

S. HARRISON

CHINESE LITERATURE

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CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

EDITOR: MAO TUN

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THREE ONE-ACT PLAYS

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE MILL

Tsui Teh-chih

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance):

Wang Chuan, *a girl of 18, spinner*

Liu Lien-ying, *a girl of 23, spinner*

Chang Teh-yu, *a man of 25, a team leader in A Shift*

Old Chao, *a man of 30, a team leader in C Shift*

Foreman Fu, *a man of 40, spinning shop foreman in A Shift*

TIME:

Autumn, 1954

The action takes place in a bed-sitting room in the women's hostel of a textile mill in Northeast China. On the wall facing the audience is a door and a big window, (R.) through which the audience can see the mill roof. The two girls' beds, neat and tidy, with clean quilts, are on either side of the door. There is a table and a chair in one corner of the room. The table top has on it a thermos flask, a mirror, combs and sundry toilet articles. On one wall is a large poster of two children holding doves, with the words *We Love Peace* underneath. Bright coloured coats and dresses hang in a row along another wall.

The morning shift is over. It is Saturday. Wang Chuan is sitting in front of the mirror doing her hair.

Wang Chuan has only been to primary school. She came to work in the mill because her sister has been a worker there for years. She is a straightforward, warm-hearted girl and an energetic worker. Like most young girls of her age she is either up or down emotionally. She laughs easily, but the tears come as easily. She likes to take trouble with her appearance. Since she joined the Youth League a year ago, she has come on a lot, with the help of her room-mate, Liu Lien-ying.

Wang (*looks at her watch, and says aloud*): It's Saturday, why hasn't she come back? (*Picks up some knitting wool which was lying on the table.*) I'll just put this on her bed. I'm sure she'll knit it up for him. (*Puts the wool down and returns to the mirror. She finishes doing her hair, gets a jacket down from the hanger and changes the one she has on.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying comes in. She is a good-looking girl, with big dark eyes, a nicely shaped nose and pretty, dimpled cheeks. She wears her hair short and is simply dressed. She is country born, lost her father when she was small and has been working as a mill-hand since she was twelve, supporting her younger sister and brothers with her wages. Years of living on her own, without a family to care for her has matured her, and turned her into an adult, considerate person. She has come on a lot since she joined the Communist Party and is now leader of the spinning shop Party group. She is well balanced, sticks to principles, lives up to her ideals and is always ready to make herself better. She is devoted to the Party and never spares herself either at work or in studying.*)

Wang (*looking up as Liu Lien-ying comes in*): Why ever are you so late today, Lien-ying?

Liu: I've been to see Hsiao-yu off — you know, the one from C Shift.

Wang: Where's she gone? Why did you have to see her off?

Liu: She's gone to study at the Party school. (*Wistfully.*) It must be wonderful to get such a chance to study. (*Accusingly.*) You should have gone to see her off too! Everyone was there, including your sister.

Wang: Well, she was in the same shift as my sister. I hardly know her at all. Why should I go to see her off? I'm going to the pictures tonight.

Liu: You've no mind for anything on Saturday, have you, my child? The moment the shift's over, you dash back here to preen yourself in front of the mirror.

Wang: I like that! I was waiting and waiting for you, but you were ages coming. (*Points to the bed.*) What d'you think of that?

Liu (*walks over to the bed and picks up the wool*): What's this? Where did it come from?

Wang: Our team leader brought it round a few moments ago. It's getting colder now and he wants a pull-over.

Liu (*rather shyly*): Why give it to me? Can't you knit it for him?

Wang: Because it wasn't me he asked! Why should I knit for him? Come on now, don't tell me you mind knitting him a pull-over.

Liu: No, I don't mean I mind that, but you see, I've never knitted anything for a man before. I wouldn't know how to do it. I'll have to get bigger needles, I suppose. (*She strokes the wool and puts it down on the folded quilts.*) Did he say whether he's coming in again?

Wang: Oh, he's sure to be coming. He's gone to the Emulation Committee meeting.

Liu: Dear me, yes! It's getting to the end of the month again.

Wang: Tell me, Lien-ying, do you think our team'll get the red banner again this month?

Liu: How would I know? The results aren't out yet.

Wang: You can make a good guess! I think we've got a good chance of doing it again. This month Chang Teh-yu's really stirred us all up and made us fairly bubble over with enthusiasm. Not one of us let the yarn split this month, and we've overfulfilled our quota again — even more than we did last month. That red banner won't slip out of our hands, I'm sure! (*Hopefully.*) You know, if we keep it this month we'll be the mill's model team. Hooray!

Liu: Oh you silly girl! Nothing's certain yet and you're daft with joy already.

Wang: Daft with joy? Don't try to tell me you're not even more pleased! This time *he* will be the leader of the model team. Remember what a mess our team was at the beginning of the year? Month after month we couldn't even fulfil our quota. In my opinion it's thanks to him that we are doing so well now. He's a good chap in every way. (*Pointedly.*) I must say, Lien-ying, you do know how to pick a good man. I don't think you'd find his match anywhere in the mill.

Liu (*bashful at being teased, stops her*): All right! Don't go on praising him to me. Anyway, I don't agree that he's so very wonderful. If our team does do well it's really because we try to carry out Party decisions properly.

Wang: Sure, sure. Only I know someone who's secretly glad at heart, don't I? Confess you know who I mean! (*With great enthusiasm.*) I say, why don't you two go to the pictures tonight?

Liu: What d'you mean, you two?

Wang: You and our team leader, of course!

Liu: Why should I go to the pictures with him? I haven't the time.

Wang: Oh? Have you got to go to a meeting or something?

Liu: There's the group's plan to be done. . . .

Wang (*disappointed*): Really, Lien-ying, I think you're terrible! Why are you always like this? You've been friendly with him for ages and look at you, still behaving as if there's nothing special between you. And when you do see him you either talk about "ideological problems" or the mill, even on Saturday night. You never go out together to have fun. Tell me, how are you two getting along, anyway?

Liu: How? In the usual way, I suppose!

Wang: Go on! Don't try to hide what you really feel. You've been all in a fret about him for a long time. I really think you worry about him more than you do about yourself. Look at the time he had that bit of trouble at work — you were tossing and turning all night! You hardly slept a wink. And if he skips a meal occasionally, you grumble about it, and worry. In the usual way! Why, you've even written to your mother about him, haven't you? You see, I know all about it!

Liu (*very much embarrassed*): Stop it, you silly! Think you're so clever, don't you? I can't keep a thing from you.

Wang: And why should you? Now look, it's been quite some time since you came out of hospital, and you've been finding out all about one another all that time. There's no question that he's terribly sweet on you. He's always helping you plan this and do that. And when you criticize him over anything, he accepts your opinion at once. D'you remember you once said that the tall chap goes off for a smoke too often, and wasted working time? Well, Chang Teh-yu promptly cut out smoking! Why d'you think he wants you to knit him a pull-over? You must know what he feels about you? What are you waiting for? I think it's about time you showed him you've got some feelings too. (*Like a child.*) If you're going to go on being so stand-offish about it though, don't expect me to be sympathetic. Next time you want to find out something about him I shan't tell you a thing.

Liu: All right, all right. Run along now, and go about your own business.

Wang (*still sticking to the subject*): Well, are you going to the pictures tonight or not?

Liu: Have you booked tickets yet?

Wang: Yes, and I'm going round to Young Hu right now to pick them up. Shall I buy two for you?

Liu: No! (*Then, very much embarrassed.*) Well, to tell you the truth, I have booked two tickets myself. Will you bring them back for me when you get yours?

Wang (*surprised*): Oho! So you've booked tickets already, eh?

Liu (*shyly*): You see, everyone was booking tickets, so I thought I might as well get a couple too.

Wang (*beginning to understand*): I see. So that's how it is, eh? You kept it dark this time, all right!

Liu (*cautiously*): Now listen, Wang Chuan, don't go gossiping round about this, please! We've never been out together all this time. It's quite possible that he won't want to go, or something, and I'll be so embarrassed if. . . .

Wang: Ah, don't be such a fusser. He won't be unwilling to go, you see! Haven't I seen him come here every Saturday? Doesn't he always hang around patiently, and listen to you talking about work, and then go off so forlornly? I'll guarantee he'll be only too eager to go. Anyway, I'm off now to get your tickets. (*Prepares to go.*)

Liu (*calling her back*): Wang Chuan!
(*Wang Chuan returns.*)

Liu (*earnestly*): Don't just egg us on like this! You should tell me seriously what you think about it. Do you think we're going the right way about it?

Wang: Goodness yes! You've been so careful about everything you do. There can't be anything incorrect. You're not at all like some of the others! Look at Little Chen — she and her boy friend went to a few dances then they bought a watch and settled their life together, bang! But you've been so cautious! Neither of you have bothered about silly little things. You've worried about real things like your work, and the way you think about things. And you've both improved so much in this last six months. You won't find another couple with a better understanding of an another in the whole mill. If you want to know what I think, I don't think you should have dragged out this getting to know one another period so long. You've been too brutal to yourself, and choked it all back.

Liu (*very seriously*): But Wang Chuan, you know, that isn't really choking back feelings. We've talked about it before, haven't we? You have to be very careful about these things. Look what happens to so many of our girls. They go and get married before they each know what the other thinks about the real things of life, and then of course, after they've married, they fall behind in work and aren't even happy at home. You yourself just mentioned Little Chen. She is an example of this. How can there be a good end for marriages like that? We all want to make ourselves better, so we must find a partner who can help us, and who we can help. We must be careful about it. Don't you forget, either: you'll have to do it too some day.

Wang (*bashfully*): Me? Why drag me into this. . . . It'll be years before I. . . .

Liu: Maybe, but when it happens you'll have to treat it seriously. Getting married is a lifelong affair.

Wang: M'm, yes. But you've picked yourself a fine chap, anyhow. And I should say you both have taken enough time to find out about each other. You shouldn't go on holding yourself aloof any longer. After all, time's passing, and your mum's always asking about it in her letters. I think you should hurry up a bit. In fact, if things go well, there's nothing to stop you getting married.

Liu (*bashfully*): Married indeed! Who's been talking about getting married? Today'll be the first time we've ever gone out together. We've not even mentioned marriage to one another yet! I don't even know whether he cares. . . .

Wang: What, with you? You're pretty, and you can help him in his work! Of course he cares! I don't think you realize how anxious he must be. Tonight, when you're coming back from the pictures, you must bare your heart . . . and everything'll be settled.

Liu (*embarrassed*): Oh dear! Bare my heart? I shan't know what to say! Anyhow, you'd better go and get the tickets.

Wang: I'm going. But he'll be here soon. Hurry up and make yourself pretty for him. (*Goes to the door.*)

Liu (*anxiously*): If Young Hu were to ask you who I want the second ticket for, don't you say anything.

Wang: Don't worry! (*Exit.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying opens her suitcase, brings out a pretty jacket and starts to change. A pause. Wang Chuan rushes in.*)

Wang (*in a whisper*): Hey, he's coming, he's coming. . . .

Liu (*starts, but immediately calms down*): What's there to get excited about? If he's coming, well, I can't stop it.

Wang: Don't pretend to be so shy with me! Listen, don't put on your serious face and just talk shop this time, please. Have a proper talk, eh?

Liu (*shyly*): Leave me alone! Run along, now, do.

Wang (*remembers something as she turns to go*): You can ask him what our chances are of getting the red banner this month.

Liu: You always set your heart on nice easy things.

Wang: No, I really want to know, and he'll be fresh from the meeting where they have been discussing this very thing, so he must have a pretty good idea. You will ask, won't you? (*Exit.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying finishes getting ready quickly, has a last look in the mirror and sits down on the bed with assumed carelessness.*)

Wang (*offstage*): Here he is!

(*A pause. There is a knock at the door.*)

Liu: Come in.

(*Chang Teh-yu enters. He is a strong, healthy young man who has proved to be a very capable team leader. While he is hard-working and enthusiastic, he tends to be a little impatient and hasty. He has been in the Communist Party for three years. His whole life is centred on the team he leads, and he devotes all his time and energies to it and finds his greatest pleasure in its successes. Now he has come straight from the workshop and hasn't changed his clothes. Cotton fluff is still clinging to his jacket and trousers.*)

Chang (*goes over to Liu Lien-ying*): Oh, here you are!

Liu (*standing up composedly*): Hello, there!

Chang: I've got a letter for you. (*Hands her the letter.*)

Liu (*looks at the envelope, puts it down*): It's from my mum. (*Pointing to the chair.*) Aren't you going to sit down?

Chang: Thank you. (*Sits on the chair.*) I've been here earlier this evening. Did you know?

Liu: Yes, Wang Chuan told me. I went to see Hsiao-yu off. (*Pointing to the wool.*) You brought this, didn't you?

Chang: Well, yes. You see, since I gave up smoking, I've saved a bit, so I bought some wool. But everyone seems to be so busy, and I don't like to be a bother. Do you happen to have time?

Liu: Yes, only I've never made a man's pull-over before. I don't know what sort of a job I'll make of it.

Chang: I don't mind what it's like as long as it'll keep me warm.
(*Silence.*)

Liu: You've just come from the Emulation Committee meeting, haven't you? What's the latest position?

Chang (*unable to hide his pleasure*): I was just going to tell you. This time our team's sure to be on top again. We're leading on points now, and if we can keep it up a few more days we'll get the red banner again. (*Very much excited.*) That'll be the sixth month running, so it means in a few days we'll be the model team of the whole mill.

Liu (*delighted*): Fine, fine! Wang Chuan will be ever so pleased . . . she told me to ask you about it just now. She's put in a lot herself, to get the red banner.

Chang: Yes. She's become one of our best hands. She's quick at changing the bobbins and good at mending broken ends. . . . (*With satisfaction.*) D'you remember how she used to cry in front of her spinning frame, when she first came, because she couldn't mend the broken ends? We've brought her on a long way.

Liu: How are the other teams doing?

Chang: We don't have to worry about them, except for C Shift's No. 2 team. They're catching up very fast this month, only two points behind us. It's a pity they're such tricky customers. They're always leaving us bad bottom formations when they go off shift. . . .

Liu: But they shouldn't do that. It'll affect production all round. We'll have to do something to stop such tricky dealings.

Chang: They won't get away with it, though. With their Hsiao-yu gone they'll not have anyone who's strong at the bobbins. If we can make our frame 12 behave, and see that it doesn't produce sub-standard stuff, we'll leave them gaping at the end of the month.

Liu (*meditatively*): It's so easy to get into a muddle during emulation campaigns. We'll have to be very careful. . . . (*Suddenly catches herself talking shop again, quickly changes the subject.*) You . . . er . . . why haven't you got out of your working clothes yet?

Chang (*looks down at himself and says in an embarrassed tone*): We had a meeting right after work and I seem to have forgotten all about it. . . .

Liu: You're working too hard. Sometimes you even forget to eat properly, I understand. . . .

Chang: Not now! I always remember to eat a good meal since that time when you criticized me for forgetting. Honestly, I've given it a lot of attention, and I haven't skipped a single meal since then.

Liu: Good. You must look after your health, you know.

Chang: You are quite right. . . . (*An awkward pause ensues. Chang is longing to bring the conversation to where he wants it but does not know how to do it.*)

Chang (*coughs*): Look, haven't we got a problem to discuss?

Liu (*can't imagine what he's trying to say*): A problem? What problem d'you mean?

Chang (*bursting to talk about his feelings for her but flustered by this question*): Can't we do what we did last Saturday? We went over the week's work and. . . .

Liu: There's only the problem of what to do to help Liu Sheng left, and as far as problems go, that's too thorny a question to tackle in a few minutes. Let's not bother about it today. Ever since the emulation campaign started you've been working yourself to death. What you need is a good rest.

Chang (*thinks that he is being dismissed and tries desperately to prolong his visit*): No, no, I'm not the least bit tired. I'm used to it. I like going over our work on Saturday evenings.

Liu (*with concern*): But you shouldn't go on doing it, though. You haven't had a decent rest for weeks now. Being busy all the time will get anybody down. The strongest person can't stand it.

Chang (*looking at her bright jacket and feeling his way*): But you're all dressed up! Were you going somewhere?

Liu (*suddenly overcome by shyness, mumbles*): Oh no—I mean . . . I don't know that I'm going anywhere.

Chang (*losing hope again*): Ah well, I suppose I'd better go back to the hostel and have a good sleep. (*Turns to go.*)

Liu (*awkwardly*): They say this week's film is very good. Aren't you going to see it?

Chang: I'd like to, but you know it's no fun going to the pictures by yourself. (*Glances hopefully at Liu Lien-ying.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying starts to say something, loses courage and just stares at the floor.*)

Chang: Oh well, better be going, I suppose. (*Again goes towards the door.*)

Liu (*gathering courage, cries out and stops him*)

(*Old Chao rushes in. He is a skilled worker with plenty of experience, who has been working in the mill for twenty years or so. He used to be the leader of Chang's team. He does a thorough job on the whole but lacks drive. He is an expert on his job but clings rather to old methods. He is now the leader of C Shift's No. 2 team, the one which is racing closest to Chang's team. Like Chang, he is completely engrossed in the campaign.*)

Old Chao (*shouting as he appears*): Is Foreman Fu here?

Chang (*crossly*): No! Why ever should you expect to find him in the women's hostel?

Old Chao: I've got to see him urgently, and I've looked all over the place. I thought he might be here talking over the work with you.

Liu (*immediately interested*): What's your urgent business?

Old Chao: You know our Hsiao-yu's gone; we haven't got a replacement for her yet. That means we're one short on the bobbins.

Chang: I say! D'you mean to say they haven't given you anyone yet?

Liu: Didn't the manager arrange for her to be replaced before she went?

Old Chao: 'Fraid not. She went off at such short notice, you see. But the manager's just told me he'll talk it over with your foreman and get someone transferred.

Chang: What? From our shift?

Old Chao: That's what he said. I don't know how good she'll be, either. It's too bad to lose a model worker at this point of the campaign! (*Goes towards door.*) I must find the foreman. (*Prepares to go, but just then Foreman Fu comes in. He is a technician from pre-liberation days, is enthusiastic about work and willing to listen to other people's views, but is over-cautious. He doesn't dare answer the leadership back, nor like to offend the workers, so he tends rather to give in to everyone and please nobody in the end.*)

Old Chao (*goes straight up to the foreman*): There you are, Old Fu! I've been looking everywhere for you. Now, who are you going to give us for the bobbins? We want someone good, you know.

Foreman Fu (*quickly assenting*): Yes, yes, the manager told me. That's what I've come here about.

Old Chao: Get a move on, won't you? We need someone tonight and the quota's very much on my mind.

Foreman Fu (*looking pained*): You know how it is. It's not so easy to arrange a transfer. (*Gives Chao a look and then says soothingly.*) You know I'll do my best to settle it as quickly as I can. You go back and wait.

Old Chao: I'll leave it to you then. I'm on the night shift, but I haven't been to bed today. You'll make it snappy, won't you?

Foreman Fu (*nodding*): Yes, yes!

(*Exit Old Chao.*)

Foreman Fu (*to Chang and Liu*): Well, you both heard him. Now, let's study the question and see what's to be done.

Chang: Which team are you going to rob?

Liu (*to Chang*): Looks as if he's after us.

Foreman Fu: That's it. That's why I'm here, in fact. We'll have to take someone from your team this time.

Chang: Why pick on us? We haven't got anyone to spare!

Foreman Fu: Your Liu Sheng's back from sick ward, isn't she? You've got more people than any other team.

Chang (*disgruntled*): It's too bad to take someone from us right in the thick of the emulation campaign. Our record'll drop straight down.

Liu: Never mind. We have got one too many in the team; it'll make us the right number if we give them one.

Foreman Fu (*trying to talk them round*): I'm afraid it can't be helped. You see, this is an unexpected difficulty. They've lost Hsiao-yu and the manager insists that someone's got to be transferred from our shift. It's up to all of us to do our best to overcome such difficulties.

Chang (*unwillingly*): I suppose so, but why should we be the ones? Just when we are doing well for a change! If you go on doing such things you won't like it a bit at the end of the month.

Foreman Fu: They're really desperate. Now, who do you think should be transferred?

Chang: Bother it, we only just know about it. We can't decide at once. The least you can do is let us talk it over.

Liu: Well, we shan't forget we've got to replace a very good worker. And we won't deal with the matter lightly. We'll talk it over and let you know.

Foreman Fu: Good. I'll go back to the shop then, and wait for your decision. Let me know as soon as you can, won't you? (*Goes to the door.*)

Chang (*remembering something, calls him back*): I say, what about our No. 12 spinning frame? It's always producing sub-standard stuff. Can't you do something about it?

Foreman Fu: It's difficult. They've gone over the machine and there's nothing basically wrong. You'll just have to handle it better. For the time being you'll have to solve the problem as best as you can yourself.

Chang: We will have to solve the problem! You always say that when there's trouble. It's been a nuisance for days and days now. We have to put someone to stand over it all the time and keep an eye on it. It's a full-time job for one of our people. How long d'you expect us to put up with it?

Foreman Fu: It'll take a lot of head-scratching before we've solved it. Meanwhile you must think of something yourself. If I find a solution I'll let you know. (*Exit.*)

Liu (*to Chang*): Oh well, let's get down to business, and settle it quickly so that we can get away.

Chang: It's a damned nuisance! It wouldn't have mattered so much at any other time, but they would want to transfer someone from our team just when the others are getting so close to our record.

Liu: Well, I don't think they like it any more than we do. How can they do a good job when they're one short? They must be terribly worried.

Chang: That's all very well, but the fact remains that it's awfully difficult for us. It's not as if we are having an easy time. We've got that wretched No. 12 to bother with. Any moment, if we take our eyes off it, there'll be a load of sub-standard stuff. That'll just about finish us off.

Liu: Losing one person won't make all that difference. Who've you got in mind?

Chang: It's really a hard thing to decide. (*Troubled.*) The campaign's at its height. We just *can't* spare any of our people. I don't see how I can decide who could be transferred.

Liu (*after some thought*): I've thought of someone who'll be just right, but I'd like to know your opinion.

Chang: Who?

Liu: Wang Chuan. She's just about right.

Chang (*taken aback*): What? You suggest we give them Wang Chuan?

Liu: Yes. She's quick at changing bobbins, she's good at helping her mates out, and she can more or less take the place of Hsiao-yu. Incidentally, her sister works in that shift too.

Chang (*much puzzled*): What ever's come over you? Wang Chuan is our main prop and we've spent months training her up! How can we let her go to the other team?

Liu: Well, who else is there? If we send someone who's not so good, it'll pull their work down and that'll never do.

Chang: That's all very well, but we can't let her go. Think again. What about our own quota? Haven't we got to fulfil that?

Liu: We've got a lot of experienced workers. We'll be able to find a way.

Chang: We haven't got a light task; how d'you propose to rearrange things?

Liu: Don't let's worry about that now. I'll guarantee there'll be some way to work it out.

Chang (*making a quick decision*): Never mind. I've thought of someone else.

Liu: There's no one I can think of except Wang Chuan. (*Suddenly realizes what he is getting at.*) Don't tell me you intend to give them someone we don't want, like the other shifts! That's a rotten thing to do.

Chang (*evasively*): No, no. I don't quite mean that.

Liu (*persisting*): Not every thing's been done properly since the campaign started. We must do the right thing ourselves, when we're up against it.

Chang: There's a lot of bobbin changing in Old Chao's team and he's a strict leader, you know. I don't think Wang Chuan will want to go.

Liu: You don't have to worry about Wang Chuan's side of it. She's often said that it's inconvenient being on a different shift from her sister. I can promise you she'll accept the decision. What else have you got against it?

Chang (*stammers*): Er . . . nothing in particular. But the foreman will have to okay it before it can be finally decided. He may have something to say about it himself.

Liu: Go on! If we, as a team, agree that Wang Chuan should be transferred, there's nothing left for him to say! (*Decisively.*) We might just as well make up our minds now to let Wang Chuan go.

Chang: I don't agree. I want to talk it over with Old Fu first.

Liu: There's nothing to talk over, really. All you have to do is tell him our decision. (*Reminding him.*) This is Saturday evening! Go on and tell him, and let's settle it, we've got other things to do. . . .

(*Wang Chuan comes on.*)

Liu: Ah good, here she is.

(*Chang Teh-yu, after thinking for a while, walks to the door.*)

Liu: When you've finished, be sure and come back. . . .

Chang: All right. (*Exit.*)

Wang: Where's he off to in such a hurry? Did you ask him if our team's going to get the red banner this month?

Liu (*glad to change the subject*): Yes, I did, but he can't say yet.

Wang: Oh well, we'll all know in a few days. (*Full of interest.*) Well? What did you talk about?

Liu: Nothing much. We were discussing work.

Wang (*very sweetly*): Pooh! You don't expect me to believe that!

Liu: But it's true. There's a new problem come up all of a sudden. I wanted to talk to you about it anyway.

Wang: Why, what's happened now?

Liu: Hsiao-yu's gone and C Shift's team is short of a bobbin changer. The foreman wants us to transfer someone from our team.

Wang (*promptly*): That's no problem at all! That Liu Sheng is always being an absentee for one reason or another. Let them have her.

Liu (*correcting her*): You shouldn't talk like that. Their team's working for our country as much as we are. We should give them a helping hand when they're in trouble, shouldn't we?

Wang (*feeling a little ashamed*): I was thinking about the campaign, you know. That team's nearly caught up with us.

Liu: We shouldn't encourage such thoughts at any time, you know; it's bad. (*Gently.*) We are thinking of sending you. What do you think?

Wang (*taken aback*): What? Me?

Liu: You're a member of the Youth League and a very skilled worker. You'll be able to do a good job there. What's more, you've often grumbled about the inconvenience of not being on the same shift as your sister. She's on C Shift, so you'll be working with her.

Wang (*very unwilling*): I'd rather my sister was moved to our shift. We work together so well here and I like it so much. Why should I want to go to another team?

Liu: Well, we weren't only considering your personal convenience, of course. The main thing is that they've got to have someone. They're naturally worried about their quota, too, and we've all got to think of what the work needs. . . .

Wang: I don't see why I should go! . . . (*Nearly in tears now.*) You and I have been room-mates for over a year now, and I like it so much with you. I don't want to leave you.

Liu: That's nothing worth worrying about! You're not going far. We'll still be working in the same shop. We'll be seeing one another every day.

Wang: But it isn't the same thing at all. Here we're together off work as well. You're nicer to me than my sister, even, and you've helped me ever so much since I've been here.

Liu: Yes, but when the work needs us, we can't go round having personal preferences, you know. Besides, I shall be taking part in the Youth League activities, and we'll be in the same branch. We can still give one another a hand when we've got problems. Now's the time when we've got to think about the good of the work. . . .

Wang (*calmer now*): Well, has it been decided yet by the management?

Liu: I think so! Chang Teh-yu has gone to talk to the foreman, but I think it's as good as settled.

Wang: Oh well, if they've decided to transfer me, I shan't make a fuss.

Liu: Good girl! But tell me if you still feel bothered about it.

Wang: I shall miss you terribly. You won't forget me completely, will you?

Liu: Don't be a baby! Of course I shan't forget you.

Wang: That's all right, then. Anyway, it's quite true what you said: it's not as if I'm going far. When I want to see you I can always drop over after work.

Liu: Of course! So it's settled. When Chang Teh-yu comes to tell you, then, you'll go.

Wang: Sure! (*She is her usual cheerful self again. Brings out tickets.*) Here, I've brought you your cinema tickets.

(*Liu Lien-ying takes tickets but remains silent.*)

Wang: There's only an hour or so left before the film begins. You'd better be going directly he comes back.

Liu (*slowly*): I'm not sure we are going.

Wang (*puzzled*): What? Haven't you asked him to go?

Liu: No. You see, it's an awfully difficult thing to say.

Wang (*impatiently*): Slow-coach! You go so far as to buy the tickets but you're too bashful to say so!

Liu: Well, he didn't help. I don't think he wants to go.

Wang: What rot! Only a little while ago he was asking me whether you were doing anything in particular. It's your fault for always talking shop on Saturdays. He daren't mention anything else! (*Looks out of the window.*) Oh, oh, here he comes. This time I'll do the asking for you.

