



“Nothing is hard in this world if you dare to scale the heights.” A phrase almost as familiar as it is powerful, ripping through repeated storms of two-line struggle in China, and reverberating worldwide among revolutionaries inspired by Mao’s visionary challenge to clasp the moon, to change the world. A call as universal as reaching for the clouds, as pointed as the scorching brand of “potatoes piping hot” on the backs of revisionists....

Twenty years have passed since these two poems by Mao Tsetung, “Reascending Chingkangshan” and “Two Birds: a Dialogue” were first written during the spring and fall of 1965. 1965—a year in which a mighty torrent of rebellion was being unleashed against all that was outmoded and against those blocking the further revolutionisation of society from their positions within the encrusted bureaucracy, the year that began the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

These are poems born of a class, the proletariat, rising to meet the demands of leading social transformation in all fields and fully conscious of and rooted in the power of the masses. And the strength and high artistic level of these verses by Mao make them stand by themselves as fine examples of revolutionary art. While Mao encouraged developing new forms of poetry among the young because the old forms, he said, “restrict thought and are hard to learn,” he used classical Chinese form in these two poems, setting them to well-known “hums” or “motifs,” and showing how the old forms with revolutionary content produced poetry of an entirely different nature.

Mao more than once made use of poetry as a salvo in the struggle, and these two poems played such a role at two major turning points. The situation in China at the time they were first issued was one of sharp class struggle within the Chinese Communist Party, a period of near isolation for the revolutionary line represented by Mao. Liu Shao-chi’s headquarters, partisans of emulating Soviet revisionist “socialism” in China, was strong and controlled important posts; moreover, Liu was openly an-

# Two Poems by Mao Tsetung

## "Nothing is Hard in this World If You Dare to Scale the Heights"

tagonistic to Mao's campaign around the Socialist Education Movement, opposing actively the 23 Articles Mao released in January 1965, which targeted those in power taking the capitalist road. In the spring of 1965, Mao disappeared from Peking for a few months and went to the centre and south of China to further prepare his counter-offensive. At the end of May, he reappeared, climbing to the top of Mount Chingkang where he had stood nearly forty years before, and wrote the poem "Reascending Chingkangshan." He recalls with joyous, sweeping strokes the advances of the past 38 years since he first established a base area there in 1927, and full of revolutionary optimism, looks to the struggles ahead which will bring new victories. It was from this base that Mao regrouped a small detachment of the Red Army shortly after the defeat of the Autumn Harvest Uprising, and from which they set out on the Long March in 1934. A mere snap of the fingers...to return to...*socialist* China.

It was not long after this, in August 1965 that Mao told an interviewer: "I am alone...alone with the masses and I am waiting..." indicating the degree to which the class struggle had sharpened at the top levels of leadership within the Party. Soon after, in the fall, he wrote "Two Birds: A Dialogue." Mao

openly satirised the image of Soviet "Goulash" communism his opponents wanted to serve the masses, through the struggle between two birds, a revolutionary and a revisionist, firing a shot at the Liu Shao-chi's of present...and future.

These poems were together reissued on New Year's Day in 1976 accompanied by an editorial in the major Chinese press. It states, "The publication of these two poems assumes great political and practical significance, catalysing forcefully the energy of the whole people..." This was part of Mao's last great battle only nine months before his death, once again calling for a major political struggle to defeat revisionism, headquartered in the CPC by Deng Xiao-ping. It was a battlecry to dig in and wage sharp class struggle to defend and deepen the gains of the Cultural Revolution, to prevent this camp from overthrowing them, reversing the dictatorship of the proletariat, and twisting revolutionary socialism into what it has become today: "Coca-cola communism" that apes everything western and "modern" and is of course nothing but the commonest pursuit of capitalism.

The past twenty years have thus borne out the deadly serious nature of the polemics in Mao's poems and the burning challenge they pose as defiantly and urgently as ever to revolutionaries today. On the one

hand, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution brought forward the most advanced experience of the international proletariat to date. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the broad masses of Chinese people were mobilised to actively and consciously join in the life and death political and ideological struggles shaping the very direction society would take, in the process inspiring millions and spreading revolution throughout the world. This meant not only transforming education, science, the arts and other strongholds of old ideas, but most importantly battling out the crucial question of who, which class, holds political power. This great revolution gained another ten precious years of proletarian rule in China, a period of invaluable experience for the proletariat and revolutionaries worldwide.

On the other hand, Mao's relentless warning also came true, when the Right *did* in fact seize power after his death in 1976, and revolutionary China was lost. In the face of this defeat in China suffered by the international proletariat, important advances have been made; the stakes are also raised. In 1985 the Chingkangshans loom alluringly and dangerously...difficult, but conquerable as in 1927 or 1965, with the daring vision of Mao Tsetung.

**REASCENDING CHINGKANGSHAN**

*—to the tune of Shui Tiao Keh Tou*

**May 1965**

*I have long aspired to reach for the clouds,  
Again I have come from afar  
To climb Chingkangshan, our old haunt.  
Past scenes are transformed,  
Everywhere orioles sing, swallows dart,  
Streams babble  
And the road mounts skyward.  
Once Huangyangchieh is passed  
No other perilous place calls for a glance.*

*Wind and thunder are stirring,  
Flags and banners are flying  
Wherever men live.  
Thirty-eight years are fled  
With a mere snap of the fingers.  
We can clasp the moon in the Ninth Heaven  
And seize turtles deep down in the Five Seas:  
We'll return amid triumphant song and laughter.  
Nothing is hard in this world  
If you dare to scale the heights.*

**TWO BIRDS: A DIALOGUE**

**—to the tune of Nien Nu Chiao  
Autumn 1965**

**The roc wings fanwise,  
Soaring ninety thousand li  
And rousing a raging cyclone.  
The blue sky on his back, he looks down  
To survey Man's world with its towns and cities.  
Gunfire licks the heavens,  
Shells pit the earth.  
A sparrow in his bush is scared stiff.  
"This is one hell of a mess!  
O I want to flit and fly away."**

**"Where, may I ask?"  
The sparrow replies,  
"To a jewelled palace in elfland's hills.  
Don't you know a triple pact was signed  
Under the bright autumn moon two years ago?  
There'll be plenty to eat,  
Potatoes piping hot  
With beef\* thrown in."  
"Stop your windy nonsense!  
Look you, the world is being turned upside down."**

*\*This refers to 'goulash.'*