and stockman of the Green Ridge Team. He was busy feeding the oxen in the cattle shed.



Seeing the team leader, Wang San-li said, "Shan-cheng, a lot of people have come to swap for seed these couple of days. Today the Kuangming Team sent a member for 500 kilogrammes. But that's all the seed we have left."

"You should have let them have it," Shan-cheng declared.





“Then what about seed for ourselves?”
San-li protested.

“All the grain we divided among our members for food after last autumn’s harvest was Red Heart No. 1. Why not swap that? It can be used for seed, too.”

“But it’ll have to be sifted and selected again! That means a lot more work!”

“Even if it does take work, we should let them have the seed,” said Shan-cheng.

But San-li still shook his head.



Just then the commune members trooped back from the fields. Seeing their team leader arguing with San-li, they gathered around. "We should think of how the Tachai Brigade helps others," Shan-cheng was saying, "and about how the Dragon River Brigade shows its



communist spirit. Do we cultivate Red Heart No. 1 merely so our one team can raise its yields? We should learn from those brigades and not think only of our own small group.”



The commune members chipped in:

“Shan-cheng’s right.”

“We shouldn’t just think of ourselves.”

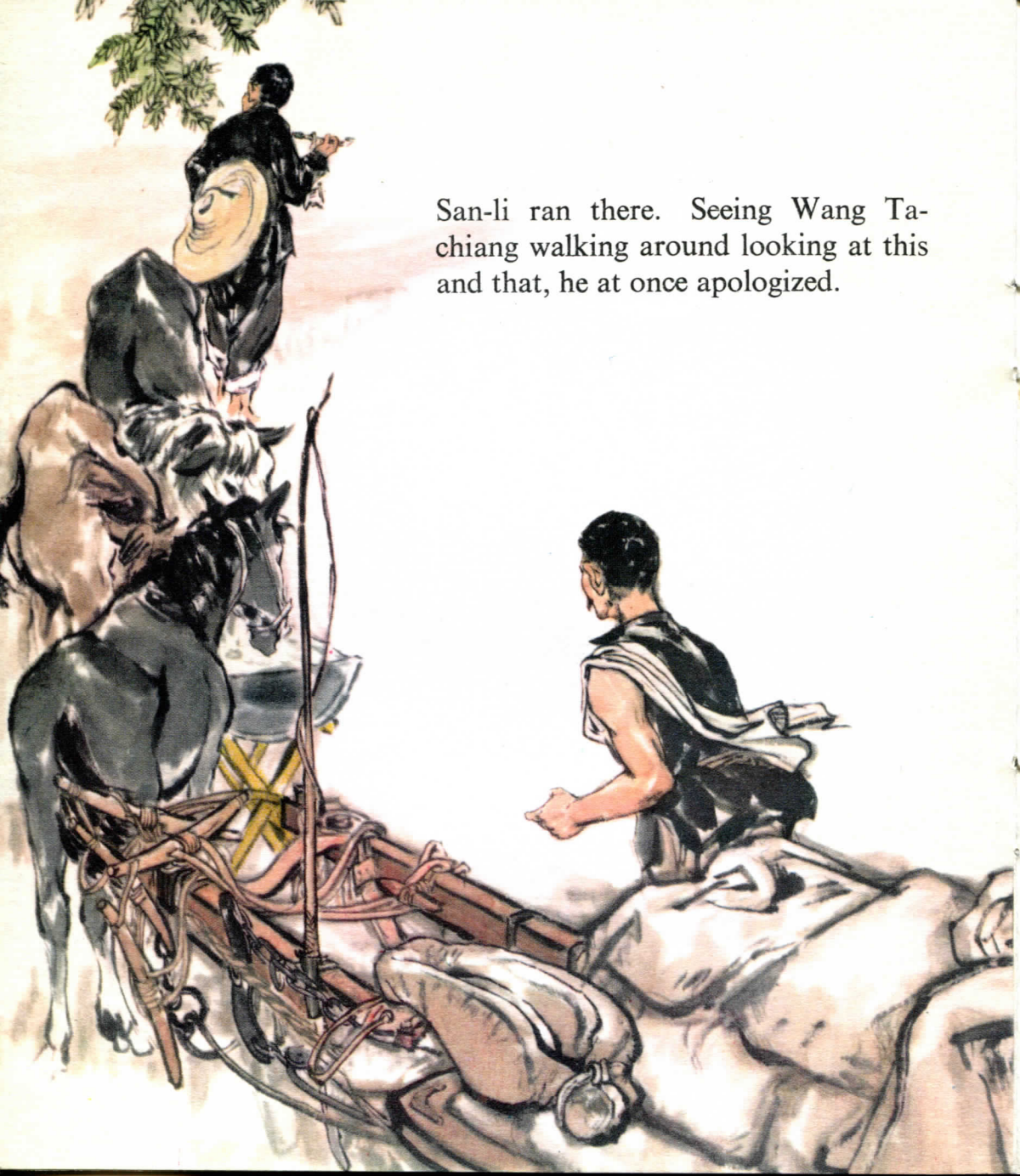
“I have some Red Heart No. 1 at home. I’ll fetch it right now.”