Liu (*very much embarrassed, quickly stops her*): No, no! Wang Chuan, let me do it myself.

(*Chang Teh-yu comes on.*)

Liu (*with great interest*): Well?

Chang: All settled. I've arranged it with the foreman.

Liu: So you told him we've decided to send Wang Chuan.

Chang (*purposely being vague*): I told him how things stood. He can transfer whoever he sees fit.

Liu (*light-heartedly*): Then every thing's quite settled. (*To Wang.*) You might as well be prepared.

Wang: When am I supposed to go?

Chang: That sort of thing's up to the foreman. I don't really know the details myself.

Liu: I suppose it'll be either today or tomorrow.

Chang (*looking at his watch*): Ai, what a lot of time we've wasted. Why must they want to make transfers on a Saturday?

Liu: It's just one of those things I suppose.

Wang (*to Chang, bluntly*): How do you feel about going to the pictures? Lien-ying wants you to go with her. Will you go?

Chang (*overjoyed*): Really?

Wang (*pointing to Liu*): Look at her, all dressed up and waiting for you.

Liu (*shyly*): Please, Wang Chuan! (*To Chang.*) Everyone has been saying the picture is awfully good, so I bought two tickets. Didn't you say just now that you're free?

Chang (*quickly*): Yes, yes, quite free. I wanted to ask you to go with me but I never thought you would want to go. (*Produces two tickets.*) See, I've bought two tickets myself.

Wang (*to Liu and Chang*): There you are! You both had it in mind. Why on earth didn't you say so? (*Chaffingly.*) You've got about an hour left. It's time you got started. Walk along slowly, and have a bit of a gossip on the way. It'll just about be starting when you get there.

Liu (*still embarrassed*): Oh shut up you silly girl!

Chang (*looking down at his clothes*): O dear, I've been rushing round ever since we finished work, and I haven't changed yet. I'll just dash back to the hostel and clean up.

Liu: There's no hurry, really. I'll start on and wait for you outside the gate.

Chang: Fine! I shan't be long.
(Feeling happy, Liu Lien-ying and Chang Teh-yu go to the door. Foreman Fu rushes into the room.)

Foreman Fu (*blocks Chang Teh-yu's way*): Chang, old man, that girl you suggested simply won't do.

Chang (*crossly*): Why ever didn't you go back to the shop, then? I'll come and talk about it later.

Foreman Fu: No, it can't wait. The manager wants us to settle this right now. I must ask you to talk it over now.

Chang: Oh me, what a nuisance!

Liu (*puzzled*): Why, what's happened?

Foreman Fu: It's this business of the transfer. *(To Chang.)* That girl you want to send just won't do. The whole shop knows that she's slow in changing bobbins, has more broken ends than anyone else and is always under the weather and asking for sick leave. We really can't send them someone like that.

Chang: You're exaggerating. She's not as bad as all that.

Liu *(more puzzled now)*: Who are you talking about?

Foreman Fu: Who? Why, Liu Sheng, of course. *(To Chang.)* The manager agrees that we've got to go over this again. C Shift's got a hard enough time to do their stint in any case. We've got to give them a good worker, he says.

Wang: Oh, are you sending Liu Sheng after all?

Liu *(surprised, to Chang)*: What *have* you done!

Foreman Fu *(quickly)*: Why, are you surprised?

Liu: Uh . . . nothing. *(Checks herself. To the foreman.)* It's nothing. Go ahead with your discussion.

Foreman Fu *(to Chang)*: You'll have to send someone else to C Shift. With Hsiao-yu gone they've only got green hands. The manager said we'll be affecting production if we behave like this with transfers.

Chang *(decisively)*: Can't help that! I haven't anyone else I can spare. I'm not going to transfer anyone else.

Foreman Fu: How do you mean you haven't got anyone to spare! Your whole team, bar one, is made of model workers. All you've got to do is close your eyes and grab the first person you come across. Anyone would be better than the one you suggested. To send Liu Sheng is just ridiculous.

Chang: You seem to have set your heart on pulling us down. If a worker doesn't want to be transferred, I can't force her to. Anyone acting on compulsion simply won't put her heart into the job. Whose fault will that be, I should like to know?

(Wang Chuan starts to say something but Liu Lien-ying speaks before her.)

Liu: Stop a minute.

Foreman Fu: You can tell her how to look at it, can't you, and educate her? Anyway, something'll have to be done. *(Showing some spirit.)* I can tell you, Chang Teh-yu, you're taking a narrow, departmental view on this.

Chang *(very angry)*: Who are you calling narrow? *(Vengefully.)* All right, don't ask me to deal with this transfer. Do it yourself, if you know so much about our team. Take your pick. If we haven't fulfilled our quota at the end of the month it'll be nothing to do with me.

Foreman Fu *(trying to ease the situation)*: Climb down! Don't get mad. I'm only telling you what the manager said. You know I'm the foreman of this shift. Don't you think I want my teams to do well? Of course I don't want to send a good worker out of our shift any more

than you do. But the manager won't hear of the one you suggested. I told him myself we hadn't got anyone else to spare, but he didn't believe me.

Chang: Well then, you should have explained matters to him. He ought to know what the job's like nowadays; he's got no business to overlook our difficulties.

Foreman Fu: I tell you, he wouldn't listen. As a matter of fact, he told me off. (*Looking pained.*) Ai, I really don't know what to do. The poor old foreman gets it from both the higher-ups *and* the rank and file.

Chang: There're only a few more days till the end of the month. It'll be up to you whether our team does well or not. Think it over and do what you like.

Foreman Fu (*helplessly*): All right, I'll go and try talking to the manager again. (*Exit.*)

Liu (*hardly able to contain herself*): What ever's the matter with you? What made you change your mind about sending Wang Chuan?

Chang: I thought over carefully. She's not the right one to send.

Liu: But the foreman said someone like Liu Sheng won't do.

Chang: I can't help that. She's not so bad. In fact, she's better than some of their learners.

Liu: Better than some of their learners! Didn't you see the slipshod way she was working today? It was nothing but broken ends the moment she changed the bobbins. All the spinning frame girls were complaining. And the other team's got to work just as hard as we have. If they have her they'll have to put someone to keep an eye on her all the time. We should be making their troubles worse instead of better.

Chang: If we can't send her, there's nobody else we can spare.

Liu: What do you mean? I thought we'd settled it already! We can do the best we can with our difficulties, and let Wang Chuan go.

Chang: I don't think Wang Chuan herself will want to go.

Liu: I've talked it over with her. She's not against it.

Wang: It's all right. Lien-ying told me just now. If the management tells me to go, I'll go.

Chang: That's all very well, but it'll affect our work.

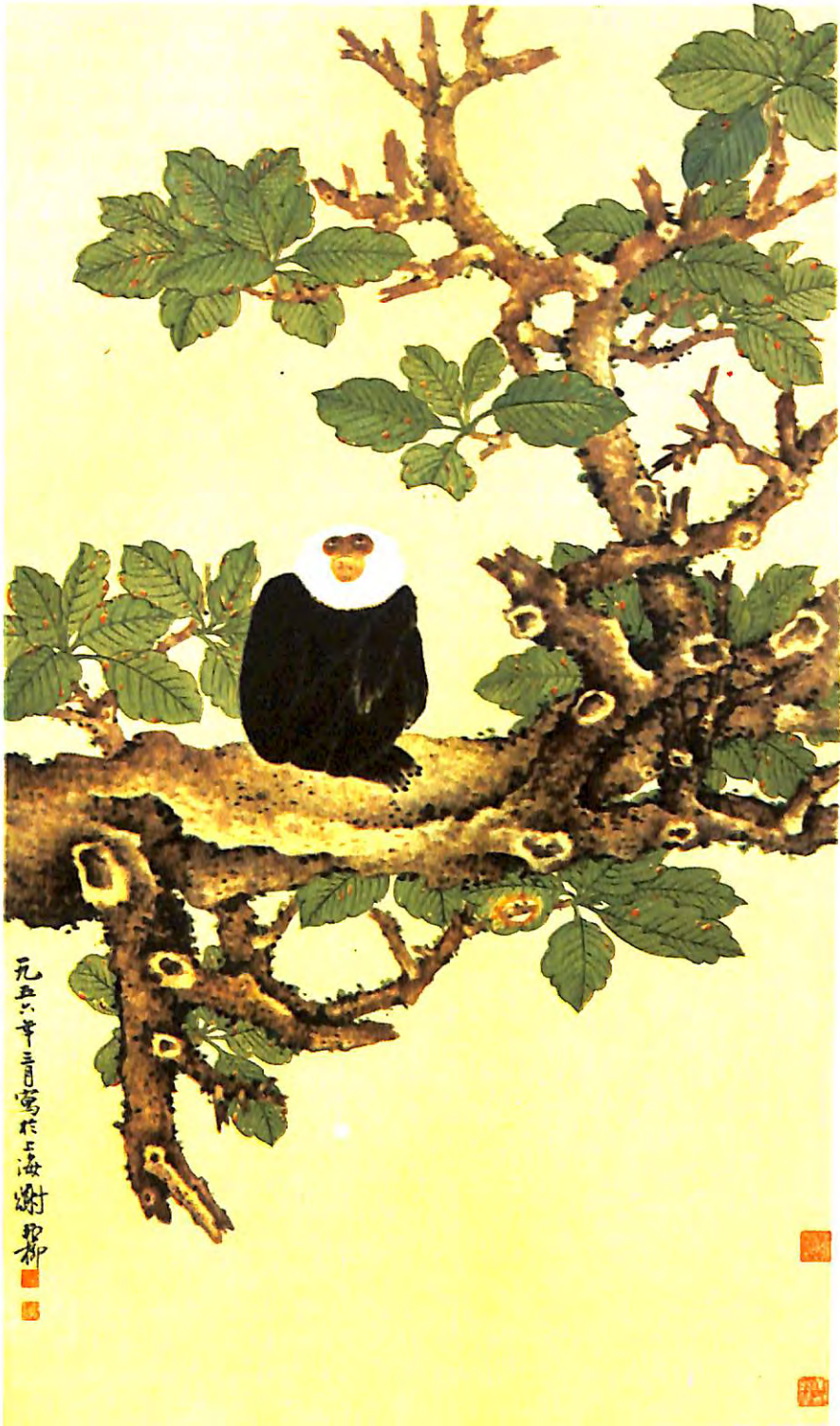
Liu: Don't you believe me when I say we'll be able to work out some way to make up for it?

Chang: If Wang Chuan goes, everything's finished. There's nothing we can do about it.

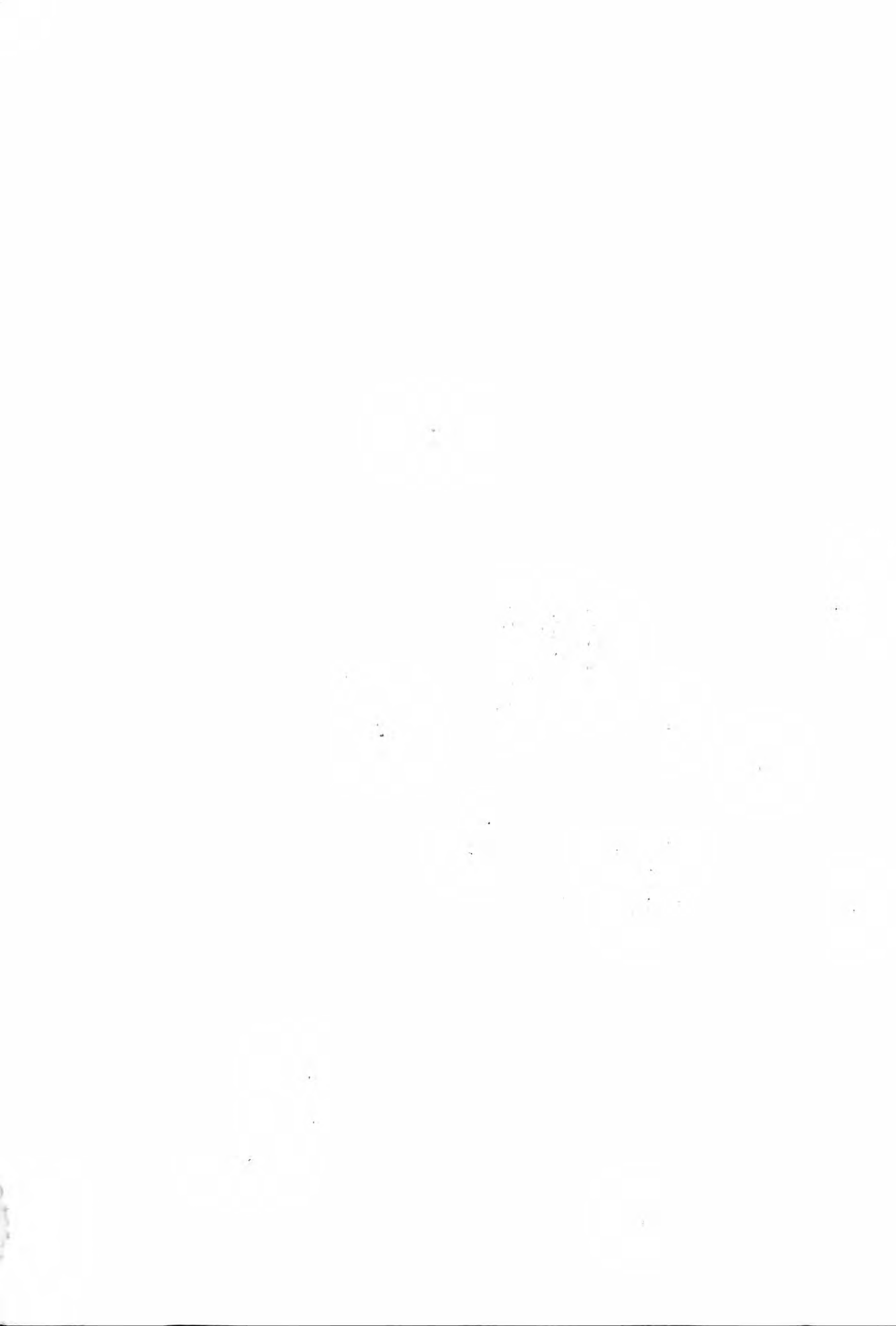
Liu: Nothing we can do! Sun Shu-chih can take over Wang Chuan's job, and change the bobbins, and Liu Sheng can work at the frame.

Chang: Liu Sheng can't manage spinning frames any more than she can change bobbins. She's no good at anything.

Liu: Put her near me. I'll be responsible for seeing to her. It'll only be difficult for a little while. We've got a good team, and if we work



Capuchin Monkey (118 cm × 68.5 cm)
Painting in the traditional style by Hsieh Chih-liu



together we'll be able to cope. Whatever happens it'll be easier for us than for them.

Chang (*decidedly*): No, I'm not going to let someone like Wang Chuan go.

Liu (*a little upset*): What ever's the matter with you?

Chang (*after a pause, seriously*): I'll be quite frank with you. This time I can't take your advice. There's only a difference of a fraction of a point between us, and I won't let a good worker like Wang Chuan go to them.

Liu (*taken aback*): You . . . but that's a terrible way of looking at it! How ever can you let such ideas enter your head?



Chang: This isn't an ordinary time. We're just at the most critical stage of the campaign and we've got to look at it all round.

Liu: But that's just what I want you to do. It's during such campaigns that we must think very carefully about these questions. There's enough bad spirit already in the shop. We ourselves must be very careful not to let the mill suffer as a whole.

Chang: All right, but why should I be the one who sacrifices? Nobody gives their favourite child to the monastery. I don't believe there's any leader who doesn't put his department's interests first when it's a question of transferring a worker.

Liu: Yes, but you know the Party secretary's been telling us that's the wrong way to look at it. We're Communists. We mustn't be dragged down into making ordinary mistakes. You must take the lead, and set a good example, so as to change this bad tendency.

Chang: Can't we do that next time? We've only just got our team into proper shape. This time we'll have to let it go.

Liu: If something's wrong, we shouldn't do it even once. Won't you go and tell the foreman you've changed your mind, and you'll let Wang Chuan go?

Chang: No, I can't bring myself to do it. We need people like her to make our team a success. I can't transfer our main prop.

Liu: What you mean is you won't!

Chang: All right. I won't.

Liu (*unable to restrain herself*): If you don't, I will. I'll go and say it for you. (*Begins to go out.*)

Chang (*getting angry*): You'll wreck our team. What d'you think you'll get out of it?

Liu: I want to help you correct your mistakes. I can't stand by and watch you make a serious blunder.

Chang: I don't need your help. If that's what you call help, all I can say is it'll ruin me.

Liu: You'll understand later. . . . (*Starts towards the door again.*)

Chang (*shouting*): Lien-ying!

Liu: No, I'm really going. (*Continues towards the door.*)

Chang (*in a rage*): You're set on getting me down! All right, go ahead and do your worst. What do I care if I'm finished as a team leader!

Liu (*stops in her track*): What . . . what on earth are you saying?

Chang (*threateningly*): You're the leader of the Party group. You don't have to say more. I understand you now.

Liu (*angrily*): What makes you act like this?

Chang: I've nothing more to say. It's just that we think in different ways. If that's what you want, it's all right with me.

(*Liu Lien-ying pauses at the door. Foreman Fu comes in hurriedly.*)

Foreman Fu (*to Chang*): The manager wants to speak to you.

Chang: What about?

Foreman Fu: We've got to decide at once who's to be transferred. He wants to speak to you himself.

Chang: Good. (*Walks to the door. To Liu Lien-ying.*) Things are coming to a head. The fate of our team is in your hands. If you have a heart at all, think it over carefully. I've said all I can possibly say.

(*Chang Teh-yu and Foreman Fu go together.*)

Wang (*uneasily*): You know, you've really upset him.

Liu (*sighs*): It's dreadful to find him thinking so pettily.

Wang: Well, it's only natural, isn't it? He's worked so hard for the team, even to going without food and sleep for it. Why, he even trots to the wash room so as to save working time. It wasn't a bit easy getting the team into its present shape, and now he's afraid that we'll come right down. Of course it is hard for him to be reasonable about it.

Liu: But whether we come down is simply a question of whether we let it. It's entirely up to us. If we don't let it collapse, it won't. But it's not right at all for him to behave in the same petty way as the others. It'll only upset production in the whole mill.

Wang: Yes, but it's very common, and half the others are even worse. D'you remember when they had to transfer someone from C Shift's No. 1 team? They had a dreadful row with the foreman. And Chang's so stubborn he'd go on dashing down the same track until it's too dark to see his way. But this is a pity! The first time you two were going out together, and now you've got to have a quarrel over a thing like this.

Liu: But I can't stand by and let him push Liu Sheng into the other team, can I? Can I watch other people's work suffer?

Wang: D'you really think it will be so very bad for them? Liu Sheng's not all that much worse than some of the others in our shift.

Liu: What on earth do you mean? She's not worse than others in their team? Do you honestly think she can manage?

Wang: She'll manage more or less. One person doesn't make all that difference. What's more it wasn't only you I didn't want to leave, it was Chang Teh-yu as well. He trained me from the time I came here knowing nothing, until I'm what I am today. I'd have missed him, too, if I was transferred. If I'm working with him I can go on learning more. Maybe it's just as well if I don't have to go. If we get the chance, can't we transfer my sister into our team?

(Liu Lien-ying is deep in thought. Old Chao comes on.)

Old Chao *(in a worried tone)*: Isn't Foreman Fu here?

Wang *(coldly)*: No!

Old Chao: Do you happen to know whether they've arranged the transfer yet?

Wang: Oh, don't keep asking me! Yes, they are transferring someone from our team.

Old Chao *(stunned)*: What? From your team, eh?

Wang: Have you got to keep on worrying and nagging us about this, too?

Old Chao *(in despair)*: Oh, what a mess this all is. All right, give us someone, good or bad. *(Desperately.)* Oh Heaven, why did Hsiao-yu have to go just now?

Liu *(cutting in)*: Is it true that your lot can't cope with the quota?

Old Chao: Would I be grumbling like this if they could? With Hsiao-yu gone, it's as if half the team's gone. There're only a few learners left. *(Sighs.)* Ai! What's the use! What can I do now?

Liu *(decidedly)*: You wait. *(Stands up and walks to the door with resolution.)*

Wang *(quickly)*: Where are you going?

Liu: To the manager's office, to go into the question again.

Wang: Oh, don't, please! Why must you go and bring trouble on yourself?

Liu: I really can't stand by and do nothing when things are like this.
(*Marches out.*)

Wang (*calling after her*): Lien-ying, Lien-ying! Don't do it!
(*Exit Liu Lien-ying.*)

Old Chao (*puzzled*): What's she going to do?

Wang (*tartly*): Do? She's going to see about the transfer for your team.

Old Chao: Don't pull my leg. Are such administrative affairs the business of the Party group leader?

Wang: Of course she's got to do something about it, when you're putting on all this act about not being able to cope, and being worried to death. I never heard such fussing and grumbling!

Old Chao: Can you blame me for grumbling? After all, there's only those few points' difference between us, and now we're dependent on your team for a transfer! You must see why I'm unhappy. Of course we're finished.

Wang: Don't you be too sure of your "of courses." I'd advise you to stop making foolish guesses.

Old Chao: Foolish guesses! It's simple logic and human nature. You don't even give way to your own father on the battlefield. Who's going to think about his competitors' benefit in an emulation campaign? (*Inquisitively.*) Tell me, who *are* you transferring to us?

Wang (*spitefully*): Me, me, I tell you.

Old Chao: Stop teasing, can't you? We wouldn't aspire to such an honour.

Wang: Oh, go away! When you're short of a hand, you come crawling to us, but as soon as it comes to the end of the shift you grab all the yarn on the bobbins.

Old Chao: Now then, don't you go making groundless accusations. We always change our bobbins according to schedule. We're one of the best teams in the shop as far as leaving the bobbins in good shape is concerned.

Wang (*impatiently*): I've heard enough. Will you stop bothering me? Run along now and do whatever it is you're meant to be doing.

Old Chao (*puzzled*): Are you really trying to get rid of me? After all, we've got to get someone from your team. It's only natural I should want to ask who it is.

Wang (*letting off steam*): For goodness' sake! You must be blind if you can't see I don't want to talk about it. Why must you come here just now?

Old Chao: Heaven help me, I didn't know I had to make an appointment with you!

Wang (*worried*): Oh dear, oh dear! What shall we do! They'll have a terrible quarrel.

Old Chao (*getting more and more puzzled*): Whatever are you talking about?

Wang: Oh, do stop asking questions. Run along to the manager's office, can't you?

Old Chao: But if it's already decided that we're going to have someone from your team, why should I go back to him again? I tell you, I'm not budging until I've got someone. (*Plants himself down firmly.*)

Wang (*looking out of the window, in a worried tone*): Oh my, here comes the team leader. Now what's going to happen!

(*A pause. Chang Teh-yu comes angrily into the room.*)

Chang (*in a gruff, unfriendly tone*): Wang Chuan, get ready to go to C Shift.

Wang (*uneasily*): You . . . um . . . have you seen her?

Chang (*crossly*): Mind your own business! You're on her side, aren't you?

Old Chao (*quickly*): What about that transfer for our team?

Chang: It's all settled. You're getting a top-notch worker.

Old Chao (*sceptically*): Ah pooh! We wouldn't dare hope. . . .

Chang (*impatiently*): Shut up. You've got the red banner within your grasp now. Get along.

Old Chao: All right! I'm going to ask the manager. (*Exit.*)

Wang: What did she say?

Chang: She gave me hell! (*In a rage.*) Whew, did I catch it! She certainly made it clear she had no personal feeling for me. Fool that I was, I thought we were friends, and I tried as hard as I could to accept all her criticisms. But it's at a time like this that one gets to know what a person's really like.

Wang (*uneasily*): Oh dear! Don't talk like that. Anyway, I don't want to go to the other team any more.

Chang: You don't have to pacify me. Your wings have grown strong and you're quite skilled now. You go, if that's what's decided.

Wang: Please don't talk like that to me! Have I offended you, too?

Chang: Oh no, none of you have offended me. The team is my personal team, and it was I who offended you. (*Looking in the direction of the factory building to an imaginary Liu Lien-ying.*) I know you now. You only care about your work. You don't care a damn about anyone human. (*Sighs.*) How hungry I was when I went without food, and how sleepy when I went without sleep! How much time and energy have I spent, and what trouble I had to bring the team into proper shape! And now you must go and wreck it in one blow. If tomorrow No. 12 were to turn out a complete batch of sub-standard stuff, that would just top everything off. . . . There's nothing left for me as a team leader now! (*Pulls the cinema tickets out of his pocket.*) Why should I waste money on these things! (*Tears the tickets up.*)

Wang (*trying to stop him*): What are you doing? You're going to the pictures later, aren't you?

Chang: All she wants is to get me down. I'm not going to the pictures with her! I'm not going to be twisted round her little finger. *(With regret.)* I was a fool to wait so hopefully; months, it's been. I kidded myself that things were going well. I thought I'd found someone at last, and that we understood each other and could help one another. But does she understand me, or want to help me? I gave her my heart, but has she got any heart for me?

Wang *(can't stand it any longer)*: Oh Chang Teh-yu, don't go on like that! You've not understood her. Look, I won't go to the other team, if that'll make you feel better.

Chang: Oh no, you must go. Don't give her any more chances to take me to task in a big meeting. In the future, after I've finished with the bobbins I'll just stroll round to the rest room and have a cigarette in peace. Fulfil the quota, that's all I'll try to do. Why bother about anything else? Everything can go to hell for all I care. *(Takes up the wool.)* Will you tell her I've got someone else to knit this up for me?

Wang *(goes over to him, and tries to take the wool out of his hands)*: Don't be like that. She was going to knit it up for you.



Chang: I don't want to be in her debt, thank you. I shan't die of cold without Miss Liu Lien-ying. Tell her that I've got other friends besides her and I'll be able to find someone to do it for me. *(Goes to the door.)*

Wang *(stopping him)*: Don't go. Let me explain things for her.

Chang (*waving his hand*): Go away. I'll never come back here again to look for inspiration. (*Quickly exit.*)

Wang (*goes to the door*): Oh, team leader, team leader. (*No response. She walks back into the room in great perplexity.*) Oh dear, this is a dreadful business. What could have happened? Perhaps the manager gave him a dressing down, too. Lien-ying is frightfully strict, I must say. She knows perfectly well how he feels about the team. He just can't be expected to take a thing like this all of a sudden. But why must she go and take it on herself to say so? (*Begins to grumble, puzzled.*) It . . . it all started because of me. It's all my fault. Why do they want to transfer me at this juncture? Why pick on me? (*Looks at the torn cinema tickets.*) With all this trouble they didn't even go to the pictures. They've been friends for months and this is what it comes to. (*Very unhappy.*) Where can Lien-ying be? And what shall I tell her when she comes back? She'll be heart-broken. (*The more she thinks the more disturbed she becomes. She puts her head down on the table and bursts into tears.*)
(*A pause. Liu Lien-ying, a pair of knitting needles in her hands, comes on.*)

Liu (*seeing Wang Chuan in tears, goes over to her and strokes her head*): What ever's the matter, dear?

Wang (*wipes her eyes*): Oh, it's nothing. Why were you so long away? (*Speaking brings on her tears again.*)

Liu: What a baby you are! (*Wiping tears for Wang Chuan.*) There, there, don't cry.

Wang: Where have you been all this time?

Liu (*soothingly*): After we'd decided what to do I went to the co-op to get some knitting needles. I suppose you already know you're being transferred.

Wang: What did you say to the manager?

Liu: I didn't have to say anything. I'd no sooner gone into the room than he proposed it himself. Hasn't he been here to tell you?

Wang: He told me plenty! He was white in the face with rage.

Liu: I expect it was the reaction to the heated argument he had. He probably hasn't calmed down yet. He'll be all right after a bit.

Wang: That's what you think! He's taken his wool away.

Liu (*surprised*): Has he? What's he done that for?

Wang (*pointing to the torn tickets on the ground*): And see, he's torn up his cinema tickets.

Liu: Oh goodness! (*She is very taken aback.*) How could he behave like that? (*Walks with heavy steps to the bed, and puts down the knitting needles absent-mindedly.*)

Wang (*comforting her*): Please, Lien-ying, don't feel too bad.

Liu (*inwardly seething*): No . . . I'm not feeling bad. I just didn't know he was that kind of a man. (*Sadly.*) Ai!

Wang: If only you hadn't gone to the manager's office! It's all my fault, really. I shouldn't have agreed to go to the other team.

Liu (*rousing herself from the tumult in her own mind and speaking seriously*): No, you were quite right to agree. What he tried to do would have upset the work generally. I don't think the fault lies with you or me. You see, we've got to help one another, not only in our own team, but through the whole mill, in the campaign. Didn't they teach you that in the Youth League?

Wang: Oh yes, I know what you mean about that. But this is a personal question for you two. . . .

Liu: But you see the rights and wrongs of it are quite clear, and no matter what difficulties may come, we simply have to do what the Party asks of us. . . . (*With feeling.*) Wang Chuan, we must always remember what we belong to. The Youth League and the Party need a lot of living up to.

Wang (*bursting out*): Oh, Lien-ying, I understand now. (*Quickly drying her tears.*) You were right to do what you did. I was behaving like a child. Oh, what a lot I've learned from being with you! I do wish I could go on being with you.

Liu (*in a lighter vein*): You'd better be getting ready to go to C Shift, hadn't you, my dear?

Wang (*decidedly*): You're right. I'll go see their team leader straight away. I'll go on night shift this evening, I think.

Liu: No, there's no need to do that. You'll be tired after the morning shift. We're not allowed to do two shifts in one day.

Wang: You've been so unselfish in all this. I just want to do my bit too.

Liu: But you were all set to go to the pictures. You're dressed for it too. I think you ought to go and enjoy yourself.

Wang (*remembering Liu's problem again*): But what about you two? After all this fuss and bother neither of you are going! What will you do with yourself?

Liu: I shall be all right. It's all in the day's work. (*Takes her tickets out of her pocket.*) Here you are; you take these, and see if any of the others are still in the hostel, and take two of them with you.

Wang: But you can't have finished with him just like that.

Liu: If he wants to behave so perversely, and doesn't want people to help him, that's that, isn't it? There's nothing more I can do.

Wang: It seems dreadful to break it off just like that.

Liu: It can't be helped. One can't help running into unpleasant things in this world. Time will cure it, I suppose.

Wang: No! Your friendship mustn't finish like that. Besides, his crossness won't last. He's got a quick temper, but he comes to his senses quickly too. He's probably realized the truth already. (*After a moment's hesitation.*) Perhaps I'd better go to his hostel and find him for you.

Liu (*pettishly*): Oh no, you don't! I've not been in the wrong. By the way he's behaving he doesn't seem to want to stay friends with me, so we might as well call it quits.

Wang: Oh no! It makes me sad to see you two like this. I must do something about it. If you don't want me to go now, I shall speak to him about it tomorrow.

Liu (*anxious to drop the subject*): All right, let's wait and see. You'd better hop off to the pictures now.

Wang: I don't think I want to go after all. I'll just go and have a look at C Shift. (*Goes to the door, but turns back, still very much concerned.*) Dear Lien-ying, promise me you won't feel bad. I'll be back in a few minutes. Why don't you come with me to my cousin's; we can have a good time there.

Liu: All right. You run along now.
(*Exit Wang.*)

Liu (*sits down on the bed and picks up the knitting needles. Stares into space for a long while*): Ai, such a little thing and this is what happens to me! (*Sighs.*) Well, that's that! (*Puts down the needles, and walks towards the windows. She sees the torn cinema tickets and picks them up. Is again lost in thought. A pause.*) No, I can't let it finish just like that. I'll go and talk to him. . . . (*Goes towards the door. But after a few steps, pauses.*) Ai, what is there to talk about? I did what was right. . . . (*Returns to the room and sits down on the chair. A pause. Sadly.*) Oh well, I'd better get on with some work, I suppose. I'll write out the group plan. (*Gets out writing materials and with an effort begins to write. She can't keep it up, however. She is too agitated at heart, and with a sigh buries her head in her hands.*)
(*There is a knock at the door.*)

Liu (*straightens up and hastily smooths her hair*): Come in!
(*The door opens and Chang Teh-yu holding something wrapped in his coat appears.*)

Liu (*taken aback*): Oh, it's you.
(*Chang stands in the doorway.*)

Liu (*sees that the bundle he is carrying is the wool. She is overjoyed*): Oh good, you've brought it back.

Chang: Well, I really came to see Wang Chuan.

Liu (*goes to him and takes the coat and wool out of his hands*): Come on now. You've straightened things out in your mind, haven't you? Let's forget the whole thing now. I've even bought the needles to knit your pull-over.

Chang: I . . . how dare I ask you to do that!

Liu: Are you still angry with me?

Chang: I'm not angry with anyone.

Liu (*puts the coat and wool on the bed, and says seriously*): Tell me, what have I done that you should talk to me like this?

Chang: You . . . you should know that better than anyone else.

Liu: I know you are angry because you don't want to transfer Wang Chuan. But didn't you propose it to the manager yourself?

Chang: With you standing over me, what else could I have done?

Liu: You're sore because you know you were in the wrong. Do you really feel I was wrong to insist on you doing it?

Chang: Oh no, you were right. You're always right. Is that what you want me to say?

Liu: Can't you think it over carefully, and understand why I had to do it? Of course I realize that our team has every chance of being the model team, and I know, too, that Wang Chuan is our main prop. In fact, she's not only our best worker but my closest friend too. When she goes to the other shift I personally lose a lot. I shall miss her terribly. But we haven't got any choice, have we? The other team is desperately short of good workers.

Chang: You've said enough! For goodness' sake, stop attacking me with these grand words.

Liu: You'll see my point if you think things over carefully. Don't you remember how our team suffered when we had changes? In '52, when we were getting poor quality cotton, and having a hard time with our spinning, didn't C Shift transfer two learners to us one after another? And wasn't that the reason why we couldn't fulfil our quota for three whole months? I remember how bitterly you grumbled at the time! We know what it's like, so we shouldn't do it to others. Now, in this campaign, some of the team leaders are too anxious to grab the red banner, and they've been behaving badly, so much so that it's harmed the solidarity of the mill. We shouldn't do that, should we?

Chang: If you keep on preaching we'll never get anywhere. You should try to understand why I'm feeling like this.

Liu: I do understand rather too well. You feel very bitter and fight tooth and nail when one of your workers has to be transferred to another team. Why didn't you stop and count the number of teams in our mill? There's quite a lot of them! If none of the others can fulfil their quota, what's the use of your team doing it on its own? But you don't give a damn for the others.

Chang: I'm not fighting for private interests. The yarn produced by our team goes to the state; I am not putting it into my own pocket. If our team does well, it's good for the state, so it's really the state's interest.

Liu: The way you are ignoring the difficulties of others and carrying on like this means you're no longer thinking and acting in the interests of the state. There's only one thing to call it: you're doing it for yourself. That's plain self-interest.

Chang (*startled*): What?

Liu: You have gone so far that it wouldn't be fair to you not to say it. You talk of whole-hearted devotion to the team and acting only in its interest, but actually you've got your eyes on the red banner for your own pride. You want to be the leader of the model team, to sit in the front row at meetings and to be praised wherever you go.

Chang (*angry and ashamed*): Go on. Put a big cap on my head and tell me it fits. I never had such ideas. . . .

Liu: Don't shrink away because it sounds bad when it happens to be the truth. When you've got such thoughts in your head you can't listen to good advice. You don't realize that you're sinking yourself into the mire of petty individual interest.

Chang (*nearly speechless*): You! . . . all right, do your worst, I know what you want.

Liu: What do you know? You can't even distinguish a true friend from false. (*Full of emotion.*) In the winter when I was sick in hospital, you came to visit me. I was down in the dumps and terribly homesick, but because you came every day and helped me patiently, I soon got better and left the hospital. I was very happy to return to the mill and before long I completed the probationary period and became a full member of the Party. Ever since then, I realized that a friend who can help one think in the right way is one's dearest and nearest friend. . . . After that . . . (*a pause*) after that you know quite well what we've been to each other. I had hoped from the bottom of my heart that our friendship would last a lifetime. Whenever you criticized me or expressed an opinion I always complied cheerfully and corrected myself as quickly as I could. I interested myself in your affairs too and criticized you in the same spirit. When I heard you had difficulties in your work I often lay awake at night worrying about it, racking my brains to think of a good way of helping you. In the last six months I felt that though neither of us mentioned it, we have in fact drawn much closer to each other. When I see comrades who haven't enough mutual understanding marry in haste and bury themselves in babies and good food, when I see them gradually drop behind politically and quarrel about purely domestic matters, I was surer than ever that you and I have taken the right road. I was so happy, and dreamed so many dreams: I even wrote and told my mother about it. I had a letter from her just now. (*Another pause.*) I thought our friendship was unshakable. I never imagined that today, in my effort to help you so that you could keep up your reputation of being an excellent team leader, you would behave like this, treat me with such hostility, and behave as if I were your enemy. To think you'd come down to this! You have made me lose confidence in myself.

Chang: I do believe you are speaking from your heart. But in today's matter you've made it too hard for me. I simply can't understand. . . .

Liu: Now that we've come to this, I no longer hope that you would understand me. I don't care what you think of me personally. You can think what you like. But you have been wrong in your approach to this question. You must recognize your mistake at once. Go humbly and honestly before the Party and criticize yourself. . . .

Chang: I don't see any reason to criticize myself . . . I'm not as bad as you try to make out. . . .

Liu (*in disgust*): How can you be so obstinate? Don't you want to recognize your mistake?

Chang: No, don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't want to admit my mistake. It's just that we've got that wretched No. 12 and conditions are really difficult in our team . . . I simply couldn't help doing what I did.

Liu (*solemnly*): No matter what you say, the Party will not let you entertain such erroneous ideas.

Chang (*knowing that he's in the wrong*): I'm not the only one, you know. Haven't you seen how others. . . .

Liu: If that's the way you feel about it, all right. We have nothing more to say to each other. (*She bends the steel needles in her hands.*) Go ahead and do what you like.

Chang (*startled*): What are you saying?

Liu: I can't stoop to a person like you.
(*Chang stands transfixed in thought. Old Chao comes on.*)

Old Chao (*walking to Chang and full of feeling*): Chang, old man, I . . . I'm overwhelmed. . . .

Chang (*puzzled*): What is it now?

Old Chao: You've done something I couldn't have done. You have transferred Wang Chuan to our team. You give us such an excellent worker. . . .
(*Chang is silent.*)

Old Chao: You've set an example to all of us. You followed the Party's call to co-operate and help one another, and showed us what we should all do. You have really gone a step ahead of me. (*Produces a piece of paper.*) Here, take this! You'll find in it directions on how to handle No. 12.

Chang (*surprised*): What did you say? No. 12?

Old Chao: I'm the only person in the shop who knows what's wrong with that spinning frame. But you see I didn't intend to tell you about it before. (*With earnest goodwill.*) I've swallowed more cotton fluff than you and this is a bit of an old hand's experience! Just follow the directions I've written down when you guide the traverse board and the gill and then you won't have to stand by and watch it every second. It won't produce bad stuff for you again.
(*Very much moved; Chang takes the piece of paper.*)

Old Chao (*produces a letter*): This is a message from our C Shift's No. 2 team. "We pledge ourselves to follow your advanced way of thinking, to help our work-mates, to build up a feeling of solidarity and make our emulation campaign a real emulation of good points."

(*Slowly, Chang takes the letter and hands it to Liu Lien-ying. She puts it on the table. Wang Chuan dashes in very much excited.*)

Wang (*calling as she runs in*): Lien-ying, Lien-ying! (*To Chang when she catches sight of him.*) How is it that you're back here again? Haven't you seen the board? Our team's been commended!

Chang (*puzzled*): What for?

Wang (*gesticulating wildly*): The characters are as big as this! "A Shift's No. 2 team shows a true fraternal spirit in the emulation campaign. Transfers excellent bobbin worker to support brother team!" Look! (*Points out of the window.*) There's a crowd outside the shop reading it. . . .

Chang: Ai! (*Lowers his head.*)

Wang (*to Chang*): Well, what have you got to say now! (*To Liu.*) Oh, Lien-ying, it's you who have brought such honour to our team . . . (*emotionally*) . . . I'll never forget you, and how you did this.

Old Chao: Chang, old chap, I confess the bottom formation we used to leave you could be better. You wait and see. We'll make it much better.

(*Chang is touched and turns away from the others to dab at his eyes with a handkerchief.*)

Wang (*to Chao*): I think I'd better come to work this evening.

Old Chao: No, don't! You worked the morning shift. You'll tire yourself out. We'll manage somehow today. You start in on Monday. (*To Chang.*) Well, I must be going. (*Goes to Chang and again grips his hand. Exit.*)

Wang (*to Liu, full of interest*): How is it with you two?

Liu (*shaking her head*): Don't ask me.

Wang (*after a little thought*): I think I'll go to C Shift for a look. (*Calling.*) Chao! Old Chao, wait for me. (*Runs off.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying takes off her jacket and puts on the old coat she was wearing in the beginning of the act. She walks towards the door.*)

Chang (*following behind her and in a tender tone*): Where are you going?

Liu: To the Party branch. . . .

Chang: Are you going there to discuss me? You needn't go; I'll go of my own accord and criticize myself. . . .

Liu: Why should I go there to discuss you? I want to discuss what to do to help Liu Sheng. . . .

Chang: Let's go together then.

Liu (*stepping back*): You can go by yourself. I'll go on Monday.

Chang (*penitently*): Comrade Lien-ying, I do really understand you now. Can you go on helping me?

Liu (*in a huff*): I don't see how we can go on as we did, now. You've brought this upon yourself. There is nothing I can do about it.

Chang (*sighs sadly, takes up the wool and with sincerity*): Comrade Liu Lien-ying, I am still a Communist, I know how to deal with my mistakes. As long as you are still in the mill you'll see for yourself. (*Gives Liu Lien-ying a lingering glance and stalks to the door. Exit.*)

Liu (*gazing at his retreating back, is lost in thought*): I . . . I shouldn't go on treating him so harshly. He's the kind of man who corrects himself with determination as soon as he recognizes his mistake. . . . (*Picks up the knitting needles on the ground.*) O look, I've bent them. (*A pause.*) I suppose I'll have to straighten them out. (*Goes quickly to the door. She bumps into Chang Teh-yu who is being pushed back into the room by Wang Chuan.*)

Wang (*to Chang*): There's no need to go now! There'll be plenty of time for you to go and criticize yourself after you've been to the pictures.

Liu: Give me that wool. Let me knit the pull-over for you. (*Takes the wool. As she looks at Chang her affection is unmistakable.*)

C u r t a i n

Translated by Tang Sheng
Photographs by Tsao Hsi-lin

THE DAY THE NEW DIRECTOR CAME

Ho Chiu

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance):

Lao Li, *the messenger at the General Administration Office of a certain bureau, aged 50*

Liu Shan-chi, *a man in his forties, chief of the General Administration Office*

Tai Wei, *general clerk in the General Administration Office*

Chu Ling, *in her twenties, from the Construction Section Office*

Comrade Chung, *an office worker*

Chang Yun-tung, *in the neighbourhood of fifty, the new director of the Bureau*

TIME:

A morning in late spring

PLACE:

The director's office in a certain bureau

SETTING:

Centre, back, a double frosted glass door opens on to a corridor. On the corridor side of the door, seen backwards from the audience, is "Private, Director of Bureau," in black paint. Left, there is a door which opens into the General Administration Office. Right, windows. The director's office is furnished with an executive desk, a swivel chair, a filing cabinet, and a round conference table and chairs. On the desk, stationery, a desk telephone, a small desk clock and a bell push.

When the curtain rises, the door into the corridor is shut. The door to the General Administration Office is open. Lao Li is sitting at the round table poring over a book, marking passages as he reads, his dust pan and a broom beside him on the floor. The sky seen through the window is overcast; it looks like rain.

A volley of knocks is heard at the glass door. Lao Li puts his book down and hurries to open it. Liu Shan-chi, a bulging portfolio under his arm, rushes in.

Liu Shan-chi (*throwing the portfolio on the desk, gives a quick look at the door on the left and then says to Lao Li*): Nobody here yet?

Lao Li (*baffled*): Who should be here?

Liu (*again looking left through the door*): Where's everybody? Hasn't Comrade Tai come yet?

Lao Li (*looking at the clock*): Why, chief, there's an hour still before office hours begin.

Liu: Office hours! What d'you mean, office hours! You people talk as though you're paid by the hour! The new director'll be coming this afternoon and there you are, waiting around for office hours! (*Picks up the book from the table.*) Whose is this?

Lao Li: Mine.

Liu (*patronizingly*): Studying the General Line,* eh?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu (*throws the book down*): Messengers like you would do better, as far as the General Line goes, to put your minds to keeping the office clean and seeing to taking round the tea. (*Points at the dust pan lying on the floor.*) Look at that! The way you throw your dust pan and broom about is not according to the General Line, I can tell you. May I ask when you're going to clear up?

(*Lao Li quietly picks up his dust pan and broom and starts to go.*)

Liu: Hey, you, hold on a minute!

(*Lao Li halts.*)

Liu: Have you got the director's new office ready yet?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: Have the curtains and covers come?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: Have you put them up?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: I'll have a look later. That's all.

(*Exit Lao Li, left, with his dust pan and broom.*)

Liu (*sits down, wipes his perspiring forehead, picks up the telephone and dials a number*): Hello! That the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . (*Gruffly.*) Never mind who's calling. Just tell him to come to the phone. (*Impatiently presses the bell. When nobody comes, he calls, left.*) Lao Li! Lao Li!

(*Lao Li enters hurriedly.*)

Liu: Go and fetch Comrade Tai.

Lao Li: Very well. (*Walks to the left door.*)

Liu: Wait!

(*Lao Li stops.*)

*General principles of the policy to be adopted for building socialism in China, put forward by the Communist Party, and adopted by the Government after nation-wide discussion.

Liu (*The receiver is buzzing. He quickly speaks into the phone*): Hello! This is Liu Shan-chi speaking. (*Motions Lao Li away.*) You may go. (*Exit Lao Li, left.*)

Liu: Hello! About the sofas we bought yesterday. Why haven't they been delivered yet? . . . What's that? No, nothing doing! It's got to be delivered before nine . . . before nine, I say, and not a minute later. (*He slams the receiver down, and then picks it up and dials again.*) Hello! Who's that? Oh, it's you, Lao Lu! I say, you know that spring bed we bought for our director yesterday? I want it delivered right away. (*There are loud voices off, left.*)

Liu (*unable to hear the voice in the telephone, puts his hand over the mouthpiece and shouts loudly, left*): Who's making all that noise there? (*Tai Wei puts his head around the door, left.*)

Tai Wei (*timidly*): It's me, chief. . . .

Liu: What the hell are you shouting about? Can't you see I'm trying to telephone?

Tai Wei: Comrade Chu of the Construction Section. . . .

Liu: It would be! Tell her she'll have to wait.

Tai Wei: All right. (*His head disappears.*)

Liu (*on the phone again*): Hello! Hello! Hello, hello! (*No answer.*) Damn it! (*Slams down the receiver.*)

(*The quarrelsome voices have not been stilled outside. Liu Shan-chi presses the bell petulantly. Tai Wei enters.*)

Liu: What's all the argument about?

Tai Wei: It's those Construction Section people. . . .

(*Chu Ling enters on Tai Wei's heels.*)

Chu Ling: Comrade Liu, just look at the sky! I'm sure it's going to rain today. And you know we can't leave that cement outside any longer.

Liu (*assuming a considerate air, with an effort*): Comrade Chu, I thought you'd covered up that cement with oiled cloth?

Chu: I've got some, that's true, but seven or eight bags got soaked the day before yesterday when it rained, for all that.

Liu: Well, there simply isn't any storage space for it, so what do you expect me to do about it?

Chu: I know the storage is a problem, but something's got to be done about it just the same. That cement's government property, you know, and we can't just stand by and see it wasted, can we?

Liu: I've studied the General Line too, thank you! That doesn't alter the fact that we've got no storage place. That's where the difficulty lies.

Chu: I thought difficulties are meant to be overcome, aren't they?

Liu (*looking trapped*): All right, all right. I'll try to overcome them — I promise. (*Looks at his watch.*) It's nearly time to start work; I'll talk it over then and see what can be done.

Chu: You people observe working hours pretty strictly, don't you?

Liu: Well, that's in conformity with the General Line, isn't it? It calls for increased production, but we don't approve of overtime.

Chu: I'm afraid the rain won't keep to office hours! If that cement gets damaged, it'll be your office that's held responsible.

Liu: All right, all right! We'll take full responsibility. Only give me a little time, please. (*Looks at his watch again.*) Half an hour, and it'll be fixed. How's that?

Chu: All right, then. I'll be back in half an hour. (*Exit, left.*)

Liu: H'mmm! That Construction Section ought to be called the problem-making department. They've just no consideration for others.

Tai Wei: They're all the same there. Look at them! She herself came over five times yesterday, fussing away. She wouldn't listen to a thing I said. All she could see was her 300 bags of cement. She never gave a thought to our headaches.

Liu: When she comes back, just tell her that nothing can be done for the moment. And mind you don't let her get hold of me, whatever happens.

Tai Wei: You know she was demanding that downstairs room back, just then?

Liu: What the hell! I purposely had that room emptied for the new director. Can't she see it has been newly done up?

Tai Wei: I told her that, but she said it was a waste of money. She said she couldn't see why we had to spend money on a new office for the director if there was this one already.

Liu: You can just tell her that this one's too small. It's not suitable for a director. And anyway, my office has got to handle all manner of business. We're overworked actually. We can't carry on without a decent office for ourselves, in fact.

Tai Wei: Well, she went on to speak her mind about us and said that it was only because we wanted a bigger office for our section that there was nowhere for the cement to go.

Liu: Nag, nag, nag! Always criticizing! (*Changes the subject, pointing at the lettering on the centre door.*) Why hasn't that been changed yet?

Tai Wei: I'll get it done right away. Very simple. It only means changing "Director of Bureau" to "Chief of Section."

Liu: But I want another line underneath, "General Administration Office."

Tai Wei: Very well.

(*Lao Li enters, left, with a wooden sign, saying: Private, Director of Bureau.*)

Lao Li: Chief, here's the new sign.

Liu (*takes over the sign and examines the writing*): H'mmm! Sung dynasty style, eh! Not bad! Not bad at all! (*Hands it to Tai Wei.*) Have it hung right away.

Tai Wei (*takes it*): Very well. (*To Lao Li, pointing to the glass door.*) Lao Li, scratch off "Director of Bureau" there, will you? I'll send someone over to do the painting.

Lao Li: Right you are.

(Tai Wei and Liu Shan-chi exeunt, left.)

Lao Li *(muttering)*: I must say he's got a lot of energy, that chief of ours. He's even got to see to hanging up signs! *(As he talks, he starts to scratch the words off the glass door with an old knife.)*

(Enter Comrade Chung from left.)

Chung: Lao Li, where is your section chief?

Lao Li: He went downstairs.

Chung: Can you find him for me?

Lao Li: The office isn't open yet, Comrade Chung. Is there something special you want to see him about?

Chung: Yes. You know how the roof of our hostel leaks. I want to know whether the General Administration Office is going to do anything about it or not.

Lao Li: Of course we are. But Comrade Chung, our section chief. . . .

Chung: Your section chief knows too well how not to do things. All he ever does is talk about "the budget" or the "bureau rules." Now, when he comes in, will you be sure to tell him this: we've found a man to do the roof ourselves. He'll be coming in a minute. What we want is for your office to see him, and settle the price. If your chief refuses to pay for it, we'll share the expenses among ourselves.

Lao Li: Who is this man? What's his name?

Chung: He's the manager of the Hsiang Tai Construction Company. Rather a tall fellow. His name's Chang.

Lao Li: All right, then. When he comes, I'll take him to see the section chief.

Chung: Thanks very much. *(Exit, centre door.)*

Lao Li *(shaking his head with a sigh)*: What's the use? The whole department is so busy with this new director coming that we don't know whether we're on our heads or our heels. How shall we find the time to bother about a thing like a leaking roof? *(He resumes his work on the door with his knife. There is a short pause. Then a knock on the door is heard. Lao Li stops his work and opens the door. Enter Chang Yun-tung.)*

Chang Yun-tung: Excuse me, is this the office of the Director of Bureau?

Lao Li: Well. . . . *(Looking at the words on the glass.)* It was, but now it is the chief of the General Administration Office.

Chang: Where's your section chief then?

Lao Li *(taking a good look at the visitor)*: Why? Do you want to see him?

Chang: Yes.

Lao Li: Your name, please?

Chang: My name's Chang.

Lao Li: Oh, yes! Manager Chang.

Chang (*puzzled*): Manager Chang?

Lao Li: Yes, I know about you. Comrade Chung's just this moment told me. (*In an earnest voice.*) I really ought to tell you it's not a good moment, Manager Chang. Why butt your head against the wall? Our new director's coming to take over this afternoon, and our section chief's madly busy getting his new office ready. He's got his hands full. He'll never give the time to talk to you about house repairs.

Chang (*more and more puzzled*): House repairs?

Lao Li: Yes, of course. In the first place, you see, there's no doubt that our hostel building is a bit ancient, and on top of that, the storm we had last week smashed a lot of tiles. So now, every time it rains, there's a proper lake indoors! But what can we do about it? The office for the new director needs whitewashing, and new furnishings and new flooring, not to mention sofas and a spring bed. That'll cost us over 400 dollars alone. How much does that leave for house repairs this month, I ask you!

Chang: Yes, but if your roof leaks so badly, it's got to be done somehow.

Lao Li: Of course it should. We've had such a lot of rain recently, and whenever it comes down half the workers simply stop and go over there to get the leaking-pans out. If it happens to rain during the night, well, nobody gets any sleep. The result is that they've practically declared war on the General Administration Office! But our chief is the kind who sticks to his rules and keeps a tight hold on the purse-strings, and all he'll do is to tell everyone they'll have to put up with it until next month.

Chang: Whereabouts is the hostel? Can you let me have a look at it?

Lao Li: You can easily find it yourself. Downstairs and turn right. You can't miss it. Come to think of it, Manager Chang, it wouldn't be a bad idea if you went there now just to take a look, and make an estimate. It'll have to be done next month anyway, and then we can give you the contract.

Chang (*nodding, with a faint smile*): Thank you. That'll be fine. (*Exit, centre door.*)

(*The sky outside is getting darker. Now and again there's a distant roll of thunder.*)

Lao Li (*looks out at the window with a sigh*): There's going to be another shower. I'd better close these windows now, so the floor doesn't get wet again. (*He shuts all the windows, and then picks up the knife and goes back to his scratching.*)

(*Chu Ling and Liu Shan-chi enter, left, arguing with each other.*)

Liu: You win, you win, my dear Comrade Chu. But you promised to give me half an hour, and here you've hardly turned your back before you come bothering me again. If everyone behaved this way, how d'you think I'd be able to get any work done at all?

Chu: What ever do you mean, bothering you?— Bothering! What a word to use! I'm here on proper business, mine and yours.

Liu: I'll take you at your word on that, comrade! If it's business, let's go about it in a business-like way. So let me remind you, Comrade Chu, that it's not our office hours yet.

Chu: Oh, pooh! You can see for yourself how it's getting darker and darker, and you must have heard the thunder just now!

Liu: I know, I know, I heard it. But you must also admit that we provided you with oiled cloth, didn't we?

Chu: Of course I know you did, but the stuff you gave us was perished. It's not water-proof any longer.

Liu (*vexed*): You do nothing but make demands all the time! What are you after really?

Chu: That room downstairs.

Liu: What room?

Chu: The one where the cement used to be stored.

Liu: My dear girl, that room's the new office for the Director of the Bureau. Do you mean to say that you want to use the director's office for storing cement in?

Chu: Not all of it. Half would do us very nicely, if you really can't find a vacant place for us anywhere else.

Liu: Let you have half of it?

Chu: That would do, I reckon. Three hundred bags of cement, you see . . . I think half the room would do.