Seeing he was wrong, San-li said, "I'll hitch up the horses, load the seed on the cart and try to catch that comrade."

"I've brought him back here already," said the team leader. "He's resting by the storehouse."



San-li ran there. Seeing Wang Ta-chiang walking around looking at this and that, he at once apologized.





Then he unlocked the door, took out the carefully kept 500 kilogrammes of Red Heart No. 1 and exchanged it for the grain on Ta-chiang's cart.

Before leaving, Ta-chiang wanted to find Shan-cheng to thank the Green Ridge Team. But Shan-cheng had gone to the brigade Party branch office.

Ta-chiang said to San-li, "I've just had a look at your land. It strikes me that if you planted Red Heart sweet potatoes on it, you could harvest 7,500 kilogrammes per mu."

"That would be great!" San-li said. "But where are we to get the seed potatoes?"

"Our team has that strain. If you want to try them, I'll send some back as soon as I get home."

"Wonderful!" said San-li, grasping Ta-chiang's hand.

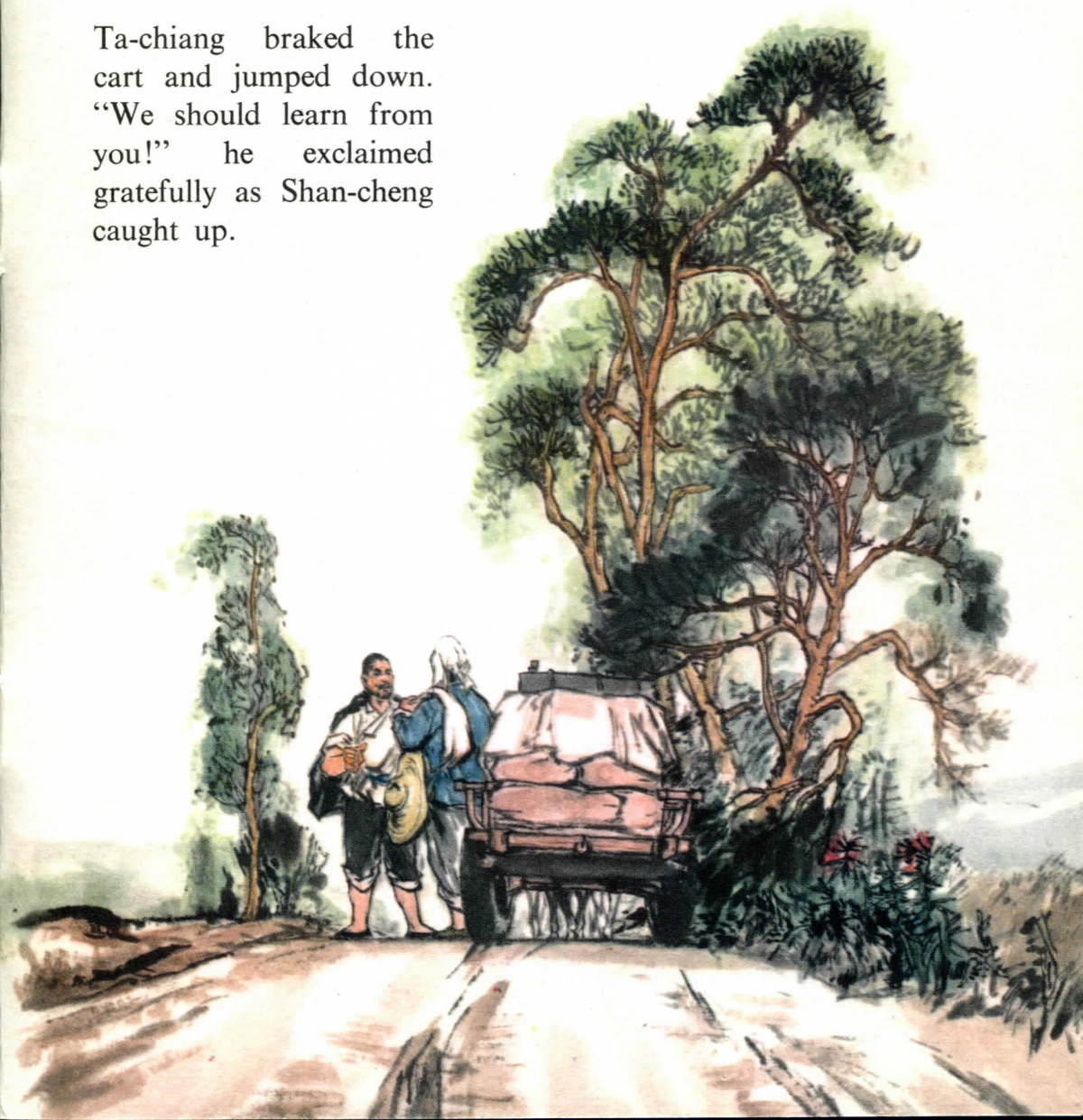


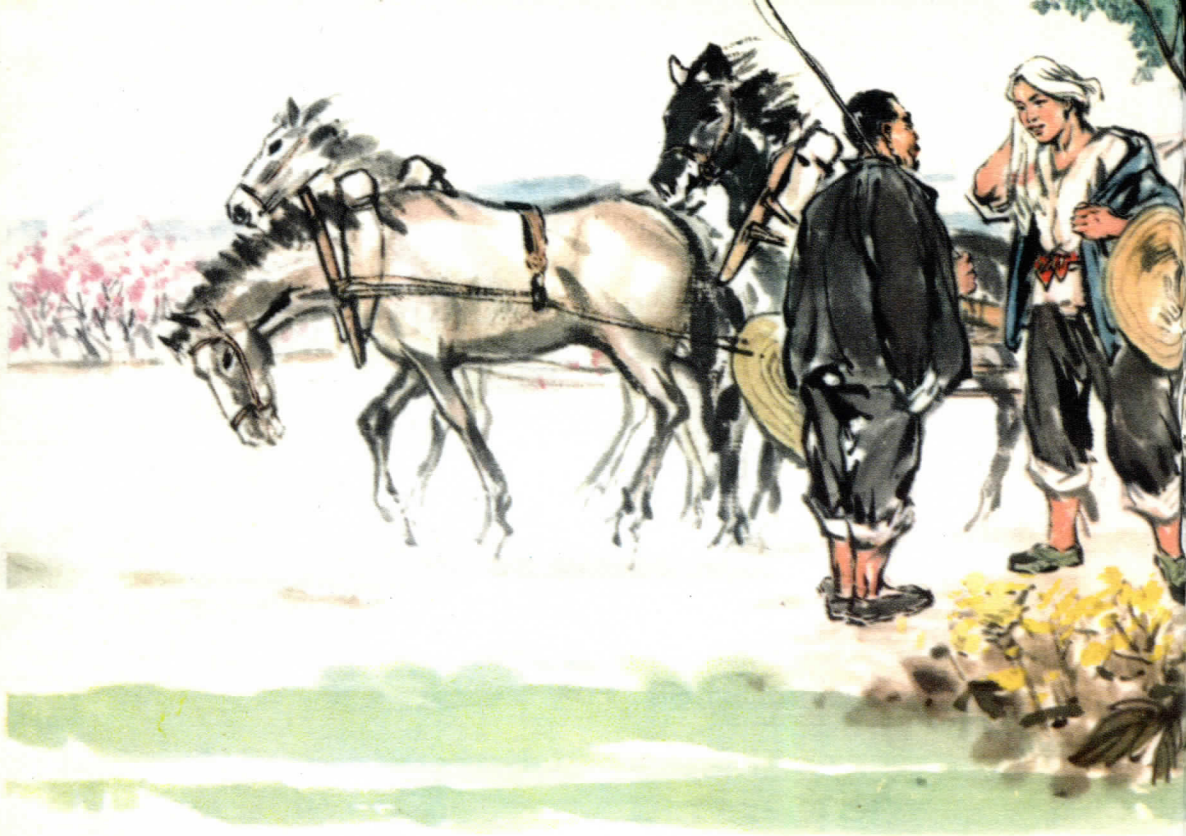




After feeding the horses Wang Ta-chiang got on the cart and drove off. One kilometre out of the village, he heard a shout from behind. Shan-cheng was running after him and calling.

Ta-chiang braked the cart and jumped down. "We should learn from you!" he exclaimed gratefully as Shan-cheng caught up.





“No, we should learn from you. And thank you too,” Shan-cheng interrupted.

“How about coming along to have a look at those Red Heart sweet potatoes?” said Ta-chiang.

“I mean to go with you anyhow,” Shan-cheng said. “Since your team hasn’t planted Red Heart No. 1 rice before, our Party branch wants me to help you grow the first seedlings.”



“Red Heart . . . that’s the word for them,” Ta-chiang thought to himself, deeply moved, looking at Shan-cheng, then at the sacks of seed on the cart.

Both men leaped onto the cart, and the horses trotted briskly forward.





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