Liu: I see! Half the room for your cement and the other half for the director's office. Sweet and simple, isn't it?

Chu: Don't you really think you ought to do something about that cement? It's very important to us, you know.

Liu: Now, which is more important, some cement belonging to the Construction Section, or the office for the director? Anyhow, the director's coming this afternoon. D'you think I'd let anyone mess his office up? Not on your life!

(*There is another roll of thunder.*)

Chu (*agitated*): D'you hear that? More thunder! It'll rain any minute! You must do something for goodness' sake!

Liu (*calmly*): Comrade, you've studied the General Line, haven't you? There's the economy drive to think of, isn't there? After all, you keep on forgetting that we've managed to supply you with that oiled cloth. That's already something, in view of the need for economy, I can tell you.

Chu: Yes, but what about the cement? You simply don't. . . . (*A loud peal of thunder.*) See? The rain will start any minute!

(*Chang Yun-tung enters, centre.*)

Chang (*to Lao Li*): Comrade, where's your section chief? I must see him.

Lao Li (*in a tight corner*): Manager Chang, you . . . you had better not. . . .

Liu (*ill-humoured*): What is it now?

Lao Li: Eh . . . h'mm! Pardon me, Manager Chang, this gentleman is our section chief.

Liu (*to Lao Li*): Who's this?

Lao Li: It's Manager Chang, the contractor for the roof. Comrade Chung sent him over.

Chang: I beg your pardon, I am. . . .

Liu (*interrupting him*): Which roof needs repairing?

Lao Li: The roof of the staff's hostel. It lets in water all over.

Chang: That's a fact. I've just had a good look at it.

Liu: Well, I'll be damned! Just for a few drops of rain, they kick up such a commotion. They don't seem to understand that we'd never get our work done if we didn't keep to the rules. If everyone can go and get a roofing contractor in every time they think something wants repairing, wherever should I be?

Chang: I think it's very possible that they haven't kept to your rules. But who's really responsible for that?

Liu: Look here, you run along and talk to whoever it was who got you here. (*Looks at his watch. To Lao Li.*) There's half an hour before it's time to start. I'm going to have a bit of shut-eye and I don't want you to let anyone disturb me. (*He puts his portfolio under his arm and makes ready to leave.*)

(*Chu Ling immediately bars the way.*)

Chu: I'm not going to let you get away like that! Those 300 bags of cement simply mustn't be left out in the rain again.

Liu: What do you propose to do about it, then?

Chu: I want to use that downstairs room. Look here, Comrade Liu, the new director isn't coming till the afternoon, is he? We've got until then. You could easily let us use it for the time being. Directly it stops raining we'll shift it again.

Liu: You've got a nerve! You see for yourself, comrade, that room's just been whitewashed and the floor's been waxed. By the time you've had your cement in and out, d'you think the room would ever get cleaned up again?

Chu: Oh, you always have good reasons for not doing anything. Talking never gets anywhere with you. I can tell you, Comrade Liu, that I am going right down to get someone to give me a hand with moving that cement. If we do mess the room up, and if it upsets the new director, I'll take the consequences. (*She starts to go off, left.*)

Liu (*jauntily*): Sorry, Comrade Chu, but you'll find the door locked. (*He fishes a key out of his pocket, tosses it nonchalantly, and then gives it to Lao Li.*) Here, it'll be in your charge. When the sofa comes, see that it's put in the office. (*He turns away, pauses, and speaks again to*

Lao Li.) No one is allowed to open the door without my direct permission! D'you understand? *(Sweeping everybody with a glance, he goes off, left.)*

Chu *(vehemently)*: Look at that! Just look at that! I don't know what goes on in his head, I'm sure! *(She is so angry that she can say no more and she sits down to get a breath.)*

Lao Li *(with a sympathetic sigh)*: He's got a heart of cement.

Chang *(to Chu Ling)*: Comrade, are those bags piled up downstairs the cement you've been talking about?

Chu: Yes. But if it gets wet it won't be cement any more. What good are a few sheets of oiled cloth?

Chang: Why does it have to be stored outside?

Chu: It used to be stored in that empty room downstairs. Then, with the change of director, the chief of the General Administration Office said we were to move it out, so that he could have the room re-decorated for the director's office. He promised that something would be done about the cement, but we never thought that this something would turn out to be a couple of sheets of oiled cloth!

Chang: What was the matter with this office? Why change it?

Chu: This one's too small, it seems. After all, it is for the director. It should be grander, I suppose.

Chang: Grander! Do you think that's the real reason?

Chu: What do you think?

Chang: I think it's pure nonsense!

Chu: I couldn't agree more! Pure, unadulterated nonsense! All he cares about is how his own office looks — government property doesn't matter! What would you call such a director?

Chang *(grinning)*: I should say he was a bad one, if he's really like that. *(Another roll of thunder, this time loud and near.)*

Chu: Oh! The rain's going to start!

Lao Li *(looks out at the window)*: That's right; here it comes!

(Chu Ling runs over to the window, opens it and puts her hand out, then shuts the window hastily.)

Chu: It's started! My poor cement'll be soaked. *(Rushes to the door, left.)*

Lao Li: What are you going to do, Comrade Chu?

Chu: I'm going over to my office to see if there's anyone there who can help.

Lao Li: Well! If your office could think of a way out, you could have saved yourself all your trips here.

Chu *(in a quandary)*: Oh, what can we do? *(She pauses a moment, and then an idea comes to her.)* I've got it! I can get the bed quilts! *(She starts to run off.)*

Lao Li: Then, Comrade Chu, how many quilts d'you need? You'd need all the bed quilts we have, and then no one will be able to sleep! Come on, let's move that cement. I've got the key.

Chu: Oho! Move it! Into the new director's office?

Lao Li: It's the only place there is, isn't it? Let's move it there, for the time being, anyway.

Chu: What about you? Won't you get into trouble with your boss?

Lao Li: Never mind about him. I may be only the messenger, but I've studied the General Line myself, and I've got things clear now. Come on! I'll be fully responsible.

Chang (to Lao Li): Comrade, you are doing the right thing.

Chu (shaking hands with Lao Li excitedly): Good for you, Lao Li!

Lao Li: All right, but let's go. There's no time to waste.

(Chu Ling and Lao Li are just going when Chu Ling stops.)

Chu: Oh, I forgot! There'll be no one to give us a hand! With this rain everyone'll be over in the hostel putting pans under the leaks! Where on earth can we get help?

Chang: Don't worry, come on. We'll all come.

Chu: But three of us won't be enough! There are 300 bags of the stuff! It'll take us all day. The moment it comes down really hard, it'll all be done for, for all our worrying.

Chang: Then go and tell everyone to come over immediately to salvage the cement. Tell them the new director says so.

Chu: The new director says so? I oughtn't to say that, ought I?

Chang: Go and try. I'm sure they'll believe you.

Chu: But you . . . you really mean I should fool them?

Chang: You won't be fooling them. I am. . . .

Chu (with a start): What? Are you? . . .

Lao Li: Do you mean to say you're. . . .

Chang (smiling): Yes, I'm the new director of your Bureau.

(Chu Ling and Lao Li are both dumbfounded.)

Chu: Well! . . . the new director! (She is so overcome with excitement that she doesn't know what to say.) Come on, Lao Li, let's go and shift that cement!

Chang: That's the stuff! I'll be along immediately. You two go ahead and get everyone together.

Chu: Of course, of course! (She pulls Lao Li out through the centre door jubilantly.)

(Chang Yun-tung scribbles down a note, using the pen and paper on the desk, and follows them.)

(The stage is empty for a few moments. Vivid flashes of lightning can be seen through the window. The noise of rain gradually grows louder. Liu Shan-chi and Tai Wei enter, left.)

Liu: No, I said nothing of the kind. Get on the phone and tell them to send it over immediately.

Tai Wei: Very well. (Takes up the receiver.)

(Liu Shan-chi sits down at the round table, smoking.)

Tai Wei (*speaking on the phone*): Hello! Is that the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . Oh, good morning, manager. Our section chief told me to get on to you to see whether you've sent that sofa we bought. . . . Not yet? Why not? . . . You've got to wait until the rain stops? (*Puts his hand over the mouthpiece and speaks to Liu Shan-chi.*) He says he'll send it as soon as it stops raining.

Liu: Nonsense! Ask him if he is a meteorologist, or something, who knows when the rain's going to stop.

Tai Wei (*speaking into the phone*): Hello! My chief wants me to ask you if you are a meteorologist, and know when the rain will stop . . . no? Well, then, you'd better do something. . . .

Liu: I'll give him half an hour to deliver it in.

Tai Wei (*speaking into the phone*): Hello! My chief gives you another half hour to deliver it in. . . . What's that? Oh, I see! (*Puts his hand over the mouthpiece and speaks to Liu Shan-chi.*) He says as soon as he can have it packed in oiled cloth, he'll send it over.

Liu: Nothing doing! Oiled cloth's no good! (*Grabs the receiver from Tai Wei, and speaks himself.*) Hello! Let me ask you just one question: Have you studied the General Line or not? That sofa's been bought by the government; it's state property. We've got to take good care of it. . . . Nonsense! That won't do! What are you thinking of! Oiled cloth is no good. You'll have to get a van. . . . What's that? Transport charges? You must charge us? All right, all right! But mind you send it over at once! (*Hangs up the phone.*) Can't see an inch beyond their own interests, these business people. He even tries to make a bit on the transport.

(*Chang Yun-tung enters, centre, soaked through, mopping his face with a handkerchief.*)

Liu: So you're still here. It's no use you hanging around, I tell you; we're not interested in house repairs.

Chang: Why not? That dormitory leaks like a sieve. Why don't you repair it?

Liu: I like that! Surely it's up to us to decide whether it needs repairing or not, isn't it? I fail to see that it's any of your business.

Chang: Why don't you go and look at it yourself? Have you any idea what state that hostel's in? Pails, basins, spittoons — everything is mobilized. What's more, you have to keep on shifting the things around from one corner to the other. All your workers' quilts are drenched. Don't you worry about things like that?

Liu: Now look here! It's not your business to read me a lecture: I should have known better than to waste any courtesy on commercial people like you. The movement against the Five Corruptions is hardly over, and yet here you are, worming your way right into our Bureau. I wondered what you were up to here!

(While this exchange is going on, Tai Wei discovers the note on the desk. He reads it, jumps, and hastens to hand it to Liu Shan-chi.)

Tai Wei: Chief, our director. . . .

Liu *(takes the slip, but doesn't look at it)*: Incidentally, I must warn you our new director thoroughly detests the likes of you. If you are wise you'll get out before you're kicked out. Otherwise, if you run into him, you won't be treated with the consideration I've shown you.

Tai Wei *(pointing to the slip in Liu Shan-chi's hand)*: But . . . but the new director has come. . . .

Liu *(still has no ear for Tai Wei)*: That reminds me, when the director comes, I certainly shan't forget to report all this to him. See if I don't tell him how much trouble the people here make for me, sending over a private contractor here.

Chang: Trouble for *you*? When it rains, your people have to leave their offices and go over to the hostel to put out the pans to catch the drips! Do you realize the loss that causes? Not to mention the conditions in the hostel itself, with everything damp, and getting mildewed! Don't you realize that'll affect their health? Why do you have to stick to your budget and rules so rigidly and insist upon doing nothing "until next month" always?

Liu *(in a rage)*: Damn you! Do you realize where you are? This is an office, a government office! I forbid you to brawl here. *(To Tai Wei.)* Throw him out!

Tai Wei *(trying to push Chang Yun-tung out)*: You'd better leave, Manager Chang, you'd better leave. You might as well give up hope of getting any business from us. It won't do you any good to exasperate him! Think of the old saying, "Go out to get wool, and come home shorn."

Chang *(protesting aloud)*: Let me tell you something, Comrade Liu. When you hear yourself criticized, remain cool and think things over. It'll do you good.

Liu *(stamping his feet)*: Get out! Get out, I say!

Tai Wei: Now, now, please. *(Pushing Chang Yun-tung out, centre, back.)*

Liu: Preposterous! This is simply preposterous!

Tai Wei *(turns back and says urgently)*: Chief, the new director's here already.

Liu: What! Here?

Tai Wei *(pointing at the slip in Liu Shan-chi's hand)*: Look at that! He's left a note for you.

Liu *(hurriedly unfolds the note and reads it aloud)*: "To the Chief of the General Administration Office: Please assign the director's office quarters downstairs to the Construction Section, so that it may be used to store the cement in as before. Also, have the roof of the staff hostel



repaired within two days. Chang Yun-tung." . . . Impossible! When did this note come?

Tai Wei: That's what I've been wondering myself.

Liu (*turns to the door, left*): Lao Li! Lao Li! . . . Blast the idiot! Where the hell does he get to when he's needed?

(*Chu Ling enters, centre, back, carrying a jacket and trousers.*)

Chu: Comrade Liu, where's Director Chang?

Liu: Director Chang?

Chu: Yes! He told me just now that I should find him here.

Liu: What? Then why haven't I seen him?

Chu: Haven't you? I'd better go and look for him, I suppose. (*Turns to go.*)

Liu (*barring the way*): Look here, Comrade Chu, do you know the new director?

Chu: I met him just now. Why?

Liu (*hesitantly*): Nothing, I was just wondering.

Chu: What about?

Liu: You see, he left this note. (*Handling the slip to Chu Ling.*)

Chu (*takes the slip and reads it*): That's right. He was rather displeased with the cement being left outside.

Liu: Oh, was he? Did he say anything else?

Chu (*bluntly*): He was very much dissatisfied with you. He said that you were careless of public property, and that you didn't bother about how your comrades had to live. Even when you knew their rooms leaked, you didn't mind, he said.

Liu: But doesn't he realize that it's because of the rules there's no money left this month? It's simply got to be postponed till next month.

Chu: Well, the new director asked how it was then that you could have an office whitewashed, and a new floor laid? There was room for that in the plan, I suppose! He also wondered how it was that there was plenty of money for sofas and new furnishings!

Liu: What! He even knew I had bought sofas?

Chu: Of course he knew, and he was furious about it, too. He said that things like that shouldn't be charged to the office account, and that you ought to pay for them yourself, and take them home.

Liu: What? Me pay for them? But that's three months' salary!

Chu: Well, if you can afford a sofa set here, won't it look more like a section chief's office? *(She goes out, centre, back, still carrying the clothes.)*

Liu *(holding his head)*: I'll be damned! Here's a nice fix! . . . *(To Tai Wei.)* Go and get that contractor back immediately.

(Tai Wei hurries out, centre, back.)

Liu *(paces up and down nervously. Suddenly he walks to the telephone and dials)*: Hello! Is that the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . Hello, this is Liu Shan-chi. . . . No, no, I am not rushing you. On the contrary, I am thinking of cancelling that sofa order. . . . What's that? Already on the way? Then call it back at once. . . . What's that? You can't? The truck's already gone quite a while? In that case, order it back when it gets here. . . . Now, look here, we are old friends, aren't we? You must help me out. . . . Certainly, certainly! We'll pay for the transport. *(Hangs up the phone and dials again.)* Hello! Who's that? Oh, Lao Lu! I say, you know that spring bed I bought? I want to cancel it. Our new director is not used to sleeping in a bed with a spring mattress — you know how it is. . . . What's that? It's on its way? Hello! Hello! *(The line is dead.)* Damn it! *(Slams down the receiver, and then presses the bell in a temper.)* Lao Li! Lao Li! *(Strides to the left door.)* Damn it! Not a soul there!

(Tai Wei pushes open the front door, and with a great show of politeness, ushers Chang Yun-tung in.)

Tai Wei: After you, Manager Chang. Please come in and have a chat with us.

(Chang Yun-tung enters.)

Liu: Please sit down. *(Holds out a packet of cigarettes.)* Will you smoke?

Chang *(grinning)*: No, thanks. I don't smoke.

Liu: Pardon me, I am so forgetful. Your name is. . . .

Tai Wei *(interrupting him)*: Chang, Manager Chang.

Liu: Yes, of course. Manager Chang.

Chang: No, I am. . . .

Liu (*hastens to apologize*): We had a slight misunderstanding before, I'm afraid. I hope you didn't mind. (*To Tai Wei.*) You go and keep a sharp look-out at the front gate. When either the bed or the sofa arrives, tell whoever brings them to take them straight back.

Tai Wei: Return them, you mean?

Liu: Yes, return them — the whole lot.

Tai Wei: But. . . .

Liu: But what?

Tai Wei: But the charge for the truck and delivery service. . . .

Liu: Pay them anything they want, but see that you don't accept delivery.

(*Tai Wei hurries, left.*)

Liu: Manager Chang, I am a blunt, outspoken man. I hope you will excuse me for what happened a little while ago.

Chang: Comrade, I did not come here to see to house repairs. I. . . .

Liu: I understand perfectly. You didn't come of your own accord. They sent you here. It really makes no difference one way or the other. You shall have the business anyway. It won't be much of a contract, but you'll be able to make something out of it.

Chang: But I. . . .

Liu (*hastens to clarify his proposition*): Don't worry! I am an understanding person. Name your price, and we'll pay. The only thing is, it'll be a rush work. It's got to be finished today. If that means skimping the job a bit, well, it can't be helped, can it! I'm sure we understand one another.

Chang: You mean you'll pay any price, and I can get away with a sloppy job?

Liu (*handing him the note*): Well, see this? That's the way our new director wants it. Repairs to be done in two days, it says. Well, they are orders from above, and orders are orders.

Chang: I see!

Liu: There's one more thing I'd like you to do to oblige me: If the new director happens to speak to you about it, tell him that I asked you to make an estimate some time ago, and that you only started today because you'd been busy.

Chang: Why?

Liu (*heaving a sigh*): For one thing, there are too many people around who like to indulge in foolish talk. The director is new—a complete stranger here. It's quite possible that a piece of gossip or back-biting will reach his ears and give him a wrong impression.

Chang: I see!

Liu: Actually I have nothing to be afraid of. The director and I are old friends. He knows how I do my work.

Chang: Oh! You and the new director are old friends, you say?

Liu: That's right! Really old friends. We fought together as guerillas, worked in the land reform movement together . . . together always. . . .
(*By now he has adopted a painfully sentimental tone.*) But I haven't seen him for years. He must be getting very old now. (*Sighs.*) He's the nicest fellow except for a strange quirk—he has a strong aversion to private contractors. I advise you, therefore, to keep your distance if you should see him. It'll save you from getting into trouble.

(*Lao Li and Chu Ling enter, left.*)

Lao Li (*to Chu Ling*): See? I told you he was here.

Liu (*to Lao Li*): You have been completely invisible all this time. Where the devil have you been?

Lao Li: I went down to give a hand with the cement.

Liu: Give a hand with the cement? What d'you mean?

Lao Li: We've moved it into the director's office.

Liu: What! Who told you to do it?

Lao Li: The new director. Director Chang told us to. He helped, too.

Liu: Oh! The new director's downstairs? Come on, Lao Li, I must go down and meet him. Hurry up! (*Grabs his portfolio from the desk, ready to leave.*)

Chu: Comrade Liu, what ever's the matter with you? The director's sitting right here with you. Why d'you think you've got to look for him?

Liu (*stupefied*): The new director? (*Pointing at Chang Yun-tung.*) Him? Is that. . . . (*His voice fails him.*)

Lao Li: Yes, he is the man you are looking for. That's the new director, Chang Yun-tung.

Liu (*nervously*): I see, I see! So he is. . . . (*To Chang Yun-tung.*) Director! Director Chang! I . . . I am Liu . . . Liu Shan-chi of the General Administration Office.

Chang: H'mmm, it is certainly a privilege to have met you.

Liu: You are flattering me, director. (*To Lao Li.*) Lao Li, what are you waiting for? Go and bring some tea!

Chang: Don't bother, Lao Li. You have worked hard enough with the cement. You must be very tired. You'd better go and have a rest.

Liu: Quite right. Go and rest yourself, Lao Li.

(*Exit Lao Li, left.*)

Chu: Pardon me, director, but you must be careful not to catch cold. You'd better change your clothes.

Chang: I am quite all right, Comrade Chu. I've got used to it. I was going around like this quite often, when Comrade Liu and I were fighting in the guerilla forces.

Chu: So you two used to fight together in guerilla forces?

Chang: Didn't we, Comrade Liu?

Liu (*extremely embarrassed*): Yes, but I . . . I . . . eh. . . .

Chang: Now, Comrade Chu, how about the cement? Did you get it all moved?

Chu: Yes, all of it.

Chang: How many bags got wet?

Chu: None.

Chang: You got dozens of people to help you just like that. You did a very good job.

Chu: Thanks to you, though. All I had to say was that the new director himself was moving cement for our section, aren't you going to help, and everybody came at once.

Chang: Why did you say I was moving the cement for *your* section? Aren't I part of the Construction Section? I think I've got a share in the cement, too.

Chu: Of course, you're quite right. That cement is government property, and every citizen has a share in it.

Liu: Quite right. Comrade Chu has studied the General Line and has readily acquired a lot of civic sense. The cement is government property. It is clear that everybody has a part in it.

Chu (*dryly*): H'mmm, but you certainly didn't play much part in any of those 300 bags! You yourself didn't seem to want to, either.

Liu (*most uneasy*): Comrade Chu, you . . . you are a little too . . . too . . .

Chu: Too what? Too critical? Not a bit! Your mind's full up of arrant nonsense from the old days. You knew very well the hostel roof leaked but you never bothered. You also knew that the cement would get wet if it rained, but that meant nothing to you. All you care about is sucking up to your superiors. You've spent the whole of the last few days furnishing the director's office with hangings and curtains and sofas. All you thought about was promotion.

Chang: I am used to sitting on hard benches, you know, (*turning to Liu Shan-chi*) and now you deliberately want to spoil me.

Liu: Well . . . eh, well . . . but that was because . . . eh . . . because the General Administration Office budget could spare a little this month.

Chang: Then why didn't you have the hostel roof repaired as being more important?

Liu: I did mean to. As a matter of fact, I, er, got an estimate. . . .

Chang: It's only because the contractor had been otherwise engaged that the repairing has been postponed again and again until today, I suppose?

Liu (*embarrassed*): Not exactly. What I said to you a short while ago was due to a slight misunderstanding. I hope you don't mind.

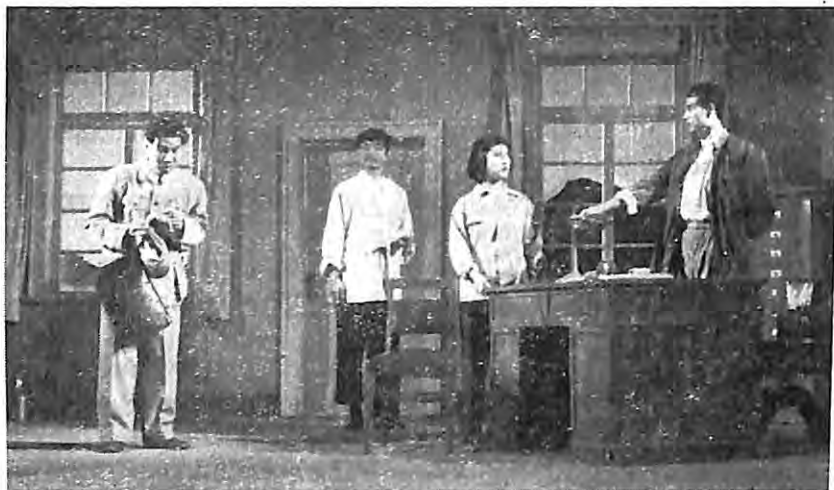
Chang: Slight misunderstandings! If they were slight I wouldn't mind, but I've seen too much to call them slight.

Liu: Of course, of course.

(*Lao Li enters, centre, back.*)

Lao Li: Chief, the spring bed's come. Where do you want it put?

Liu (*confused*): The spring bed? . . . Oh, yes! Where is Comrade Tai?
Doesn't he know about it?
Lao Li: Comrade Tai is at the front gate, apparently waiting for someone.
He's not seen the spring bed because they brought it to the back gate.
Liu: Oh! Very well, then. . . Tell them to deliver it to my house.
Lao Li (*pointing at the invoice in his hand*): Then, this bill. . .



Liu: Tell . . . eh . . . tell my wife to pay.
(*Lao Li turns to go.*)
Liu (*calls him back*): Wait! Wait! Tell Comrade Tai to come immediately.
(*Exit Lao Li from the front door.*)
Liu (*hastens to explain to Chang Yun-tung*): The bed . . . eh . . . my wife wanted this bed. She's rather spoilt, I'm afraid!
(*Tai Wei sneaks in, left.*)
Tai Wei (*whispering*): Chief!
Liu (*quickly draws him aside to speak to him in a low voice*): Keep a good look-out at the back door. That sofa will come any minute.
Tai Wei: At the back gate?
Liu: Yes! The back.
Tai Wei: But the front gate. . . ;
Liu (*pressingly*): Back gate, back gate. They are using the back gate.
(*Tai Wei scurries off. Lao Li enters, centre, back.*)
Lao Li: Chief!
Liu: What is it?
Lao Li: The sofas have come.
Liu (*embarrassed*): Sofas?
Lao Li: Yes, there's a big one and two small ones.
Liu: Oh, yes! But, then, why Comrade Tai didn't. . .

Lao Li: You told him to wait at the back gate, and they've just brought the sofas to the front.

Liu (*extremely uneasy*): I see, I see! Very well, then.

Lao Li: Shall I bring them up here?

Liu: No! Let me see . . . let me see. . . .

Chu: It seems to me that the best place your section chief can have them delivered to is his home. His wife's spoilt, he says. She'll like those sofas, I'm sure.

Liu: No, no, not that! As a matter of fact, Comrade Director, I had already arranged for the store to take it back.

Lao Li (*presenting Liu Shan-chi with a bill*): What about the delivery charges. . . .

Liu (*grabs the bill from Lao Li*): All right, all right, give it to me, I'll pay it. Director, please excuse me. I am just going to have a look. I'll be back in a minute.

Chang: Certainly.

(*Exit Liu Shan-chi, flustered, through centre, back.*)

Chang: Comrade Li, you showed a high sense of duty today in salvaging government property. You did a good job and did it courageously. On behalf of all of us here in the Bureau, I want to tell you that we appreciate it. (*Goes to shake hands warmly with Lao Li.*)

Lao Li (*rather abashed*): But . . . but I was only doing my duty. . . . Director, are you starting work today?

Chang: Well, yes! I've already started, I should think!

Lao Li: But what about your office? . . .

Chang: This office will do perfectly well.

Lao Li: Then I'll just move Chief Liu's things back where they were.

Chang: I don't think it's urgent. I rather feel that Comrade Liu will have to be assigned to a more suitable job.

Chu: You mean you're going to. . . .

Chang: I shall have to. It's only my duty to the people, and to him as well.

Lao Li (*takes out the key*): Director, this key. . . .

Chang: Let the Construction Section keep it. But that room is quite big and sunny, and it's just been done up. We shouldn't really keep it for storing cement in. Wouldn't it make better quarters than they've got at present for some of our staff? It can't be worse than they've got now, anyway! We'll repair the roof of the hostel at once, and turn some of it over temporarily, at least, to the Construction Section. Comrade Chu, would that arrangement suit you?

Chu: Suit me? You bet! It's a wonderful idea!

Chang (*jokingly*): Don't go flattering me too soon. It's early days yet. I hope you'll have no cause to call me names again in future.

Chu (*quite embarrassed*): Director, please forgive me . . . I didn't mean you.

Chang: It doesn't matter really. If you do find me making mistakes in the future, I shall expect you to call me even worse names!

Lao Li (*looking out of the window*): The rain's stopped.

(*Chang Yun-tung and Chu Ling walk to the window. Sunlight, streaming through the window, lights up their smiling faces.*)

Chang: Yes, the rain's over, and the sun's shining again.

Chu: Let's open the windows. It's stuffy in here.

Lao Li: That's a good idea. Let's open the windows and have a change of air.

(*Lao Li and Chu Ling throw all the windows open.*)

Chang: That's right. Open all the windows and let out this stagnant, filthy air.

(*The three of them facing the morning sun take a deep breath of fresh air.*)

The curtain falls slowly

Translated by Chung Wei-hsien
Photographs by Tsao Hsi-lin

HOME-COMING

Lu Yen-chou

CHARACTERS:

Tung Hui-yun, *leader of the women's group in an agricultural producers' co-operative. She is thirty-two.*

Wang Piao, *her husband, vice-manager of a branch state department store in a neighbouring province, aged thirty-four.*

Hsiao-tsui, *their ten-year-old daughter.*

Granny Wang, *Wang Piao's mother.*

Tung Hui-fen, *Hui-yun's sister, a young school teacher in her early twenties.*

Wang Chih-hua, *her husband, a young farmer about her age. Vice-chairman of the co-op and a model farmer. He is related to Wang Piao's family—perhaps a cousin. At any rate he uses the familiar greetings, and is regarded by Granny Wang as being one of the family.*

Li Teh-yu, *the chairman of the co-op.*

Co-op Members A, B and C.

Neighbours A, B . . . etc.

TIME:

The Present

Action takes place in a peasant home in China. The room is simply furnished but very clean and tidy. On the wall facing the audience is a portrait of Chairman Mao and a pair of scrolls. Against the wall is a side table on which are sundry articles and a neatly arranged stack of books. In the middle of the room is a much battered teak table and several benches. There are a tea pot and cups on the table. A bamboo chair and two stools stand L. There is a mending basket on one—evidently the housewife's sewing corner. Posters of farming techniques cover the L wall. R is a large photograph of Wang Piao. Someone has stuck the symbol of faithful married love, a red paper scissor cut of a mandarin duck and drake, on to the photograph.

It is about noon. The sun which brightens the room lends a particularly cosy and warm atmosphere to the little house. The stage is empty of people when the curtain rises, then Tung Hui-fen appears with Hsiao-tsui. Hui-fen is simply dressed in a blouse and skirt, but her cheerful smiling face has a special charm. She is carrying Hsiao-tsui's satchel. The child dashes exuberantly into the inner room.

Hsiao-tsui (*shouting*): Mum, mum! I'm back from school.

Fen (*hanging up the satchel for the little girl*): Hsiao-tsui, your mum's not back yet.

Hsiao-tsui (*coming out with a notebook*): Auntie!

Fen (*gently*): No, Hsiao-tsui, remember to call me teacher like everyone else.

Hsiao-tsui (*a little shy*): Teacher.

Fen: What have you got there? A new exercise book your mum bought you?

Hsiao-tsui: No—Mine's red. This one is mum's.

Fen: Your mum's? Let me have a look.

Hsiao-tsui: Mum writes in it every night. Aunt... (*correcting herself*) I mean teacher, don't you think mum writes awfully well?

Fen (*looking at the exercises, says to herself*): Really, Sister Yun's. . . .

Hsiao-tsui: Tell me, teacher, do you think my mum can be a teacher too in a couple of years?

Fen (*hugging the child*): Yes, Hsiao-tsui, I think she can. Look how well she writes.

Hsiao-tsui: Why does mum have to start to learn reading and writing when she's so old?

Fen: In the old days, my child, the landlords and their gangs made it impossible for poor folk like us to learn anything. Your mum was poor and she couldn't afford to study. (*In a schoolmistressy way.*) Don't you see?

Hsiao-tsui (*not fully comprehending*): M'm, yes.

Fen (*pointing to the picture of Wang Piao*): Hsiao-tsui, do you miss your dad?

Hsiao-tsui: Yes. Mum's always saying when dad comes home he'll bring me a fountain pen and a real drum. But he *never* comes home! Tell me, teacher, why doesn't he come to see mum and granny and me?

Fen: Silly girl! Your dad's very busy serving the people. Look (*producing a letter from her pocket*) here's a letter from him.

Hsiao-tsui (*clasp ing the letter*): A letter from dad, a letter! I must find mum.

Fen: Be careful you don't lose it then, dear!

Hsiao-tsui: I'll be careful. (*Exit.*)

Fen (*gazing at Wang's picture*): If only he'd come back for a visit! It'd make Sister Yun so happy. It must be at least four years now he's been away.

(*Wang Chih-hua comes in. His shirt is open and he looks as though he has come straight from field work. He tiptoes up to Hui-fen, behind her back.*)

Chih-hua: Hi! So school's out.

Fen (*startled*): Oops! (*Turning round.*) Naughty man! (*Chidingly.*) We're not at home, love. You'll make us a laughing-stock!

Chih-hua: Why should they laugh? We're an old married couple now. There's no need for us to mind what people say.

Fen: Oh, you! (*A pause.*) Let's go home. I haven't done a thing about food yet.

Chih-hua: I saw that school was out, but when I went home you weren't there. I guessed you'd have come here.

Fen: People *will* laugh at you and tease if they find out that you go round looking for your wife as soon as you get home.

Chih-hua: People will only envy me my happiness. They won't tease.

Fen: Do up your shirt, dear, you'll catch cold.

Chih-hua (*docilely*): What's for dinner today, Fen?

Fen: Well, I thought I'd heat up a bit of ham and fry some vegetables. Will that be enough, d'you think?

Chih-hua: No, I don't! We should have an egg soup.

Fen: Why?

Chih-hua: All expectant mothers have. . . .

Fen: Hush! What ever's come over you today? Why do you keep on being funny?

Chih-hua: I'm not being funny. You see, Fen, when I'm with you my heart fills with joy. (*Pause.*) I can't get over it still. An ordinary ignorant peasant like me gets a wife like you, a teacher. . . .

Fen: I won't let you say that. There's nothing the matter with being a peasant, and anyway you're the vice-chairman of the co-op and a model farmer.

Chih-hua: That's enough compliments for me. Come on, let's go home, my own teacher.

Fen: I wonder why Sister Yun isn't back yet.

Chih-hua: Her brigade has challenged the first brigade.

Fen: Sister's really remarkable.

Chih-hua (*seriously and no longer joking*): Yes, she did a lot for the co-op during the spring ploughing. She's really a most essential member.

Fen (*showing him the exercise book*): Look at the way she has been studying every evening, unbeknown to any of us! As far as that goes, she's much better than you.

Chih-hua: Well, I've not kept my pen exactly idle in the evenings, either. (*He looks through the exercise book.*)

Fen: Yes, but had to keep you at it all the time. She does it of her own accord.

Chih-hua (*thoughtfully*): I suppose she wants to keep up with him. And then, of course, being a brigade leader she's just got to learn. In other words she's studying because she really wants to.

Fen (*lowering her voice*): Listen, there's a letter from my brother-in-law.

Chih-hua: A letter? Where?

Fen: Hsiao-tsui's taken it. Honestly, Chih-hua, why ever doesn't he come home, if only for a few days?

Chih-hua: He's not like you women. You want your man to come home every night. He's a vice-manager . . . and his work. . . .

Fen: What's that you said about women? What are you saying about us?

Chih-hua: This. . . .

(*Hsiao-tsui comes in with her grandmother in tow.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Here's teacher, granny, like I said. (*To Fen.*) Granny wants you to read the letter.

Granny (*handing Fen the letter*): Will you read the letter, Hui-fen? Hsiao-tsui's been longing so for her daddy. And he just doesn't come back.

Chih-hua: His work. . . .

Granny: You're always saying he's busy with his work. He's too busy if you ask me. (*To Fen.*) Will you read the letter for us, dear? Stay and eat with us today, won't you? You know, my boy hasn't written for over six months.

Chih-hua: Elder brother's a vice-manager, aunt, he hasn't got much time for such things.

Granny (*obviously very pleased but trying to conceal it*): I don't need you to tell me! But when he comes back I'll mind and tell him how you've stood up for him and how you always defend him. Now, read the letter for us, Hui-fen.

Chih-hua: Yes, do, and see if there's any word for me.

Granny: Come on, Hui-fen, get on with the reading. (*To Chih-hua.*) There's sure to be something for you. He won't forget.

Fen (*reading*): Dearest mother, I'll be home on the fifteenth of this month. I mean to take you back to the city with me. We'll discuss everything when I see you. (*Stops.*)

Granny: Coming home! Oh! . . . (*so happy that she is flustered*) Hsiao-tsui, your dad's coming home. What's today?

Fen: The fifteenth.

Granny: The fifteenth! My goodness, then he'll be home any minute! (*Begins to bustle about.*)

Fen (*in an undertone to her husband*): Why d'you think there's not a single word for Sister Yun?

Chih-hua: Perhaps it's because he's coming back and can say a thousand things to her himself. There was no mention of me either.

Fen (*thinking perhaps she has been over-sensitive*): Anyway, he's coming home at last. Hsiao-tsui, aren't you glad your dad's coming?

Hsiao-tsui (*skipping up and down joyously*): Daddy's coming home!

Granny: Heavens! (*Grumbling happily.*) Why couldn't he have written earlier? Oh dear, and we've let the chickens run loose. T'ck! T'ck! There he is, a vice-manager now, but he still doesn't plan the things out the way he should.

Chih-hua: He's got his work to consider. Perhaps he decided to come on the spur of the moment.

Granny: There you go! Of course it's his work again.

Chih-hua (*with heartfelt pleasure*): When he's back this time there's a load of things I want his advice on. He's seen the world and he'll know a great deal about the experience of other good co-ops. (*To Fen.*) Fen, you can talk to him about problems in teaching too. He knows everything. He has studied a lot and fought as a guerilla.

Fen: All right, all right, I know! Look at you! Fairly daft with joy!

Granny: Here, you two newly-weds, you'll have to have your chattering later. Go and fetch Hui-yun home for me, can you? (*Lowering her voice.*) You don't know, but Hui-yun has been worrying for fear she can't keep pace with Piao. She's been studying hard every night; learning to read and write. (*Sighs.*) Oh well, it'll turn out all right now he's coming home. It's too bad that a young couple like them should have to be separated for years. Ai! (*To Fen.*) You and your sister Yun are both good girls, but your life has been much happier than hers. She never complains, but in her heart.... Goodness, there I go again. This time, we'll keep him home for a good long spell. He wants to take me back with him, does he? I'm not going. The city's no place for an old countrywoman like me! It'd be better if he were to take Hsiao-tsui and her mum to the city when the busy season here's over. Young people should go out and see something of the world. I'm getting on in years, and I'm sure I don't want to. What's the matter with the life here in the village? It's all right for me. (*Tung Hui-yun comes in. She looks younger than her thirty-two years, with her delicate prettiness, her fresh colouring and her prettily arched eyebrows. She has just come in from the fields and is still radiant with the joy of rewarding work. With her are two other members of the co-op.*)

Yun (*to the other two*): . . . We won't lose. Hurry home now and get on with your meal, and let's get back to work as soon as we can. We'll be able to finish by dusk, and then we can go and help the other brigade.

Hsiao-tsui (*running up to her*): Mum, my dad. . .

Yun (*not hearing her*): But don't let's tell them that we're going to come and help them, though.

Co-op Member A: No fear! We won't breathe a word.

Co-op Member B: We'll just suddenly turn up in their field and shout out together, "We've come to help you!" That'll surprise them!

Yun (*smiling*): I don't think that's a good way. We don't want to show off, do we? That'll make them embarrassed, and put them off.

Hsiao-tsui: Mum!

Yun: Just a second, dear.

Granny: You ought to listen to Hsiao-tsui. She's got good news for you.

Fen: Her dad's coming home.

Yun: Dear sister, that's not very funny for me!

Chih-hua: No, really, we're not teasing you. He's coming home today.

Granny: See, here's his letter.

(Yun reads the letter.)

Co-op Members A and B *(with pleasure)*: What! Wang Piao coming back?

Co-op Member B: That'll make her happy!

Yun *(inwardly much excited, but trying to appear calm)*: Oh! I haven't really been thinking about him all that much.

Co-op Member B: Go on! Don't try to tell us you haven't.

Granny: Imagine it! He'll be here any moment.

Chih-hua *(gets up)*: We'd better be going so that they can get ready for the home-coming.

Yun *(laughing)*: Don't hurry away. There's nothing to get ready. If he's coming, he's coming, that's all.

Fen: Oh, don't pretend so, Sister Yun.

Yun: Silly girl!

Chih-hua: I bet she's really wild with joy.

Granny: You people run along now, do.

(The others leave but Fen returns.)

Fen: Sister Yun, call me when he's here, will you?

Chih-hua *(dashing in after her)*: My own teacher, do come on home and start lunch.

Fen: How you do fuss. *(Exit with Chih-hua.)*

Granny: What a devoted young couple they are! They seem as happy as the gods.

Yun *(absently)*: Yes, they do, don't they?

Granny: At first I was afraid they wouldn't get along, seeing she's educated and he's only an ordinary peasant. I was afraid that after the first flush of love Hui-fen might feel that he was below her. But as it turns out they're getting along beautifully. How times have changed! People have changed with them.

Yun *(to herself, happily)*: Yes, our outlook has changed.

Hsiao-tsui: Mum, can't we eat now, and then go and meet daddy?

Granny *(to Yun)*: I'll see to the meal. You have a wash and change into something pretty.

Yun *(shyly)*: Mother, I'll have to go back to the fields this afternoon.

Granny: Stuff and nonsense! I'll go and ask for leave for you. Hsiao-tsui, now you be a good child and wait for your daddy to come before we eat.

Hsiao-tsui: All right, granny.

Granny *(to Yun)*: I'm going to the co-op chairman to ask for leave for you.

Yun *(trying to stop her)*: No, don't, mother.

Granny: Why ever not? Now, you see that you tidy up and make yourself pretty. *(Exit.)*

Hsiao-tsui (*airily*): Granny said you are to change, mummy, I'll get your clothes out for you.

Yun: Hsiao-tsui! (*Tries to stop her daughter, fails and says to herself.*)
Coming back! He's coming back.

(*Hsiao-tsui re-enters with a new gaily-printed cotton jacket and a flower.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Here you are, mummy!

Yun (*taking the jacket*): Silly little one! D'you really want mummy to wear a flower?

Hsiao-tsui: Yes, of course! You must wear it.

Yun (*puts her arm into one sleeve but pulls it out again. Hugging her daughter*): Oh, Hsiao-tsui!

Hsiao-tsui: Oh, mummy. (*She gently puts the flower into her mother's hair.*)

Yun: No, don't. (*Pulls the flower off and puts it back into the basket.*)

Hsiao-tsui: I'll tell granny on you. You're not doing what she told you.

Yun (*smiling tenderly*): Silly girl! Hsiao-tsui, are you glad your daddy's coming home?

Hsiao-tsui: Are you?

Yun: No, mum's not a bit glad.

Hsiao-tsui: You're pretending, pretending.

Yun (*kissing her daughter*): Oh, Hsiao-tsui.

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy!

Yun: Daddy'll be home right away.

Hsiao-tsui: D'you think he'll bring me a pen and a real drum?

Yun: I'm sure he will. He loves you.

Hsiao-tsui: What's daddy like?

Yun: He's got a squarish face.

Hsiao-tsui (*continuing for her*): And broad, broad shoulders.

Yun: How ever d'you know, child?

Hsiao-tsui: You always tell me that when I ask! How long d'you think daddy'll stay, mum? (*Pause.*) Tell me.

Yun: A long, long time.

Hsiao-tsui: Does daddy love you?

Yun: You guess.

Granny (*coming in*): Goodness, are you two just chattering? Why haven't you changed? I've got leave for you.

Yun: Oh, mother! Why did you do that?

Granny (*ignoring her*): Hsiao-tsui, let's go and catch a chicken.

Hsiao-tsui: Yes, let's.

Yun: I'll come too. (*They go out together. There is a scuffle offstage, and then Hsiao-tsui's voice is heard "Got it!" They come back.*) Mother, where's the meat-chopper?

Hsiao-tsui: I'll get it. (*Exit.*)

Granny: All right, dear, you get it, but be careful. Now, daughter-in-law, you must give him more of your attention when he's home this time. He's so seldom here!

Yun (*in a low voice*): Mother!

Granny (*her voice shows the depth of her feeling*): Hui-yun, I want you to know that I feel deeply in your debt. You've been a very good daughter-in-law to me. You've done all you should and worked so hard. You are indispensable both to the co-op and your family. When my son comes back, I'll tell him to thank you properly.

Yun (*laughing*): Mother, you talk as if I'm an outsider.

Granny (*affectionately*): No, you're closer to me than if you were my own daughter. (*Picking up the new jacket.*) Come on! Put this on.

Yun: But it makes me feel so silly!

Granny: There's nothing silly about it, child! Whoever would laugh at you for dressing up a little? (*Pause.*) I know my boy. Ever since he was a child he liked to have everything just so. You must remember that although he's as country-born as anyone, and only had a few years' schooling he's been around a lot since and he's seen quite a bit of the outside world. We mustn't be too countrified; we don't want him to feel ashamed of us.

Yun: He won't feel that way. He's a Party member.

Granny (*severely*): You'd better listen to what I say, dear.

Yun (*hesitating*): Mother, how can I go to work in these clothes? Today, our brigade challenged the first brigade, and I'm the brigade leader . . . how. . . .

Granny: Didn't I tell you I'd got leave for you? Come on, put it on.

Yun (*puts the jacket over her shoulders. Hsiao-tsui comes in with the knife*): I'll go and kill the chicken.

Granny: No, I'll do it. Now you calm down, and make yourself pretty and then go and take Hsiao-tsui to meet him.

(*Li Teh-yu comes in. He is a bearded old man in his late fifties, but is still energetic and full of life. He is naturally kind and full of humour, but he can be very strict on questions of principle.*)

Yun: Ah, here's our chairman.

Li (*bowing, his hands together in the proper old way*): Congratulations, congratulations!

Granny: Aren't you glad my Piao's coming back?

Li: Of course I'm glad. (*Sits down.*) He should have come back for a visit long ago. He ought to see how nice his home is now, how well our co-op is getting along and how well his wife is doing. If I were him and saw all these changes at home wouldn't I jump for joy?

Granny (*smiling*): Well, it's thanks to your good leadership.

Li: Don't flatter me, sister. Thanks are due to everyone who worked towards it. All I did was to say a few words here and there.

Yun: Chairman, the second brigade. . . .

Li: Never mind about that now! You're not to think about the first or second brigade today! You'll kindly stay at home for me now, I hope.

Granny: I'm glad to hear you say that! I told her I've got leave from you for her to stay home, but she's still fussing about it.

Li: Is she, indeed! She'll have to obey the chairman's orders, though.

Yun: But....

Li: No buts, now. You're simply not allowed to go to work this afternoon. If you still feel uneasy about it, you talk it over with your husband and ask him for his criticism and advice for the co-op. That'll be doing your job, and we'll count that as good work.

Yun (*blushing*): How you do talk, uncle!

Li (*laughing*): That's because I'm so pleased for you. (*Calms down.*) To tell the truth, I've been dying to see him myself as soon as I heard he was coming. There's so much to discuss with him. He is, after all, practically a veteran revolutionary. He'll be able to give us a lot of help.

Granny: You all think so highly of him.

Voices Offstage: Aunty Wang, Aunty Wang. Come out to welcome your son.
This is your gate. These houses are newly built.

Granny (*much flustered*): Aiya! Here he is! (*Exit.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Daddy! (*Rushes out.*)

Li: Here he comes. (*Exit.*)

Yun (*rather shaken and at a loss*): He's coming. He's come back! (*Hurriedly puts on her new jacket, picks up the flower and runs inside.*) (*Wang Piao enters with his mother, Chairman Li and neighbours. There is a gabble of excited conversation. In the confusion he cannot be clearly seen until the crowd settles down slightly. He wears a government worker's blue serge suit, and looks well-fed and citified. However, despite his smart and clever appearance, he does not seem quite likable, but it is difficult to say just what is the matter. Somehow his gloss is neither entirely superficial, nor really cultured and wise. He seems to be nervous about something and his answers to the people round him are offhand.*)

Wang: Sit down, everyone! Well, how are things going? The land keeps you busy, I suppose. Anyone wants to smoke?

Co-op Member A: Yes, the land is a great call. We've got a high production task to fulfil, you know.

Wang: M'm. (*To Li politely.*) Uncle, you look just the same, as full of life as ever.

Li: Thanks, my boy! (*Pulls himself up with a laugh.*) Listen to me, still calling you "my boy"! You, a man with a big job now. We've all been looking forward to having you back for a visit; we want you to give us your frank criticisms of our work. I must say you look different now. You've gained weight, I think, and your skin's not so sunburnt as it was.

Granny: I kept hearing so much about how busy you were that I thought you'd be bound to be fairly worn out.

Wang: I've been kept rather busy, that's true, but we eat well you know.
(*Gives an important laugh.*)

Granny: You know what they say: "A mother's heart's never at ease, when a son travels a thousand li." Why have you never been back once in four years?

Wang: Too much work to do. I wanted to come back, of course, but I just couldn't manage it. Being in a leading position isn't all that simple. I have to go here, there and everywhere. When I go back this time, I've got to go to Peking.

All: Go to Peking!

Hsiao-tsui: Daddy's going to Peking! Granny, teacher says Peking is simply wonderful.

Granny (*happily*): That's lovely, dear. We'll get daddy to take you to Peking some day. (*To her son.*) See how big your daughter's grown. (*To Hsiao-tsui.*) Greet your daddy properly, dear.

Hsiao-tsui (*shyly*): Daddy! (*Runs to the other side of the room.*)

Neighbour B: Hsiao-tsui, has your daddy given you your fountain pen and the books you wanted?

Hsiao-tsui (*to Granny*): Granny, can I . . .

Granny: Ask your daddy for them.

Hsiao-tsui: Dad, I . . .

Wang (*embarrassed*): Oh dear, I forgot to buy them. . . .

Granny: Well! You haven't been back for years and years, and when you do come you don't bring a thing for the child.

Wang: Come here, Hsiao-tsui! (*Brings out some money.*) Get someone to buy you what you want.

Granny (*to Hsiao-tsui*): Take it, dear.

The Neighbours: It's a present from your father. Don't be shy. Take it!
(*Hsiao-tsui takes the money and runs inside.*)

Li: Where's Hui-yun? Why isn't she here to welcome such an important visitor?

Neighbour Women A and B: She's shy! Come on, let's go and fetch her out.

(*They go into the inner room.*)

Granny (*to neighbours*): Make yourselves at home. I must go and see to the meal, if you'll excuse me! (*Exit.*)

Li (*to Wang*): It's several years since you've been back, my boy. Your wife has made tremendous progress.

Neighbour C: She studies every evening.

Neighbour D: She's a brigade leader now.

Neighbour Woman E: She is the leader of our women's group, too.

Yun (*comes in with hot water in a basin*): Oh! D'you want to wash?

Wang: Thank you.

Neighbour Woman B: See how pretty our brigade leader is today!

(The neighbours join in teasing her.)

Wang *(awkwardly)*: Help yourselves to cigarettes, everyone.

(Wang Chih-hua and Tung Hui-fen enter.)

Chih-hua *(warmly)*: Glad to see you back, elder brother.

Wang: Well, here I am. I hear you're vice-chairman now.

Chih-hua: Just doing my best. But *(pointing to Li)* I depend on Uncle Li here to tell us what to do.

Li: Don't pay any attention to things like that. He's doing very well in his own right.

Fen: Brother-in-law, do you remember me?

Wang *(surprised)*: Why, Hui-fen! How you've grown!

Yun: She's married, you can see! Don't you think they make a handsome pair!

Wang: Fancy you two married! I thought you got up to secondary school, Hui-fen.

Yun: Yes, she did, and passed out well. She's a teacher now.

Li: And she's also the co-op book-keeper.

Wang: You can do accounts! Why ever don't you go and get a job in the city then?

Li: When she's just married? Can she bear to be parted from her loved one?

Fen *(indignantly)*: Uncle! D'you honestly think I stay here just to be with him?

Neighbour Woman C: Really, Comrade Chairman, d'you think that's the way to look at our Hui-fen?

Neighbour Woman B: What a way to think!

Neighbour Woman D: Showing your disrespect for women like that!

Neighbour Woman E *(chaffingly)*: We shan't let him get away with it.

Li: My mistake, I take it all back! I wasn't thinking what I said.

(There is a general burst of laughter.)

Li *(to Wang)*: Seriously, she's quite indispensable here.

Wang *(looks at Chih-hua and then at Hui-fen but says nothing)*

Fen: You have a look at this, brother-in-law. *(Brings out the exercise book.)*

Wang: Whose is that?

Fen: My sister's. Just see how well she's got on with her literacy studies.

Chih-hua: She's made tremendous progress these last four years.

Yun: Hui-fen, are you crazy! D'you mean you've got one of my books there? *(Snatches it away.)*

Chih-hua: There's nothing to be shy about there, sister-in-law.

(The neighbours nudge one another meaningly. There are chuckles and encouraging nods, as they make it quite clear that they are teasing the newly united husband and wife.)

Wang: Won't anyone smoke?

Li: Here, we must be serious. Wang Piao, there's a general membership meeting tonight. Can you come and say a few words? We'd like your opinion on our long-term plan.

Chih-hua: Oh yes! This time you must stay here for a good long spell. You'll be able to give us a lot of help.

Neighbour A: Can you give us a report on current affairs tonight?

Neighbour Woman B: I think it's more important for him to talk about the farm work.

(They break into general discussion on whether the report is to be on current affairs or farming. Granny Wang comes in.)

Li: He'll talk on both. I expect he'll speak on any subject you ask for.

Wang: Yes, of course. I'll come along and say a few words. It may be a department store that I'm vice-manager of, but I flatter myself I know something of farming co-ops, too.

Li: Good, good. Look, everyone, we must be a nuisance here. Don't you think we'd better go, and give them a chance to talk?

(There is general agreement, and they all go, with a friendly "Have a good rest," and so on to Wang Piao.)

Wang *(half-rising)*: Goodbye! *(There is only the family on stage now. Wang yawns with ill-concealed distaste.)* What a bother they are!

Granny: How can you say that! They came out of pure neighbourliness.

Yun: Don't you want something to eat?

(Wang nods.)

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy, I'm hungry.

(Granny Wang and Hui-yun go into the inner room and fetch out bowls of food which they place on the table. They all sit down to eat.)

Granny: We killed a fowl, but you didn't give us time to cook it. Ai, at long last you're back! All these years, Hui-yun and I have been thinking and talking about you day and night. But you? I wonder if you ever thought of us. . . .

Yun *(in a low voice)*: Is there anything special you want to eat? We'll get it for you in the market.

Wang: No, don't bother about it.

Granny: There've been so many changes here in the village in the last few years. The yield's increasing every year in the co-op. Did you notice the way this house has been done up? We've bought some new things, too. Even your old mother owns a new suit of padded clothes nowadays.

Hsiao-tsui *(finishing her bowl of food)*: It's time for school.

Granny: Yes, dear, run along. Be careful and don't go falling over on the way.

Hsiao-tsui: I'll be careful, granny. Goodbye!

Yun: Manners, dear! Say goodbye to daddy properly!

Hsiao-tsui *(salutes him)*: 'Bye, daddy! *(Runs off.)*

Granny: Look at her, Piao, isn't she a nice child? She's just like her mother, isn't she?

Yun: Oh mother, don't go praising her too much.

Granny (to Wang Piao): You can put your whole heart into your work, and not worry about us. The Communist Party has made you what you are; you must be worthy of the Party. (Pause.) But, you know, you should find time to write more letters and come home more often. You and Hui-yun are both still young.

(Wang does not answer, but pushes away his bowl.)

Granny: When the busy season's over here you should take your family to the city for a long stay. I'm too old for it now; I don't want to go.

Yun (with a glance at Wang Piao): Mother, how can we leave you at home all by yourself?

Granny: I'm not too old to look after myself. As long as you are happy, and better still, if I have a grandson, that'll be better for me than the finest life and food. (To her son.) I don't want to blame you, son, but you haven't been back for four years and you write so seldom. You mustn't do that again. (Gets up and goes to the door.) I must go to the vegetable patch. (Exit.)

Yun (rather awkwardly): Will you have a bit more rice?

Wang: No, thank you. (Silence.)

Yun (with bent head): It's exactly four years since you were here.

Wang: Um! (Seems deep in thought.)

Yun: Your mother missed you very much.

Wang: Um!

Yun: Hsiao-tsui and I also missed you terribly. . . .

(Wang gets up and begins to pace to and fro uneasily.)

Yun (suddenly feeling like a young girl again): At last we've got you back with us again.

Wang (with a sneer): Yes, indeed!

Yun: Do you remember, promising me, before you left, that you'd be back once a year?

Wang: I've been kept busy with my work.

Yun: I know. At times I wanted to come to you, but you asked me not to and I didn't like to leave your mother on her own. Besides, we had too much work, too. I couldn't just drop it. That's why I never came. (Charmingly shy.) You know, all this time I've been snatching time to study. It's essential to have a bit of education if we want to live properly in a socialist society. I tried very hard, you know, so as not to lag too far behind you. All the letters we sent you this year were written by me. What did you think of my writing?

Wang (perfunctorily): It was very good.

Yun: You mustn't laugh at me. There was so much that I wanted to write and tell you but I couldn't put it down on paper. You were there all alone, with no one to take care of you, or to do your washing and

mending. I felt very sad about it. What was it like? How did you manage?

Wang: Fairly well.

Yun: How long are you going to stay this time?

Wang (*showing impatience*): I haven't made up my mind yet.

Yun (*sees he is getting cross*): Aren't you feeling all right? Come in and lie down a bit. (*Laughs.*) I've been so busy telling you about things that I forgot you've only just come off the train. (*In a low voice.*) When I heard you were coming, my heart got into such a flutter. Everyone was so glad for my sake! Uncle Li positively forbade me to go to work, but I can tell you, I was quite in a daze.

Wang (*as if he has finally made up his mind*): Hui-yun, sit down, will you? I've got something to say to you.

Yun (*pleased*): Are you sure you don't want to rest a bit first?

Wang (*takes no notice of her reaction*): Tell me what you think of our marriage. Are you content with the way things are? I don't suppose you understand what I'm getting at. I mean. . . .

Yun: Please don't think I'm still what I used to be. Of course I understand.

Wang: Well then, what do you think?

Yun: I'm quite happy. At first, when you wrote so seldom, I was a little worried, and talked it over with my sister. She told me not to be silly, and said that when there is love between husband and wife differences in education don't matter very much. After all, you know, Hui-fen herself married Chih-hua. I knew, too, that because you are a Communist you couldn't possibly think me below you, and reminded myself how happy we were. What's more, there's our child. And I was right, you see! You've come back.

Wang (*under his breath*): Yes, I've come back.

Yun (*no longer shy*): You rest now. Have a little nap. I'll go and cook the chicken. You don't have to worry about us. I find life quite good and I do my work well. This year we're going to get a thousand catties per mou.

Wang: Stop! I don't find life so pleasant.

Yun (*smiling*): What's the matter with your life? I'll come to the city, if you like, and look after you. Will that make it better? Only I'll have to come back to the village during the busy seasons.

Wang (*coldly*): That's not what I want at all, Hui-yun, and I can't come home from one year to another. It's not fair to you.

Yun: It's all right now; I'm used to it. In future, if you come back once a year I'll be happy enough.

Wang: Suppose I don't come back in five years even?

Yun: I'll wait for you.

Wang: And if I never come back?

Yun: Don't be foolish! Who ever heard of a man never coming home?

Wang: But if it should happen?

Yun: Then I'll come to look for you.

Wang: Um! (*His face wreathed in smiles.*) So you really love me, Hui-yun?

Yun (*with her hand on her heart*): Till death. When you came home four years ago, didn't I make that clear to you?

Wang: Good. Now I want you to help me with a difficult problem. I'm sure you won't refuse.

Yun (*smiling*): Look at you! You want to test me as soon as you're back. All right, I won't refuse.

Wang: Would you agree to anything?

Yun: I'm sure you won't ask me to do anything wrong.

Wang (*with would-be love, but with insincerity showing in his voice*): I must tell you, Hui-yun, that despite my high salary and position in the city, I don't lead a happy life.

Yun: Why not?

Wang: I need someone to understand me and my work. Otherwise, after office hours I feel like a monk.

Yun: D'you want me to come?

Wang: No. You'd be no use. Hui-yun, if you love me, can you relieve me of this suffering? Will you help me loosen the ropes that bind me?

Yun (*puzzled and worried*): But if you don't want me to come, how can I help you?

Wang: It must be hard for you too, here at home by yourself. It's hard on both of us.

Yun: I don't feel it's too bad. I can manage.

Wang: But it isn't good for you. Hui-yun, I have been thinking about you a lot. You haven't got a husband, really. I don't know how you've endured a life like that. At the same time it's not possible for me to come back often. I can't bear to see you wasting your youth like this. The best things in life, Hui-yun, are youth and love. Neither you nor I can do without them. Though I'm no longer so young, I still wish to enjoy a bit of love.

Yun: I wish you'll speak the way we speak here. I just don't understand what you're trying to say.

Wang: Don't pretend you don't understand, Hui-yun! We are both of us wasting the best years of our lives. We live far apart, but you're like a heavy rope tying me up. I want to soar high up into the clouds but I can't; I want happiness, but it eludes me. I want something I've been thirsting for, but I can't get it.

Yun (*with simplicity*): I still don't understand. Can't you take me with you when you soar into the clouds? I'll be able to follow you. (*Gently.*) You're a Communist. I know you can help me.

Wang (*looks first at her and then down at himself*): It's very difficult. There's too big a difference between us. You won't be able to soar.

Yun (*shuddering*): What do you wish me to do then?

Wang: You've always been a sensible person. (*Taking her hand.*) Hui-yun, listen to me, help me.

Yun: I don't understand.

Wang: I want you to agree to what I say. (*Producing a piece of paper.*) Will you sign this?

Yun (*with dread*): What is it?

Wang: You can read it yourself. I thought you'd been learning to read and write.

Yun (*trembling*): An application for divorce!

Wang (*extremely affectionate*): I know it will upset you. But what else can we do? We have taken different roads in life; we can only part. Hui-yun, I'm considering it from your point of view. I hope you'll consider mine too. Ask yourself for a moment how a person like me can get along without an educated and good-looking helpmate? You may be worrying about old conventions, and want to keep up appearances, but you shouldn't mind about such things. They're not important. You can still find happiness; you are not really too old yet. . . .

Yun: Please don't test me any more, my darling. Your way of testing is too cruel. . . .

Wang: If you really don't want anyone to know we can have a divorce secretly. The land and house will be yours. And if you have no wish to remarry, I can still come back here once a year.

Yun: What on earth are you saying?

Wang: Think for a minute. I'm a big shot, a manager, but you're just a peasant woman. . . .

Yun: According to you, you too used to be a. . . .

Wang (*sharply*): I've said all there is to say. If you won't agree, then don't be surprised if I take measures from my side. It's clear, anyway, that we're not suited to one another.

Yun: Not suited to one another?

Wang: Look at the way you dress, for one thing!

Yun: The way I dress?

Wang: I want to do my work well, but as soon as I remember I have a wife like you I can't work in peace. I've been struggling with it for four years now, and looking round. Everything's settled now. If you continue to be obstinate, you'll not only harm my work, but prevent yet another person from being happy. I hope you won't be so selfish or have so little heart!

Yun (*bewildered*): Are you serious? No, no, you are making a joke. I remember you used to like to frighten me, and then come and console me.

Wang (*harshly*): I'm quite serious, I assure you! You must be sensible. It's true I used to love you, but times have changed and the situation is

different. (*Softening again.*) Hui-yun, please don't hold me back. Come, sign the paper. . . .

(*Yun bursts into tears.*)

Wang: I haven't been back for four years in the hope that you'd lose heart and give me up. . . . But now I can't keep silent any longer. To be quite frank, I've found the woman I really want.

Yun: Oh! You can't do this. D'you mean you'd make our Hsiao-tsui fatherless? I know I'm not good enough for you, but you must give me time to catch up.

Wang: You can't expect me to ruin my whole plan of life for you.

Yun (*gets up and runs over to Wang*): You can't do this. It is not right! It's wrong for you, for me and for our child.

Wang (*pushes her aside*): Don't hang on to me like that. To tell you the truth, there is no longer any love between us.

Yun (*stands like a stone*): No love between us!



Wang (*showing his true face*): Let's come to the point. Will you agree? (*There is a pause.*)

Wang: If you won't it'll have to be settled in court. (*Pretends to be gentle again.*) However, I don't think you are the kind to be unkind and make trouble. I know you love Hsiao-tsui, and I'll let you have her, and give you an allowance. (*He fishes out some money.*) Here you are . . . here's forty yuan. Take it. We'll settle this peacefully.

Yun: You. . . .

Wang: Come on, take it. Let's part friends; it's much better than going to court. Once there, the judge will listen to me and not to you. Let me tell you I've come back solely to do this. Don't fool yourself you can make me change my mind.

Yun: Ah!

Wang (*threateningly*): If we settle this peacefully, I'll agree to some of your terms. Otherwise don't blame me if I forget we were once husband and wife. Take the money now and we can get down to business. (*Yun can find no words, but stares at him, unable to believe what she hears.*)

Wang: Why d'you stare at me like that? We'll discuss the terms today and get the divorce papers done tomorrow. Here's the money. Is it enough? (*Callously.*) Go on, for goodness' sake . . . take it.

Yun (*suddenly slaps the money out of Wang's hand*): Do you think my heart can be bought?

Wang: Idiot!

Yun: For years I waited for you. I kept the memory of you in my heart like a sacred ideal. When we were in want here I kept it from you, so that you wouldn't worry and spoil your work. Now you ask *me* to consider you, but have you considered what it means for Hsiao-tsui and me? . . . (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

Wang: Don't be a vixen. I don't care what you feel like; I'm going to divorce you. A peasant woman like you to have the nerve to try to keep me for a husband! Let me tell you: there's nothing doing! You might as well open your eyes and be sensible.

Hsiao-tsui (*coming in with her satchel*): Mummy, there's no class this afternoon, so auntie, (*correcting herself*) I mean teacher, told me I could come home. (*To Wang, affectionately.*) Hello, daddy!

Wang: Go away.

Yun (*throwing her arms round Hsiao-tsui*): Oh Hsiao-tsui, you haven't got a daddy any more.

Wang (*viciously*): Are you going to agree or not? Unless you do, I shan't even let you keep Hsiao-tsui.

(*Yun holds Hsiao-tsui tightly but says nothing. Hsiao-tsui senses that something is wrong and gasps, "Mummy!"*)

Yun: It's all right, darling, you've got your mummy.

Hsiao-tsui: Daddy, you shouldn't upset mummy like this.

Wang: You get out of here!

Hsiao-tsui (*frightened, begins to cry*): Mummy, daddy's being nasty to me.

Yun: How can you treat the child like that! Now I can really see what you're like.

Wang: So much the better. Perhaps you'll agree to divorce me now. All I want is to get away from you as quick as I can.

Hsiao-tsui: Please, mummy and daddy, don't quarrel any more, please. It's horrid! Can't you be friends?

Yun: This man isn't your daddy any more.

Hsiao-tsui: He *is* my daddy!

Yun: Your father is dead.

Hsiao-tsui (*sobbing*): Oh no! I want my daddy. (*Runs over to Wang.*)

Daddy, please make it up with mum. Look, she's crying! I want to cry too.

Wang (*realizing that things are not going the way he wishes, loses his temper*): Get off! (*Pushes Hsiao-tsui, who falls down. Granny Wang comes in with vegetables.*)

Granny (*to Yun*): Have you got the chicken on yet? (*Sees that something has gone very wrong.*) Why, what ever's the matter?

Yun (*her bitterness erupting*): Oh, mother! (*Flings herself sobbing into Granny Wang's arms.*)

Granny (*to Wang Piao, severely*): What's come over you? Hasn't she had enough to bear at home, without you coming back to make it worse?

Wang: I tried to talk to her reasonably, but she wouldn't listen to me.

Granny (*to Yun*): What is the matter, my child?

Wang (*trying to get the upper hand*): You see, mother, I've been thinking of taking you back to the city with me.

Granny: Me? Better think about Hsiao-tsui and her mother.

Wang: I can't take her. There's no love between us and she'd be no help. I want to divorce her.

Granny: My son!

Hsiao-tsui (*comprehending now*): Oh granny, he doesn't want mummy any more!

Wang (*to mother*): Mother, this is something that can't be helped.

Granny: You scoundrel! We were longing and longing for your return, and this is what you have to say when you are back!

Wang: Don't scold, mother. I'll take you back to the city where you can have a good life.

Granny: Devil take the city! Why should I want to go there? You must take back what you've just said.

Wang (*decisively*): Never!

Granny (*trembling with rage*): Do you want to kill her? Do you want to drive me to an early grave?

Wang: Why take it like this, mother? You've got a son to take care of you.

Granny: A son! Are you the child that I gave suck to? (*Looks at Hsiao-tsui and Hui-yun and beginning to weep.*) You can't do this. You weren't forced into marriage. You loved each other. What's this sham now?

Wang: That was before. Now things are different.

Granny (*sharply*): I suppose you think that because you're a government official she's no longer good enough for you!

Wang: Please don't interfere in things that don't concern you, mother. This is our affair.

Granny: I will interfere. I must! Oh, what ingratitude! You, who once wept, and pleaded with me to agree to your marrying her! You who dogged her doorstep day after day! Now that you're doing well, you want to discard her! You don't even want your own child or your old mother.

Wang (*his anger rising*): Mother, I've done nothing to offend you. You can come back with me and I shall look after you. But to expect me to give up the divorce is out of the question. (*Pause.*) Mother, please don't be foolish. Do you want to lose your son? You will, if you take your daughter-in-law's side.

Granny (*shaking*): You!

Hsiao-tsui (*running up to Wang*): Daddy!

Wang (*ignoring the child. To Yun*): Are you going to agree to it or not? I want an answer now.

Yun (*getting to her feet abruptly*): I agree.

Granny: Don't say it, my child, don't say it! You're not to agree to it!

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy!

Yun: Mother, you see how it is. He keeps on saying I'm not good enough for him. Why should I cling to him? Wang Piao, give me that paper.

Wang (*overjoyed*): My good Hui-yun! I knew you'd understand me. Good girl, I'll never forget you. (*Flattens out the divorce paper on the table.*)

Yun (*coldly*): I should have thought I was not good enough for you to remember. (*She sits down, her hands trembling. Wang Piao hands her a pen.*)

Granny (*trying to stop her*): Wait, Hui-yun, wait! Don't let that wretch get away with it so easily.

Wang (*holds back Granny Wang from going to Hui-yun, and pushes her away*): This is nothing to do with you, mother.

(*Granny Wang totters and falls, though Wang Piao had not pushed her hard. She is speechless with anger.*)

Yun (*signs the document*): There you are. Take it! (*Helps Granny Wang to her feet.*) Mother!

Wang (*looks at the document, and, trying to hide his joy, puts it in his pocket*): Let me help you up, mother. If she agrees to a divorce, I'll agree to any terms. You must come to my wedding next month. Your new daughter-in-law is an educated girl. She can write and paint. She's only twenty-one.

Granny (*boxes Wang Piao's ears*): Get out of here, you! This is no longer any home of yours!

Wang: There, there, mother, don't be angry. Everything's settled now. We'll go back to the city together tomorrow.

(*Tung Hui-fen comes in, a covered bowl in her hand.*)

Granny: Settled! What do you mean? I've every intention of asking your superiors what they mean by educating you to be like this.

Wang: Come now, mother, don't take it like that. After all, I *am* your son, aren't I?

Granny: You are no son of mine, now. (*Goes to the door.*)

Fen (*comes forward with the bowl*): We haven't got anything good to offer you, brother-in-law, but we wondered if you would like a bit of goose. . . .

Granny (*snatches the dish from her*): Don't give him anything! Our food's too good for him.

Fen (*notices something is the matter*): What's happened? What's up?

Wang (*feeling awkward*): It's nothing. Do sit down, won't you?

Hsiao-tsui: My daddy's divorcing mummy.

Fen (*shocked*): What? Divorcing her?

(*Granny Wang slips out.*)

Yun (*with a sad smile*): Don't ask me questions now, sister. I'll be able to go on living.

Fen: Comrade Wang Piao, what reason have you to ask for a divorce?

Wang: There's no love between us, we. . . .

Fen: Whatever kind of a reason d'you call that? You have loved, and you have a child.

Wang: I thank you for your concern, Comrade Teacher, but this happens to be my private affairs.

Fen: What do you mean, private! I dare say you'd like to keep this all private, but you can't when you're such a blackguard as to throw away your old wife for a new one.

Wang (*enraged*): Who gives you the right to abuse me like this!

Fen (*also angry now*): Society gives me the right! I can't believe it. A Communist! No, you're not worthy to be called a Communist.

Wang: Shut up!

Fen: Don't agree to the divorce, sister. I'll write to his superiors at work.

Yun (*softly*): No, Fen! Even if he no longer wished for a divorce I couldn't go on living with him now. Today has opened my eyes to many things. The love between you and your husband is real, but I—I've only been a stepping-stone for a thoroughly selfish person. For nearly ten years I've been that! And now that he's climbed up high he kicks me away.

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy, this is our home. Tell him to go away.

Yun (*to Wang*): We were once husband and wife, so I have a duty to you. I must warn you that you should be aware of what will happen to you if you go on like this. I may not be well-educated, nor have I seen much of the world, but I do know that a person like the heartless Chen Shih-meï, who married the emperor's daughter and then tossed off his old wife and children, has no place in our new society. I used to tell

myself you were there in the city serving the people with your whole heart and soul, but I know better now.

Wang (*doing his best to regain his dignity*): You know better! What's your great knowledge? It's a fact; I want a divorce and I want to marry someone else. How does that affect my work? Does that make me a bad official?

Yun (*loudly*): Don't fool yourself. He who is thoroughly unscrupulous and bad in one respect will never be really good in others. I can see it all quite clearly. You're a cheat and a liar, and cheats and liars cannot hide themselves for ever.

Wang: You be quiet! You can gabble as much as you like, but I don't want you.

Yun (*smiling scornfully*): Do you imagine I'm trying to hold you? Do you think—(*Shaking her head.*) Ah! Why should I try to explain anything to you! Hui-fen, I'll be able to live on my own quite well. Don't worry about that.

(*Granny Wang comes back with Li Teh-yu and Wang Chih-hua. Hui-yun goes out.*)

Li: My boy, what makes you begin to quarrel as soon as you get home? Tell me, in what way has Hui-yun failed in her duties? Tell me, and I'll try to help her.

Wang: There's nothing to tell you. Won't you sit down?

Granny (*to Fen*): He's had a change of heart. He's found a twenty-one-year-old, who writes and paints.

Wang (*trying to carry it off*): Have a cigarette, uncle.

(*Chih-hua starts to speak, but Wang interrupts, and behaves as though nothing has happened.*)

Wang: Now about that report you people want me to give you. I think I'll . . .

Chih-hua (*cutting him short*): Elder brother, I'm an outspoken and straightforward person, and I must tell you that what you want to do not only breaks up your home but makes us, your neighbours, angry. You know how highly we here think of you.

Li: Chih-hua is right. You cannot let yourself do such things as will make our people point at you in scorn and mutter against you all your life.

Fen: It is such a thing he's already done.

(*The neighbours come in in ones and twos.*)

Wang: It seems to me that you people still indulge in feudal ideas, uncle. Haven't you learned about the Marriage Law?

Fen (*indignantly*): Our Marriage Law was not made to be used by scoundrels. It's not an excuse for trifling with women.

Wang (*angrily*): Are you trying to insult me? Really, this is too much.

Li (*seriously*): Comrade Wang Piao, this is no time to lose your temper. Why don't you tell us everything, and let the people say who is in the right.

Wang: This is my private affair. I have no desire to ask other people to trouble their heads over it.

Li: You've misunderstood me. I don't want to interfere in your getting a divorce. If the divorce is for good reasons, and not done in an underhand way no one has any right to interfere. I am speaking to you as one Communist to another. What is the reason for your divorce? Why do you want it? Have you considered the consequences carefully?

Wang: I have the right to decide my own private life.

Fen: Have you? That depends on what you do with it. If a Party member, in his private life, degrades the moral principles of communism, and it affects the prestige of the Party, then not only the Party organization, but the masses, too, have the right to interfere.

Wang: I'll trouble you to make yourself clear, if you please. In what way do you claim that I have degraded communist morality?

Chih-hua: Let me ask a question. What has Sister Yun done that is not worthy of you? In what way is she not good enough for you, that you want to divorce her?

Wang: There's no love between us.

One of the Neighbours: Pah! There speaks a heartless beast! Ten years ago, who was it who begged of me to be the matchmaker between you and her? Who was it, when her father was against the match, who asked me to help you elope with her!

Li: It's no good trying to hide a corpse in melting snow, comrade. Do you think we are fools, because we're peasants? Admit it frankly. What you want is just selfish pleasure. Let me tell you, comrade, this is very serious. It's a nasty bourgeois idea, the kind exploiting classes have.

Chih-hua: Because your lusts make you desire a prettier and younger woman, you are willing to desert your wife, your child and even your mother. Is that the behaviour of a Communist?

Wang: Rubbish! The reason I want a divorce is just as much to help me do my work properly.

Li: Work properly? You make me blush for you! How can you use such words?

Wang: I refuse to discuss this with you. You don't understand a thing. At all events I don't love Tung Hui-yun, and I see no call to sacrifice myself for her. I'm quite prepared to defend my right to my own life, but it's just as much for her benefit too.

Yun (*coming in from the inner room*): I'll thank you, not to drag me in again. You are not good enough to mention my name! Will you please go! (*To herself.*) I can see everything clearly now. Ah me! It's not a simple thing to know what a person's really like. The Wang

Piao of today's no longer the Wang Piao I knew ten years ago. It is difficult to believe that the person I shared bitterness and hardship with, the person who used to walk hand in hand with me, and talk with me as from heart to heart is now the person who can tell me there is no love between us. He used to be as ignorant and illiterate as I! And now that the Party has educated him and brought him on, he tells me my educational level is too low for his great height! To think that someone who so short a time back had climbed out of the mud should now turn round to say I'm too much of a country wench for him! A man who can treat his own mother, his own child, once so dear to his heart, as enemies. Ah ... the road he has taken is a very different road from ours. When he says no love, or no education, he's just mouthing words to try and fool us. All he really wants is youth, beauty and lust. He wants to snatch happiness for himself at the cost of heart-break and agony for others... He fooled me before: now he is fooling another woman, and before he's finished he'll fool many more. His type is never satisfied. He'll stop at nothing. *(To Wang.)* Wang Piao, I have to give you warning once more. I'll divorce you without regret. I have strong hands and I know how to use them. I know what life is, and how to live it. The Party will go on guiding me, and my co-op comrades will help me. I shall be able to stand on my own feet. Indeed, I shall be better off separated from you, Wang Piao. My only regret is that after all the Party and the people have done for you you can only use the abilities they fostered to further your own selfish gains. You misuse them to lord it over others. Despite the swamps you are sinking in you still dare to hold your head up and strut about arrogantly. If you continue in such blindness you'll be sorry one day, but it'll be too late.

Granny: Say no more, Hui-yun. This brute has brought shame down on me in my old age.

Neighbour A: Why waste your breath on such as him, Hui-yun?

Neighbour B: Don't worry, Hui-yun. We will be with you.

Neighbour C: Try not to feel sad, Hui-yun. We shall all stand behind you.

Yun: Thank you, my friends. You help me to realize I am not alone. You need not worry for me. I shall not let my life be ruined by a worthless, selfish person.

Hsiao-tsui *(rushing to her)*: Oh mummy, mummy, please don't get a divorce! They'll say I have no daddy! *(Sobbing bitterly, she runs to Wang Piao.)* Daddy, daddy, why don't you love me?

Yun: Come to your mother, Hsiao-tsui. She loves you, and all your neighbours love you.

Li: Come to us, Hsiao-tsui. You have a whole large family in the co-op to love you.



Neighbour A: Look at the poor child! She's crying fit to break her little heart! (*Pointing to Wang.*) But him! His heart's a stone. His feelings aren't even touched. . .

Granny (*to Wang*): My son, open your eyes! Try to see things as they really are. You have a devoted, faithful wife. She is as well capable and intelligent. How can you think she's not good enough for you? You should be thankful she did not find you not good enough for her! Yet you dare to turn round and say she's not good enough for you! You're going a little mad, my son. Turn back! Turn back! Give me that divorce paper.

Wang: That's impossible. I'll not sacrifice my happiness for you. . .
(*Granny Wang stares at her son in helpless dejection.*)

Yun: Don't worry, mother, I'll never leave you, as long as there's breath in me.

Li: So, Vice-Manager Wang! It seems you have no ears for what we have to say. But I'll not allow a person like you, a person with only selfish aims, to stay in our revolutionary ranks and make trouble. I shall go to the city, and talk to the comrades who direct your work.

Chih-hua: No, Comrade Chairman. You stay here and look after farm work. I'll go and see to that.

Fen: I agree with you. We'll go to the city together, and take Hsiao-tsui. I want to see the girl he wants to marry, this clever one who can write and paint.

Wang (*startled*): What are you getting at?

Fen: I want her to see your daughter, the daughter of the great vice-manager! I shall ask her why she wants to marry a man who's already married, with a child.

Neighbour A: That's right, Teacher Tung. I'll come out and help you get the cart ready. (*Exit.*)

Wang (*pleadingly*): Hui-fen, you mustn't do that. Some of the others may not be able to understand me, but surely, you can sympathize with me.

Fen: Sympathize with you! I've no sympathy for you! I think you must have deceived this other girl and I want to show her your true face. I want to see that your selfish plans don't go through.

Chih-hua: Ah, don't waste words on him. Come on. See you in the city, vice-manager.

(*Fen, Chih-hua and Hsiao-tsui exeunt.*)

Wang (*in a panic*): What are you doing? What is this? (*Pleading.*) Uncle, you can't let them do this.

Li (*turning away*): I feel no call to stop them.

Wang (*in despair*): Oh God, this will be the finish of me. (*Snatches up his brief-case and runs out.*)

Granny (*weeping*): What sort of a son did I give birth to!

Li: Don't break your heart over him, sister. Hui-yun understands and is right. He's not worthy to be your son, or her husband.

C u r t a i n

Translated by Tang Sheng
Photographs by Tsao Hsi-lin

TWO SHORT STORIES

Sha Ting

THE MAGNET

Yuan Hsiao-chih, a lad whom most of his friends called Little Yuan, was very irritated to begin with by his half-blind mother's grumbles, but gradually lost himself in his own thoughts.

His mother had been nagging him every day lately, always harping on the same old theme: she felt certain that her days were numbered, yet her only son kept doing one foolish thing after another to increase her worries.

Little Yuan had withdrawn from his school in Chengtu with Huang Chun about a fortnight ago, and come home from the provincial capital in the hope of scraping up enough money to set out immediately for Yen-an, the Mecca of the Chinese Revolution. But he had not succeeded. And his friend, whose parents were grimly opposed to the venture, was virtually a prisoner at home.

Huang Chun's stout father had even called on Little Yuan's mother to accuse him of trying to lead his boy astray. He declared that in future he would have nothing more to do with Little Yuan's tuition and board, which he had been paying.

This was what upset the lad's mother. She felt deceived and disgraced by her son. She believed every word Mr. Huang had told her, convinced that Yen-an was a dangerous place and that it was far, far away.

"I've worked my fingers to the bone to bring you up," she blared at her son as soon as Mr. Huang had left. "I begged on my knees so that you could go to school. And what do I get in return? You put me to shame! A fine way to show your gratitude!"

But she knew how weak her hold was over her son. Ever since her husband had died when she was still young, leaving her very little to live on, she had fastened all her hopes on her only son and lavished her affection on him. She had let him have his own way much too often, and now regretted that she had spoiled him. On top of this she knew that by nature she was not one to inspire fear in other people. That was why she kept resorting to tears and moans—her only weapons.

"I can almost hear the grave-digger rattling his hoe over my head now," she would whimper. "Wait until I've breathed my last, and you may go wherever you like. . . ."

In fact she did not see how Little Yuan could leave home. She would not give him the money for the journey, nor could he raise it anywhere else. But she felt ill at ease just the same, because her lively, talkative boy seemed suddenly to have grown mute and lame. He would brood in the room all day hardly uttering a word. She was afraid that he would ruin his health if he went on like that.

When complaints made no impression on Little Yuan, she tried pleading with him instead.

"Can't you listen to a word or two of what I'm saying?" she sighed. "Is that asking too much? Why don't you stop sulking and go out to see some of your friends? No one's stopping you. Don't be such a lazy-bones!"

Several days earlier, Little Yuan would have been very upset to hear his mother talk like this and would have felt sorry for her. But now he was so absorbed by his fascinating vision that he forgot her very existence. Stretching before his mind's eye was a boundless expanse of glistening snow, across which an endless train of young travellers were plodding as if drawn by a magnet, full of enthusiasm and confidence, and undaunted by obstacles put in their way either by the reactionary forces or by their own dear ones.

Recalling his mind to the present, he heaved a long sigh and felt bitter resentment against his schoolmate's father. Had it not been for the latter's lying talk, Little Yuan's mother could have been persuaded to let him have the money he needed for the road, even though it meant running into debt, and he would already be on his way, alone if necessary. As it was, he was compelled to remain in this dreary place, leading a dull, monotonous existence.

He felt thoroughly irritated by the way his mother kept pestering him. Now she was sobbing again. He stood up, unable to control his temper.

"What is there to cry about all day?" he grumbled. "Nobody's dead!"

"It's because I have such a good son, that's why!" his mother snapped back, but then changed her tone and added, "Don't be angry with me . . . I won't be standing in your way for long!"

Little Yuan made no reply. He buttoned up his student uniform with a grim face, and went out.

It was late in the afternoon of a cloudy winter day in 1938. The street was just as it had been the previous day: deaf old mother Chang was spinning cotton by her sesame candy stall, the pot-bellied proprietor of the Yunhsing grocery was humming lines from the *Book of Sacred Injunctions*, and the same old crowd was chattering away in the tea-house — there was absolutely nothing to show that a holy war for national independence was being waged against the Japanese invaders.

Just after he came back from Chengtu, Little Yuan had also been to the tea-house a couple of times in the company of a few local primary

西冷橋上
望南北高
峰出沒雲
際特鏡亞
趣
公肩虹



Corner of the West Lake
Painting in the traditional style

(75 cm. × 48 cm.)
By HUANG PIN-HUNG



school teachers. But ever since his plan to go to Yen-an had become known and he felt that people were eyeing him curiously, he had never set foot there again. Now he had practically nowhere to go, and roaming in the streets alone held few attractions, so out of boredom he turned into the gate of a primary school in Yu Wang Temple.

The only people whom Little Yuan found at all congenial in this small town were a handful of primary school teachers, though their life was just as colourless as his own and one of them was even hostile because he suspected that since Little Yuan was poor and had left school he would naturally try to get a teaching job here the following year. This man was a teacher of arithmetic whom everyone nicknamed "Decimal Point" because his face was covered with black-heads. He was a bony man, very healthy though, narrow-minded and sharp-tongued. He was the first person Little Yuan came across as he stepped into the temple hall.

"Ah! So you still haven't left?" said Decimal Point sarcastically, then continued after a half-hearted sigh. "To tell you the truth, I'm afraid we shall all rot away here if we keep on like this. I'd have left here long ago myself if I had had the chance. There's absolutely no sense in this life we're leading! . . ."

"Is Mr. Chang teaching right now?" Little Yuan cut him short.

"I hear he's ill again," answered Decimal Point meaningly. "You'll probably find him in bed."

They exchanged a nod, and parted.

Little Yuan went to find Chang Chi, a Chinese language teacher. The latter was a consumptive youth, whose straightforwardness made him very unpopular among his colleagues. They would have been only too glad to get rid of him. But they had to leave him alone to spend his days in his own carefree way, for even though he had severed all connections with his family over six years ago, his elder half-brother was one of the local township heads.

The cause of the split between the two brothers was no other than rivalry in love. And though many years had already passed since his sweetheart had become his sister-in-law, Chang was often kept awake at night by his hopeless yearning for her. Seeing Little Yuan enter, he quickly pulled himself up to a sitting position on his bed.

"I'm so glad you came!" he called. "I was getting bored to death."

"So was I!" replied Little Yuan, pulling over a ramshackle chair and sitting down.

"Decimal Point was saying a moment ago that we'll all rot away if we keep on like this. He's perfectly right, I'm afraid. I'm really beginning to think that I should go anyway, the sooner the better! Even if I have to beg my way! . . ."

He was interrupted by a fit of rasping coughing from his friend.

"You haven't been spitting any more blood, have you?" Little Yuan asked solicitously.

"It doesn't matter. I'll be all right in a few days."

A pause followed during which a meaningful smile spread slowly over Chang's lips. "Decimal Point!" he exclaimed, his lips twisting sardonically. "I'm sure *he* isn't going to rot away! Why, even today I heard him suggest that we all subscribe to start digging for gold. I don't know where he got hold of this story. Says gold was found somewhere behind our old temple!" And then, between paroxysms of coughing, he spoke indignantly of the deplorable conditions of school teachers.

Little Yuan paid scant attention to what he was saying, for he had heard such talk many times before. But as he kept up a show of listening, he wondered why his friend had never made any attempt to tear himself away from the life he despised so much.

"How can you still put up with this then?" he asked abruptly.

The teacher heaved a long sigh. "It's hard to say," he replied. "You'll understand in a few years."

Little Yuan thought Chang was thinking about his own love affair. But the answer rather surprised than satisfied him, for he felt it was inconceivable for a man to seek self-destruction on account of a woman, especially at such a time of national stress. However, he kept his thoughts to himself. He did not want to seem rude to Chang whom he believed to be one of the few scholars in this town. And besides, he had other things on his mind, things concerning himself which he hoped to discuss with him. From their conversations in the past he believed that Chang was the only person who understood him and the real significance of what he was longing for.

So he only smiled sympathetically until, unable to restrain himself any longer, he finally asked, "Well, what do you think I ought to do now?"

"You should know yourself well enough!" said Chang impatiently. "How many times do I have to repeat it to you? Go, by all means! I'd have flown away long ago if I were you.— Make up your mind like a man!"

"But my mind is quite made up."

"Of course! I know!" he answered warmly. "Why can't you do it then? When I ran away from home in anger, everybody felt sorry for me and tried to make me go back as if they were afraid I'd starve to death! But I've got along all right here all these years. There's a lot of truth in the old saying: 'Heaven always provides a way out.' Look at my eyes. They're still moving, aren't they?"

He smiled cheerfully and began to look round for his water-pipe. He found it at the end of his bed, but fumbled in vain in his pouch for any tobacco. After calling for the servant and failing to get any answer, he bent down to collect the cigarette butts on the damp ground near his bed in order to fill his pipe bowl.

"Maybe I can help you a little," he said gaily. "Things will be easier when those rich old pupils of mine come back for the winter vacation."

I know them well and I'll ask each of them to contribute something for you. I'll subscribe my share as well, even if I have to pawn my trousers!"

"No, I can't allow that. . . ." Little Yuan blushed.

"Don't be so scrupulous. They may be middle school students, but actually each one of them squanders four or five hundred dollars a year, playing mah-jong, eating at the best restaurants, and loafing in the park. What's wrong with shaking a little of it out of them?"

Little Yuan remained silent, not because he approved of the other's suggestion; on the contrary, it enraged him. He had always despised those fops whom Chang had just mentioned. He did not fly into a temper, though, since he believed that the other meant no harm.

He watched in embarrassment as his friend drew furiously at the pipe. With his lips twisted and his sunken cheeks hollowed while smoking, Chang looked more haggard than ever. The rest of his appearance was no less deplorable — his dishevelled hair, bare feet, and grease-stained clothes speckled with burns from the sparks of his pipe.

Little Yuan who had come to pour out his own troubles and find some support could no longer stand his growing disappointment. He stood up and asked Chang whether he had any book worth reading.

"Yes, yes, of course!" The teacher felt under his pillow.

He produced a love story and gave it to Little Yuan.

"It's very well written," he said. "An extremely interesting book!"

Since he had asked for a book merely to wind up their conversation, Little Yuan just glanced casually at its cover before he took his leave. Only today had he discovered how completely inept this Chinese teacher was too.

When he was walking past the Hall of the God of Fortune, which now served as the teachers' rest-room, he overheard Decimal Point heatedly trying to persuade his colleagues that with their meagre salaries it was absolutely essential for them to join in his gold-digging project.

"As a matter of fact, we don't have any choice!" he heard Decimal Point saying. "No one wants to make a fortune. But since the government doesn't give a damn what happens to us and the school principal has never even set foot in this place, what can we do but rely upon ourselves?"

Frowning, Little Yuan made for the playground.

It was crammed with pupils, nearly eighty of them, boys and girls, ranging from snotty-nosed urchins of six or seven to tall lads in their late teens. About half of them were wearing caps, while the rest had felt bonnets or cloth wound round their heads.

Following their instinct for mischief, most of them were pushing and shoving each other around, throwing up stones and broken tiles, or testing the strength of one another's arms. Only a few dutiful-looking pupils stood quietly on the sides waiting to race back home at the sound of the bell.

From among the crowd a little girl in a red knitted cap suddenly ran up to him. It was Huang Chun's eight-year-old sister. Little Yuan recognized her at once, for her brother who was now imprisoned at home had already sent her to him twice as a secret messenger.

She stared at him round-eyed, and there was a pressing note in her lowered voice. "My brother says you must come tonight!"

Recalling the trouble his two previous meetings with his friend had brought him, Little Yuan was hesitant in giving his answer.

"I'll see!" he mumbled, "I'll be there if I have time!"

"No, that won't do! You *must* come! If you don't, he'll blame me for having forgotten to tell you. Besides, father isn't at home, you know!"

Finally Little Yuan promised to see her brother. Then he cut across the playground, and left the school.

He had other reasons for not wanting to go to Huang's home besides the commotion that his previous visits had caused. He was afraid that his friend would bring up his reckless plan again: to steal a sum from his parents to finance Little Yuan's journey to Yen-an alone. Though he longed to leave these dreary surroundings, once the truth came out his friend would be in great trouble. Moreover, he hated the idea of spending any more of the Huangs' money, because at the time when Mr. Huang brought his complaints to Little Yuan's mother, the lad had declared that he would never accept aid from him again. Both families knew that the stout old man had been helping him in order to repay the kindness Little Yuan's father had shown the Huangs before his death, and also to have Little Yuan, a clever and likable boy, as a companion for Huang Chun.

Huang Chun was lame and two years younger than Little Yuan, but it was he who had first suggested that they should go to Yen-an. When Little Yuan tried to dissuade him on account of his crippled leg, he felt so insulted that he had refused to speak to his friend for three days on end. He maintained that a man's legs had nothing whatever to do with his thought.

Little Yuan had always looked on Huang Chun as his younger brother and agreed to his requests. And since this was such an extraordinary and stirring venture, Little Yuan finally gave in. So together they had left school, sought and obtained a letter of recommendation and met at the contact man's house a monk who had gone there for the same purpose. Little Yuan often found himself thinking of the young monk who, he fancied, was probably already in military uniform attending lectures on guerilla warfare at the Yen-an Anti-Japanese Military and Political Academy.

These exciting memories flashed through his mind as he walked along the street. When he arrived home, he found his mother waiting for him to have supper. Her eyes were moist, but she looked calm. He wondered where she had got the money to buy the meat for a pot of thick broth she had made. With her yearly income of only seven or eight piculs of

rice, she lived very frugally, spending every moment she could spare hemming unfinished shoes for the shoemaker.

Her annoyance had apparently given way to an overflowing tenderness for her son. She pressed him to eat as if he were a baby, while swallowing nothing but rice herself. Soon the lad could bear it no longer. The more she entreated him, the less he could eat. His bowl was still half-full when, to his mother's surprise, he put it abruptly aside and went to recline on a shabby rattan chair.

"I started cooking too late, and the firewood was wet," she said apologetically. Then stealing a glance at her brooding son, she asked, "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Why shouldn't I feel well?" he retorted peevishly.

She knew that another scene was in store if she said anything more. But after a moment's silence, guessing the cause of her son's resentment, she ventured to give him a casual explanation.

"Food doesn't cost so very much. If only you'd listen a bit more to what I say. . . ."

She was interrupted by a booming voice calling from outside, then a short, smartly dressed man trotted into the room. The visitor was one of the former vice-heads of the township, who had been on good terms with Little Yuan's father when the latter was the principal of a local primary school. He was middle-aged, voluble, and jovial. A few days before, Little Yuan's mother had paid him a visit to tell him all her troubles: the grief her son was causing her, his loss of the financial support which had enabled him to study, and her inability to support him. She had begged the former vice-township-head to find her son a job so that he could make his own living. Finally, she had asked him to keep all this secret lest her son object to her plan. But the man seemed to have entirely forgotten her last request: he came out with the whole matter the moment he saw the widow and her son.

"Don't you worry now! I'll get Little Yuan a part-time teaching job when school opens next year. You can count on that, absolutely!"

"Please take a seat!" The widow greeted him nervously.

"So you are home, good!" The visitor turned to Little Yuan and chuckled. "Take some advice from one who knows, my lad. A young man who is about to become a teacher should keep his feet firmly on the ground instead of allowing his fancy to run away with him."

"Who's going to become a teacher?" asked Little Yuan, puzzled.

"Why, *you* of course! I've already arranged everything with Mr. Chen, the school principal. You won't get much of a salary, barely enough for your meals perhaps. But in these difficult days, that's not so bad! You'll see people fighting over such a chance in the winter holidays. I'm sure some fellows will risk getting their skulls smashed to get in there!"

"But I don't want to push myself into the school."

"And why, may I ask? Because the pay is too small?"

"I need to be taught myself!"

Little Yuan, who had never liked this man, stood up and walked angrily out of the room.

He went into his own little room where he paced back and forth in semi-darkness with an irrepressible feeling of disgust. He was surer than ever that it was no longer possible for him to go on living at home. He did not blame his mother. Indeed, he felt very sorry for her though he could not stay on for her sake.

Now he began to hope that Huang Chun's plan would succeed. Even the Chinese teacher's idea of appealing to the rich young men seemed feasible now. Why should he hold back his hand merely because he disliked them? His only desire was to get away — away from this drab and vulgar environment! Away to that bright, splendid place!

He threw himself on his bed, determined as he had never been before. Then he heaved a long sigh, picked himself up slowly and went boldly out to keep his appointment with Huang Chun.

In the alley that passed his mother's room, he overheard the former vice-township-head boom: "Humph! That's how it is with all young men. After a couple of blunders he'll be all right."

Little Yuan muttered a curse and strode towards the street.

Lamps had been lit in the shops. Someone with a drawl was preaching from the *Book of Sacred Injunctions*. The tea-house with its chattering, shouting customers was like a disturbed hornet's nest. Little Yuan felt almost certain that if he should walk up to the men in there and ask them whether they realized the sacred significance of the war that was going on in their great land, they would only stare or blink at him dumbfounded.

The Huangs lived at the east end of the main street. Huang Chun's father who was on the financial committee of the county government had left two days ago to attend a conference in the county seat. From the day he knew about the two lads' plan to go to Yen-an, he had put his son under the custody of an old servant, the husband of Huang Chun's former wet-nurse, a jovial old man with permanently swollen, dropsical feet. Devoted as he was to young Huang, this old fellow took his job very seriously.

By the time Little Yuan reached the gateway of the Huang's house and was peering through the darkness, Huang Chun was fidgeting and grumbling impatiently. Upon hearing his friend's footfalls, he hurried out, limping, to meet him.

The old servant was hot on his heels.

"All right," he shouted good-naturedly after him. "We'll make a lame men's race of it. I bet I can run faster than you yet!"

When he reached the stone steps outside the gate, he saw the two lads whispering by the wall. He understood at once what his young master had been waiting for so impatiently.

"Go ahead and have a good chat," he said with a hearty smile. "You've been kept alone long enough, I know."

"Don't make such a noise!" Huang Chun stopped him angrily.

"All right, I'll keep quiet. But don't you two start discussing any crazy ideas again. It'll soon be New Year, let's not have anything untoward. . . ."

But Huang Chun paid no attention to his babble, eager as he was to discuss their own problems and their ideals with his friend. He had succeeded in carrying out his own scheme. Stealthily he thrust a small wad of cash and two gold rings into his friend's hands.

"Be sure to write to me!" he urged insistently. "And as often as possible! . . ."

"Mother's coming out!" called the little girl in the red knitted cap in a hushed voice. Her brother had placed her on watch beside their mother, and after giving the warning she slipped inside again.

Huang Chun's skinny and somewhat nervous mother was as famous a disciplinarian as her husband. They were both firm believers in the educational value of all forms of corporal punishment. Aware how ruthless she could be, Huang Chun clasped his friend's hand and then hurried back into the house.

Little Yuan did not leave at once. He stood there with mixed feelings, holding the notes and the rings. He knew that Huang Chun was bound to be severely punished, he was deeply touched by his friend's self-sacrifice and excited that his long-cherished dream was at last coming true. The night-watchman was sounding his gong when Little Yuan returned home. His mother was waiting for him as usual and hemming a shoe by the lamp.

"Did you have fun at school?" she asked.

Little Yuan went straight up to her, his heart throbbing with emotion. He had on his lips the words, "Please forgive me! Tomorrow I'll be gone!" But he turned his face aside, and merely mumbled, "Go to bed now, the curfew's sounded."

He hastened into his room as if to take refuge.

He could not sleep well that night, but tossed and turned on his bed a prey to all sorts of worries, while his mother's sighs sounded from the next room. The only thing from which he could draw strength was the vision of the boundless expanse of glistening snow and the endless stream of undaunted men and women who were plodding across it. Finally, he was overtaken by a sense of happiness, which made him forget all his troubles, as if he had already entered upon that new life he had been seeking through long days and nights. . . .

Early the next morning, he fled to the provincial capital, and from there started out on his long, exciting journey.

(1940)

AN AUTUMN NIGHT

It had just stopped drizzling. Eddies of cold wind were blowing over from the hills. And now that night had fallen — a gloomy night filled with the usual, biting, autumn chill of that mountainous area — the street looked deserted and completely dead, especially in the neighbourhood of the township office. Situated in a desolate, out-of-the-way locality, the little town overlooked a roaring, torrential stream and had its back against the flank of a lofty range of hills. Even in fair weather, there was hardly a shadow to be seen out of doors as soon as the tall, impressive gate of the township office was closed.

Shortly before, however, perhaps not much longer than it would have taken to swallow a meal or two, the so-called training-ground, where merchants and pedlars came to prop up their stalls and display their goods on market days, had buzzed with activity. It was an exhibit of a rather unusual character that had drawn around it the whole population of the town, men and women, young and old, to add a little colour to their monotonous, mirthless existence. Had it not been for the sudden change in the weather, they might have been lingering there still. But, as it was, there only remained now the odds and ends of a market day: a few simple mat shelters, some improvised stoves used for cooking the curdled blood and fat intestines of slaughtered hogs, and one or two homeless dogs — nothing else, that is, except the howling of the wind, the rumble of turbulent waters and the harassing cold.

Nevertheless, had one been searching in earnest for a human figure out there in the dark, the task should not have been very difficult, for there was that wandering prostitute who had been dragged to the place earlier in the day and put on public exhibition. Her professional name was Hsiao Kwei-feng, and she had arrived at this small town that very afternoon. Luck had been against her almost immediately. But what tormented her most now was not the sudden misfortune that had befallen her. All she wanted at the moment was to lie down. If only she could rest her tired limbs for a while! How unfortunate it was that the ground had been turned into a slushy pool by the rain!

She had been sitting upright for many hours already. Her trousers and the hind flap of her dress which she had tucked up behind her were soaked with the muddy water, and, worst of all, she had covered a distance of over fifty *li* on foot earlier that day, without having taken a morsel of food. On reaching the town she had stopped by the stream to comb and wash herself, daubed some cheap, perfumed powder on her face and put on a dress of printed silk and a pair of red shoes embroidered with white flowers. Having decked herself out like this, she set off ostentatiously through the town to find an inn. Almost at once she met an unknown foe.

As far as she could remember, misfortune had not struck her a more cruel blow within the last two years. She did not mind much having been insulted and abused, for she had long since grown accustomed to such treatment. But this time she had been slapped in the face, dragged to this place and put on public exhibition. If she had not shouted back, perhaps, she might not have been locked in the stocks, lashed by the cold wind as she sat in the mud. Perhaps she would just have been driven out of the town as a few other girls of her profession had been several days ago, and that would have been all.

There was not a wall or anything against which she could lean. Nothing around but thin air! Many a time she made up her mind to lie down in the mud, only to shrink back at the thought that the dress she had on was the only presentable one she possessed.

Now, driven to despair, she began to snifle and sob.

"What crime have I committed?" she muttered to herself, swallowing her tears. "I haven't stolen anything or robbed anyone! . . ."

Her grief grew deeper with each sob. For the first time the full realization of her miserable fate dawned upon her. Simply to fill her stomach, she had to wander to the edges of the earth, to befriend and please whomever she met, to suffer blows and torrents of abuse. And now, she had fallen lower than an ordinary criminal, for she had never seen a criminal suffer as she was suffering at the moment, exposed to the fury of the elements with her feet fast in the stocks.

She continued whimpering for a while, and then suddenly stopped to catch her breath, probing the darkness around with her frightened eyes.

"Will they really make me spend the whole night here? Oh! . . ."

To her surprise, she found herself shouting and struggling furiously, and a strange courage seemed to come to her. She was no longer weeping. Her voice grew louder and louder as her anger mounted. She refused to spend the rest of the night like this.

At the sound of shrieks and screams, the gate of the township office creaked open.

"You aren't complaining of injustice, are you?" Some abuse — not too offensive — followed.

"Of course I'm complaining!" the girl snapped back, forgetting for a moment that it was a guard of the township government she was addressing, and that she should plead meekly if she hoped to regain her freedom. "Why don't *you* come and try it for a change? I'm cold and hungry, and my back is aching terribly from sitting all the while. I haven't stolen anything or robbed anyone. . . ."

"Too bad I'm not the one who locked you up!" the guard cut her short as if to prove his own innocence.

"I don't care who locked me up here! Even a criminal has a right to a shelter from the wind, a little hay. . . ."

She gulped hard, gasping for breath, and stopped struggling as her strength failed her. The guard heaved a deep sigh in spite of himself.

"As if I were to blame!" he mumbled under his breath after a short pause.

And then, giving another sigh, he retreated behind the high, black gate. This was Hsieh Lao-wa, slow-thinking, sluggish and stout. The years he had served as a township guard had not changed his countrified manner. He turned slowly now to bolt the gate, but no sooner had he lifted his hands for the purpose than he drew them back and let them fall to his sides. He had heard Chen Yao-tung, the squad leader, approach the gate breathing heavily.

"A real pain in the neck!" he growled angrily. "A wildcat in human shape! . . ."

The squad leader was long and lank and about thirty years old. His hands were covered with scabs. The only son of a small landowner, he was interested in nothing except gambling at dice and cards, though he was almost always the loser. He had come to fill his present post less than a year before in order to avoid being press-ganged into the army. In his boredom a wicked idea had flashed into his mind—to have his fling with this vagrant whore without having to pay for it. This thought had gripped him for the whole evening, and driven him back here from Teh Wa-tze's tavern.

An insidious smile spread over the squad leader's features as he paused facing the guard.

"All right, you can go and sleep now," he drawled lazily, his smile turning into something bashful.

"Sleep? I am not that lucky, huh!"

"What a fool you are!" the squad leader hastened to add. "Didn't I tell you that I'd keep watch for you! . . ."

The guard stood a moment hesitantly.

"You're quite sure you won't go out and spend the night gambling?" he asked distrustfully.

"Gambling? Even the drinks I had were on credit. Look for yourself if you don't believe me—not a cent left!" To convince the guard he patted his pockets vigorously.

The guard lifted his gaze obliquely at him, shook his head, and finally resolved to steal a nap. But he was in no haste to leave. Instead, he stood there motionless, straining his ears. "As if I'd put her in the stocks!" he mumbled again with a sigh as the girl's sobs pierced the darkness of the night.

He wanted to speak to the squad leader about her, but after a loud yawn all he said was, "There are only the two of us here tonight, you know!"

Then at last he turned and went inside, leaving the squad leader by himself at the gate.

To satisfy his craving, the squad leader had done a great deal of thinking. With none of the clerks quartered in the office, and the township head having gone to the county seat to seek medical attendance, the entire premises were occupied by only a few guards. To get them out of the way had been rather easy since most of them had their own homes. Only Hsieh Lao-wa, a bachelor, had proved a real problem. Chen had volunteered twice to stay on duty in his stead, but the stupidly loyal guard couldn't trust him not to go gambling! Now, at long last, when he had almost given up hope, he had succeeded in disposing of Hsieh without much difficulty.

He did not go immediately for the whore beside the flag pole on the training-ground. On the contrary, to pretend that he had no ulterior motive, he half closed the gate and sauntered after the guard. Inside was the main hall of what had formerly been a temple. The wooden statue of the God of the Eastern Mountain that used to be in the centre of the hall had been removed. Under a long-out-of-use kerosene lamp hanging from the main beam stood a dining table and a few stools. Some statues of minor deities still remained on the sides, and at the foot of one portly figure flickered a lamp—a cracked bowl filled with oil. Some wood crackled as it burned in front of the altar. The squad leader sat himself down beside the fire, alert for any indications of movement from the back hall. Soon, he heard the guard yawn again, and then there was the sound of straw sandals dropping to the floor, followed by the squeaks of the wooden cot, and silence. . . .

But still Chen did not move, for an overwhelming weariness had taken hold of him. As if infected with the other's yawning, he gave a yawn too, and his scabs, warmed by the fire, began to itch. One thing about scabies is that, once the sores start itching, the earth seems to hold no greater bliss than the satisfaction afforded by a good scratching. But finally, with a foolish smile on his face, he gave a sigh, made up his mind and stood up. Leaving the fire, he tiptoed to the gate, opened it with great care, and walked like a thief into the night.

The wretched woman was still sobbing, no longer under any illusion that someone might come to her rescue. The appearance of the guard and his remarks had reminded her of her disastrous encounter that day. Never in all her miserable life had she seen such an imposing woman as the one who had directed the attack on her. Everybody seemed to obey her. The most astonishing part of it all was that even the tough-looking ruffians and scoundrels had been the woman's allies. And the moment she, Hsiao Kwei-feng, had voiced a protest, they had jumped on her like a pack of bloodhounds and put her in the stocks.

It was little comfort to recall that two or three girls she knew had suffered similar treatment at the hands of jealous hags. They had had their only presentable clothes torn to shreds or their faces so gashed with broken crockery that they had been unable to ply their trade for quite a

long while. That was perhaps worse than what she was going through. But at the moment she almost envied them, for she felt so miserable that the loss of her clothes or even of what remained of her looks mattered little to her. If only she could have some food, a warm fire and a place to stretch out in!

Seeing nothing around but impenetrable darkness, she started screaming again.

"What a wicked shame!" she shouted. "What is my crime? I haven't stolen anything or robbed anyone. . . ."

She stopped abruptly when she heard the hurriedly approaching footsteps of the squad leader. He stopped in front of her and laughed foolishly, not knowing what to say. It was not his first encounter with a woman; he was a married man with children. But this was his first experience with a woman who was treated by all as a piece of merchandise.

His smile looked particularly stupid because a primitive desire was choking him and he was afraid to make a fool of himself.

"Why on earth did you turn up here today of all days?" He blew out his breath in relief at having found a way to start a conversation.

"Was that my fault?" she retorted. But she was grateful that there was at last someone to whom she could complain. "Even if it were my fault, I should be allowed to clear out, shouldn't I? Why treat me like a criminal—even worse than a criminal! Stuck up here without any shelter. . . ."

She paused to sob, and her tears fell in real earnest. "For Heaven's sake, do me a favour!" she pleaded, weeping. "I'll never forget it! . . ."

"You'll not forget me, you mean?" the squad leader put in quickly with a grin. "Trying to take advantage of an honest man, eh?"

He had not meant to say this, but once out with it he lost all his nervousness. He assumed an attitude which he thought was most fitting in dealing with a prostitute. He blabbed with her flippantly, resorting to the most vulgar and sordid expressions.

Her response was quick and true to her profession, for she now saw a gleam of hope. If all went well, she would perhaps get the food, warmth and rest she needed so desperately. So urgent was her yearning for these things that she even dispensed with the usual preliminary flirtation. She promised to comply with all his wishes, speaking even more brazenly than he did.

Presently the squad leader released her feet from the stocks and led her into the office, groping through the darkness. Inside, he made her sit by the fire and turned to go to the kitchen for some left-over rice. But he stopped before he had even got started. Another idiotic smile came over his face as he scrutinized the small and shrunken form of the whore.

"You're not going to burn the bridge after you've crossed over it, are you?" he said, heaving a sigh of disappointment.

She lifted her head and replied wearily, "What do I have to gain by cheating you?"

The petulance of her tone and her look showed that, had it been up to her, she would have paid no attention even though a lord of lords had come into the place. All she wanted was to be left alone squatting on her haunches by the fire so that she could bury her head in her arms and relax. But suddenly she remembered that she had to have food, and noticed the frown on the squad leader's face. She forced a coquettish smile, and hastened to add, "I won't eat my words. Please see if there is any hot tea around. This thirst is killing me!"

"All right," he answered slowly, ignoring her provocative manner.

Chen walked into the kitchen, cursing his luck inwardly. Her dishevelled hair, her pale, haggard face with a sharp nose and shrunken lips on which the powder and rouge had been washed off by the rain and her tears, the sickly, scrawny figure, her mock smile and petulant voice — all these aroused his disgust. A growing disappointment began to cool his ardour.

Perhaps that was why he was able to keep calm and not lose his head when he discovered the guard standing there on his return. Hsieh had hurried out of the bedroom a few steps ahead of him. The fear that something untoward might happen had kept him awake; and when he called the squad leader but received no reply, he got up hastily.

Without either of them having expected it, they found themselves standing face to face. The guard looked greatly relieved.

"Aiya, I was afraid you'd gone out to gamble again!" he said.

"Gamble! Where can I go gambling?" the squad leader retorted with a grin. "You know I haven't a cent!"

"So you've set her free?" said the guard, indicating the girl with a motion of his chin.

"What else could I do?" Chen tried to appear disgusted. "That continuous wailing of hers got on my nerves! . . ."

"Sure!" The guard heaved a deep sigh. "A man ought to show kindness to others whenever he can." He took it for granted at once that the squad leader had done something praiseworthy. "I would have released her myself, only I was afraid I'd no right to! And it's not as if we were so strict about everything in this town. Oh-ho!"

He shook his head half smilingly and then took a seat by the fire, deep in thought.

The squad leader gave the rice to the girl, who had been awakened by their conversation, and sat down by the blazing wood. A dark frown clouded his features. He had been afraid at first that the guard would find out his scheme, and then Hsieh's honest kindness had made him feel a prick of shame. But now he resented the other's intrusion.

The only one who showed any sign of mirth was the girl. Roused by the sight of food, she forgot her weariness.

"Aiya! What luck that you were here tonight!" she said gratefully, stirring the rice.

"It must be awfully cold and hard by now!" remarked the guard with a yawn.

"Then why don't you go and boil some water for her!" the squad leader suggested.

His tone was full of resentment, but the guard only looked worried. "I'll go and see if there's any kindling left," he mumbled and hurried off to the kitchen. In a little while he came back with a jug of boiled water and three earthenware bowls. The girl was overjoyed. And Chen could not help smiling at Hsieh's naivety.

"No wonder they all say you've got a big heart!" he chuckled.

"Uh-huh, a big heart!" said the guard with embarrassment.

He filled a bowl and handed it to the squad leader. Then, raising his face which looked like a dried persimmon, he glanced at the whore searchingly. "A good thing they didn't scratch your face!" he said pensively, pulling out his long pipe.

"There's one thing I'd like to know," she said to them both, stirred by the guard's words. She stopped digging into the rice, and started talking as if she would never stop. "Who the devil was that woman anyway? I've been to quite a few places and seen a lot of bad men, and plenty of bitches too, but never one like her! It's the first time I've set foot in this place and she accused me of having debauched some man of hers . . .!"

She leaned forward and gazed almost fiercely at the guard, and tears welled up in her eyes.

The shame and the unfair treatment she had gone through in the daytime flashed back into her mind. As she was walking along to find an inn, trying to attract as much attention as possible on the way, she had passed a black-varnished door decorated with dragons and heard a torrent of abuse coming from behind. She stopped curiously, and turned to find out what was happening. To her amazement, a stout woman came rushing up to her. She had a black mole on her upper lip and grotesquely frizzled hair, while her fingers were loaded with gold rings. The girl no sooner opened her mouth than she was slapped in the face, and invectives and abuse were heaped on her.

"Curse her!" she said smothering a sob. "Does she think she's the only one in the world with human parents?"

"You picked the wrong day!" said the guard, blowing out a wisp of smoke from his fleshy nose. "If only you had come half a month earlier or when the township head were here, nothing would have happened to you. Why, only a couple of days ago a batch of girls were driven away from here, and now you come — like a flour pedlar caught in a windstorm, see?"

He paused and knocked his pipe on the ground until he had dislodged the charred ashes from the bowl. At this moment the squad leader suddenly broke into violent laughter.

"But what do you say to this —" Chen pulled a face, "aren't you always bent on wrecking someone's husband?"

"No one is to blame for that but the chap himself!" objected the guard.

"Some men don't choose properly — just take whatever's handy. . . ."

The whore blushed, and to conceal her shame turned to eat again.

From what the guard had just said, she began to realize that they were referring to a particular individual here who had something to do with her present plight. She did not know that since the township head had ruined his health through loose living his wife was in the habit of unleashing her rage on every prostitute she chanced to meet.

She took some more rice and pretended not to be listening. But a moment later, she put the bowl aside abruptly.

"What do you mean by 'wrecking someone's husband'?" she snapped, raising her thin, high-cheekboned face. "Have I ever been here before? I don't even know what he looks like! Is he pockmarked? Smooth-skinned?"

"He was only joking!" put in the guard, smiling slightly to see how annoyed she was.

"Ah! Only joking!" repeated the girl. "Think no one else has feelings, and you can crack whatever jokes you like, eh? Put yourself in my position, and see whether you can stand it!" She gulped again and her voice broke. "Isn't it true that all men were born alike? Is there any one who'd do the accursed things I have to if she had any choice!"

The squad leader who had been laughing stupidly all this time began to feel quite abashed. "Oh, come!" he said at last with a wry smile. "You get offended too easily."

"What does it matter offending someone like me! One who's born to be trodden underfoot. . . ."

The end of her chopsticks pointing up, with the back of her hand she wiped off a big tear rolling down her nose, and fell silent.

A moment later she began to eat again, but after a few mouthfuls she lost her appetite. She merely sipped the water she had poured into the rice bowl.

The guard stole a glance at her, then at the squad leader, and lit himself another pipe. Chen made no attempt to break the silence, but managed to keep a nonchalant smirk on his face. Nevertheless his pride was hurt. If it hadn't been for him, wouldn't she still be out there in the cold night under the chilly dew, without food or a warm fire? Eventually he forgot her wretchedness, but he also forgot his own ambition, and began to feel very sullen.

"See here!" he said as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"When you hear the fifth watch sound, you'll have to go!"

He glared at her, but was disappointed because she did not take fright. "Remember, don't get us into trouble at daybreak!" After a short pause, he went on unconvincingly, "When we put you back in the stocks, don't start crying again and think we've let you down. It'll be even worse for you if there's any misunderstanding, see?"

"Don't you worry," she answered dejectedly. "We know what's good and what's bad."

"Well, if we hadn't taken pity on you, Hsieh here and I would be sleeping under warm quilts now—a lot more comfortable. That's the truth, isn't it?"

"All right," put in the guard. "Take a few puffs and go to bed if you're sleepy."

The squad leader took the proffered pipe condescendingly, and began to smoke.

His first thought was to have a good smoke and then go to bed, leaving Hsieh to keep watch and do the unpleasant job that had to be done when the night-watchman struck the fifth watch. But now that all his desire for the girl had died, his heart felt much lighter. Besides, he was used to going without sleep, and his scabs were itching dreadfully again. So, after a few puffs of smoke, feeling wide awake and quite comfortable, he passed the pipe over to the girl.

He shot a quick glance at her as he scratched his hand, and appeared completely calm and satisfied.

"You must be over twenty, I suppose?" the guard queried suddenly, having studied her for some time.

"Oh, no!" The girl forced a smile. After blowing out the smoke in her mouth, she told him she was only eighteen.

"Hmm! . . ." snorted Hsieh, half suspicious, half astonished.

She knocked the ashes from the pipe with quick, nervous movements. "But it's true!" she insisted as if it were a matter of extreme importance to her. "You can count for yourself. I was born under the sign of the dragon, which makes me eighteen this year, doesn't it? I've never been one to lie about my age. What's there to lie about? You're just the age that you are, and that's that!"

The squad leader who was watching her with his head cocked to one side asked, "How long have you been in your trade?"

"Two years next spring," she answered very calmly, then drew a long breath and her fingers moved away from the cowhide tobacco pouch on her lap. "Honestly, I don't think there's anyone in the world who would willingly do this for a living." She continued, sulkily: "I don't care if you laugh at me, but I can tell you that there was a time when my family could support itself like any other. We had a few *mou* of our own land, and rented several dozen *mou*. We even had a few pigs to sell every year. Who on earth could have thought then that I'd ever fall so low? . . ."

She spread out her hands, glanced pleadingly from the guard to the squad leader, and then hung her head.

After a moment's silence, she straightened herself and filled the pipe.

"Oh, that bastard Diamond!" she cursed. "He's the one who's responsible for all we've suffered, the son of a bitch!"

"Who's Diamond?" The squad leader was curious.

"Why, he's the *lien-pao* chief of our place," she said as she lit a bamboo stick in the fire.

"So they don't call him township head out there?"

"That's his son who became township head."

She got the bamboo stick aflame, but instead of lighting the pipe, went on:

"Maybe he was township head later on when all *lien-pao* chiefs began to be called township heads. Anyway his son succeeded him as the township head after he came home from his training course. . . ."

"Ah! That's just what happened here then!" exclaimed the squad leader as if he had made a great discovery. He threw a glance at the guard.

"Oh, yes! Now I get it!" The guard also looked as if he had found a solution to a puzzle.

Chen stopped scratching himself and gazed intently at the girl.

"Your parents are still alive, are they?"

"I lost my dad the year before last."

"Yes, 'All crows under the sun are black!'" the guard muttered under his breath, paying no heed to the other two's conversation. Then he rose to his feet and went for more firewood, a mocking expression somewhat tinged with indignation on his face. When he returned, he repeated, "Yes, 'All crows under the sun are black!'"

As he sat down and began to feed the fire he heard the girl describe her elder brother's fate.

"Why, where you live, couldn't you buy his freedom?" he asked with surprise, forgetting the fire.

"We paid twice!" she said ruefully. "But it was no use. They press-ganged him into the army just the same!"

She stretched her aching back and yawned repeatedly in spite of herself, but she did not fail to notice their concern for her.

"You can imagine what happened after that," she continued, pausing at almost every word. "With the house full of kids. . . . My mother's unable to move, and that sister-in-law of mine was so feeble, she fell ill every time she went out into the wind. There was practically no one to do the work! At first we thought we could at least work the few *mou* that were our own. But we ate a lot more than we grew on the land. . . . Then ma sent me to one of the Mienyang textile mills, telling me that it was easy to earn money there."

She began to nod drowsily, but catching sight of her flimsy clothes she sat up with a start. "All crinkled like salted cabbage!" she moaned. "And she's kept my bag!"

"She'll give that back to you, all right," the guard said soothingly. "Why don't you go to sleep now?"

"Aiya! How lucky I was to meet you fellows today. . . ." She gave another yawn.

She tried to smile to show her gratitude, but her head had already dropped upon her knees.

"Please let me sleep a little longer . . ." she pleaded as if in a dream. And in no time she was snoring.

The two men exchanged a grin and sighed almost simultaneously.

"She may catch cold," said the guard.

"Not by such a warm fire!" retorted the squad leader impatiently.

He was not annoyed by the guard's concern for the girl, but what she had said had set him thinking about himself. His family, too, had paid bribes more than once to keep him from being press-ganged into the army; but still he had not been able to avoid serving among the township office guards. His father was in a poor state of health, his mother unable to stand the strain of much work. And now that it was time to sow the wheat, his poor old man was certainly going to be in pretty bad fix. . . .

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask for leave for a couple of days," he said to himself. Then he turned and shouted to the guard, "Heh! How about the two of us having a game?"

"It's all right with me," said Hsieh with a sigh after a second's thought.

They brought over a stool and put the improvised oil lamp on it. The squad leader pulled out a greasy pack of cards, and they began to play, gradually forgetting everything else — the darkness, the fact that it was midnight, the fat, red-capped and black-robed statue with its protruding lower lip. . . .

It was only while they were shuffling the cards that they glanced from time to time at the girl, or stirred the fire, before they lost themselves again in the game.

(1944)

LIU TSUNG-YUAN AND HIS PROSE

Liu Ta-chieh

Liu Tsung-yuan (773-819) is one of the greatest prose writers of the Tang dynasty.

He was born near Changan, then the capital of the empire. His father Liu Cheng was an official well known for his integrity, who had suffered many setbacks in his career because he opposed influential men, and was therefore appointed only to minor posts. During Liu Tsung-yuan's childhood his father was in the south, far from home, while he and his mother lived at Changan. He studied hard under his mother, who taught him many of the classics, and by the time he was thirteen his compositions were being praised by scholars, who considered him a young genius. In later years he wrote with deep feeling of his father's nobility of character and his mother's excellent teaching. He owed much to both his parents.

Liu passed the metropolitan examination at an early age, then served as a librarian in the Imperial Library and as assistant magistrate of Lantien County. At thirty-one he was promoted to the post of censor. His scholarship and literary talent were highly regarded by his contemporaries, while his political acumen was recognized by powerful government officials. Thus Han Yu (768-824), the other great prose writer of the time, wrote in his epitaph: "He was superlatively brilliant. In any argument, by quoting from books both new and old, from classical works, histories and the ancient philosophers, he was able to sweep all before him and defeat all his opponents. Thus his fame spread far and wide, and everyone sought his acquaintance. High officials heaped praises upon him, and tried to secure him as their protégé."

Liu Tsung-yuan lived at a time of sharp internal and external strife. In 755 An Lu-shan attempted to seize power. His rebellion was crushed after seven or eight years, but China's economy was seriously impaired, countless towns and villages had been destroyed and thousands of people killed. This was followed by a period of unrest during which many local military governors became independent, and the central rule of the Tang empire was greatly weakened. Moreover, to suppress the rebellion, the

government repeatedly enlisted foreign aid, and this led to a long series of incursions into Chinese territory by Ouigour and Tibetan troops, who plundered and harried many cities, counties and prefectures in north-west China.

While the threat from without was so grave, at court the eunuchs usurped authority. Their strength grew rapidly, and they allied themselves with the strongest military governors in different parts of the empire. They exploited the people by levying exorbitant taxes, annexed land and amassed vast fortunes to lead a life of wanton luxury. At the same time they carried on intrigues with nobles and corrupt officials, gathered partisans and formed factions to strengthen their own position. They also persecuted, exiled or killed good officials, causing much confusion and terror.

During the reign of Emperor Teh Tsung (780-804), a progressive political group headed by Wang Shu-wen and Wang Pi enlisted the support of Liu Tsung-yuan. This group, composed of comparatively young intellectuals from the lower strata of society, was formed around the crown prince. They were opposed to the usurpation of power by the eunuchs, to the heavy taxation and extortions, as well as to all the other political injustice of the time. They planned to carry through radical reforms when the crown prince ascended the throne.

In 805, when Liu Tsung-yuan was thirty-three, Emperor Teh Tsung died and the crown prince succeeded him as Emperor Shun Tsung. Then Wang Shu-wen and Wang Pi came to power, Liu was appointed a secretary of the Ministry of Ceremony, and other members of the group also achieved political prominence. They succeeded in abolishing many harsh laws made in Emperor Teh Tsung's time, wrested the control of the army and the exchequer from the eunuchs, declared a general amnesty, abolished all unreasonable levies and tributes, and released over six hundred women singers and dancers from the imperial harem. These reforms naturally won the support of the people, but were stubbornly resisted by the eunuchs and the old bureaucrats. The reactionary forces banded together, allied themselves with the military governors in outlying areas to compel the emperor to abdicate, and slandered Wang Shu-wen's group. In six months Emperor Shun Tsung, enfeebled by illness, was forced to abdicate and Hsien Tsung ascended the throne with the support of the eunuchs. Wang Shu-wen and the other reformers were condemned to death or sent into exile, so that very soon the group was completely destroyed. Liu Tsung-yuan was despatched to Yungchow in Hunan to fill the humble post of sub-prefect. This demotion was virtual banishment, for Yungchow, more than 3,000 *li* from the capital, was then a wild and desolate region to which only men guilty of great offences were sent. Seven others, including the poet Liu Yu-hsi, were demoted in the same way; and together they were known as the "Eight Sub-prefects."

Liu served as sub-prefect at Yungchow for nearly ten years, after which he was transferred to the prefectship of Liuchow, an even more isolated and backward part of the country, where life was still more difficult. He died in Liuchow at the age of forty-seven. During his long period of disgrace, he studied hard and devoted himself to literature. He wrote a great deal of superb prose and poetry, and played an important role in the current movement to reform Chinese prose.

During the Han and Wei dynasties (206 B.C. — A.D. 265), the simple, expressive, classical Chinese prose gradually became more regular, and a tendency towards parallelisms developed. Scholars of the Tsin dynasty (265-316) carried this tradition forward, evolving a euphuistic style; while during the Southern Dynasties (317-589), owing to the study of euphonic principles and the fact that scholars from the ranks of the nobility only strove to surpass each other in empty rhetoric, the euphuistic style reached its height. The euphuists laid stress on splendid diction, parallelism and strict adherence to euphonic principles, regardless of the content. For many years, up to the middle of the Tang dynasty (618-907), all prose was written in this style, whether political dissertations, literary criticism, travel essays, letters or diaries. Thus, from the third to the eighth century in China, euphuistic writing had taken the place of the straightforward classical prose.

Towards the middle of the Tang dynasty there arose in the towns a number of intellectuals who were not from noble or great families. This rising urban intelligentsia demanded a practical type of prose, and attacked the euphuistic style which served the court and the nobility only. Han Yu, the standard-bearer of this movement, courageously led the way in reforming Chinese prose. Because it accorded with the needs of the period, the new prose was vigorously supported by many young writers and, thanks to Han Yu's outstanding literary achievements, was able to defeat the old euphuism.

Although this reform of Chinese prose was considered to be a revival and a return to the oldest traditions, the style created was in fact a new one. On the basis of classical Chinese prose new elements of speech were absorbed, to provide a standardized, simple and unadorned language, suitable for narrative, debate, or the expression of emotions. From the middle of the Tang dynasty onwards, this type of prose was the classical form chiefly used.

Liu Tsung-yuan was a staunch supporter of the movement Han Yu led to reform prose, and wrote in the new style himself. Without his active support, the new movement could not have gained so complete a victory. Liu, like Han Yu, was for a revival of Confucianism; but he did not agree with Han Yu's opposition to Buddhism and Taoism. On questions of politics and philosophy the two friends differed, but they were

in complete accord regarding the fight against euphuism and the revival of free, expressive prose. They encouraged each other and discussed many problems together, while attacking the old style and creating a new one. As the two outstanding prose writers of the period they destroyed the euphuistic tradition which had held sway for several hundred years.

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Before his demotion at the age of thirty-three, Liu was still writing in a somewhat euphuistic style. Most of his best writing, rich in content and technically superb, dates from after his banishment. During the decade and more that he spent in Yungchow and Liuchow, he lived among the people and came to understand their lives and thoughts: this was a great social education for him. Many things which he had not realized in the capital—the tyranny of local officials, the sufferings of the labouring people, and the evils of feudal society—he now saw for himself. This strengthened his humanistic outlook and enriched the content of his works.

The first of Liu's prose works to strike us are his fables. Fables can be found in the works of ancient philosophers and in old histories, but they were used to reinforce arguments, not as an independent literary form. Liu Tsung-yuan was the first in China to use this genre, and his fables are perfect of their kind—each one short, to the point, and profoundly significant. His language is highly evocative, but trenchant and forceful at the same time, having all the features of good satire. His fables, like those of Aesop, are based for the most part on animal stories.

The "Three Fables" are very well known. By describing the unhappy end of a deer, a donkey and some rats, he castigates the stupid, insolent braggarts who, relying on the strength of others, bully those weaker than themselves. In the introduction to these three fables he writes: "I have always disliked those men of today who, blind to their own shortcomings, take advantage of circumstances or powerful protectors to lord it over others, bragging of their skill and seizing every chance to swagger. Such bullies always come to grief in the end." Men of this kind could be found everywhere at that time, including bureaucrats who boasted of their noble descent and eunuchs who relied on the emperor's favour to commit all manner of crimes. Thus Liu in his fables satirizes many typical figures in the society of his time.

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Liu's biographical sketches are also excellent. Most of these did not describe important historical figures, nor were they written as eulogies. He usually wrote about ordinary individuals, artisans or peasants—humble folk in the lower walks of life, collecting his material from his own experience among the common people.

By "Some Incidents from the Life of Marshal Tuan," Liu exposes the inhumanity of those military governors who annexed land by force and killed whomever they pleased. Since Liu was a humanist who opposed the corrupt politics of the time and sympathized with the people, he could give a vivid and truthful picture of the gallant deeds of this good marshal who opposed local despots and loved the common folk.

"The Snake-Catcher" can also be considered as a biographical sketch. Here, in powerful, incisive language, Liu describes a snake-catcher whose grandfather and father both died of snake-bites, and who has nearly lost his life several times during the twelve years in which he has caught snakes. But he still prefers this dangerous profession to farming, because the rapacity of officials and landlords and the sufferings of the peasants are more fearful than poisonous snakes. This sketch accurately depicts the plight of the people under the despotic rule in China during the second half of the eighth century.

Liu also wrote excellent essays on the countryside — the best of their kind in Chinese literature.

The first striking characteristic of these essays is that here scenery is not depicted for its own sake, but to express the writer's thoughts and feelings: the natural beauty he describes is charged with his own personality. This is why the consistent outlook expressed in Liu's other writings can be found in these essays too. In "Fool's Stream," he says that he must be the greatest fool in the world to be persecuted as he is by the authorities. The fact that men ignore the beautiful scenery in this lonely region reminds him of his own position; hence he calls the stream Fool's Stream. Yet Fool's Stream, "though it does no good to men, reflects all things clearly, being limpid and transparent, and tinkles merrily." Like Liu himself, it can mirror everything around it, and has purity and integrity. "Though I am unfitted for worldly affairs," says Liu, "I find great comfort in writing, touching upon all subjects, embracing all forms, and avoiding nothing." He was no real fool either, and by comparing himself with this stream he conveys his pent-up grievances. In "The Knoll West of Brazier Lake," "Yuan Family Ghyll," "Stone Town Mount" and other essays, Liu expresses similar ideas. He describes exquisite scenery in wild, forsaken parts, where there is no one to enjoy it, as a symbol of talent unappreciated. His essays are written with passion, and are not merely travel records.

The second characteristic of Liu's essays is his careful observation and penetrating understanding of Nature. He uses the most concise and beautiful language to depict scenery. His images are vivid and enchanting, and each essay is like a minute landscape which unfolds before our eyes. These are incomparable prose poems, genuine word pictures. There are few essays of this quality in all the history of Chinese literature.

Liu Tsung-yuan believed that the content of literature was important, but that the art of writing was important too. He had studied various

branches of earlier Chinese literature. He was well versed not only in the Confucian classics, but also in Buddhist sutras and the ancient writers of different schools. The scope of his knowledge and his grasp of language helped to make his prose concise, forceful and expressive. After his death, Han Yu wrote to the poet Liu Yu-hsi: "Liu Tsung-yuan's prose is powerful yet profound, elegant yet vigorous. He reached the height attained by Ssuma Chien."* This high estimate is no exaggeration.

*A great historian and prose writer, born in 145 B.C. His famous *Historical Records (Shih Chi)* had a great influence on later writers. (See *Chinese Literature*, 1955, No. 4.)

PROSE WRITINGS BY LIU TSUNG-YUAN

(773-819 A.D.)

A Refutation of the Statute Concerning Revenge

It has come to my humble attention that during the reign of Empress Wu, Hsu Yuan-ching, a native of Hsiakuei County, Tungchow, whose father Hsu Shuang was killed by the county officer Chao Shih-yun, stabbed his father's enemy and then gave himself up.

One of the censors of that time, Chen Tzu-ang, proposed that Hsu should be sentenced to death but that his grave should be honoured, and requested that this decision be embodied in the statutes as part of the established law. However, I venture to question this.

To my knowledge the chief aim of morality is to prevent disorder; thus a man should not commit murder, and even a son who avenges his father should not be pardoned. The chief aim of the law is also to prevent disorder; hence even an official who kills unjustly should not be pardoned. The aim is alike in both cases, though the application is different. Execution and honour are incompatible; for to execute a man who should be honoured is unsound and makes a mockery of the law, while to honour a man who should be executed is improper and counter to morality. If we hold up this example for the empire to be handed down to posterity, those who want to do right will have no guide for their conduct, and those who want to avoid doing wrong will not know what stand to take. How then can we make this the law?

For the sages' precepts amount to this: rewards and punishments must conform to reason, and honour and blame must accord with humanity. We must have a common criterion. If the judges had made a thorough investigation, distinguished the true from the false, the right from the wrong, and gone to the root of the matter, there would not have been this confusion between law and morality.

It may be that Hsu's father was guilty of no crime, but Chao used his authority to kill an innocent man for a private grudge, and the provincial

officials and judges instead of investigating the matter condoned the injustice and ignored the son's protest. In that case, if Hsu determined to avenge his father's great wrong and stabbed his enemy after careful thought, confident that he was in the right and could die without regret, he was doing something moral and just and the authorities should have felt ashamed. Instead of condemning him to death, they should have hastened to apologize.

On the other hand, if Hsu's father was indeed guilty and Chao passed lawful sentence, Hsu Shuang was not murdered by an official but executed according to the law. And how can one take the law to be an enemy? A man who opposes the law of the land and kills the officer administering it is guilty of treason. In such a case, if he is arrested and executed to uphold the law, he certainly should not be honoured afterwards.

Moreover, the censor reasoned: "All men have sons, all sons have fathers. If everyone takes revenge, there will be no end to disorder." This shows a wrong understanding of morality. It is moral to take revenge when you suffer from a great injustice and your plea is not heard; but this does not mean that when a man has broken the law and been condemned to death, his son can claim, "He killed my father therefore I can kill him," not considering right or wrong, but taking might alone to be justified as right. This is surely counter to all the classical canons and the teachings of the sages.

In accordance with the Chou dynasty rules of ceremony, there was an arbiter in charge of crimes of revenge. If a man was justly killed, it was wrong to take vengeance, and he who did so would be punished by death and considered as a public enemy. There was no place for family vendettas.

Again, the Kung-yang Commentary on the *Spring-and-Autumn Annals* states that if a man is killed unjustly, his son can take revenge; but if every man who deserves death is to be avenged, there will be no end to killing. Revenge of this kind does not settle any dispute. If we judge revenge in the light of these two statements, then it seems to accord with morality.

Again, to avenge a father is filial, and it is right to hazard one's own life in such a cause; if Hsu acted according to the dictates of morality, filial piety and justice, he must have had a proper understanding and been a man who upheld the truth. How then could such a man be flouting the law of the land? Yet he was condemned to death, thus injuring both law and morality. It is clear then that this statute should not be incorporated in the legal codes, and I humbly suggest that my argument be appended to the decree, with the recommendation that cases involving revenge should not be judged according to the earlier statute.

Some Incidents from the Life of Marshal Tuan

(A Report for the Official Historians)

While Marshal Tuan was prefect of Chingchow, the Prince of Fenyang* was the deputy commander-in-chief of the empire, residing in Pu County. His son Kuo Hsi, the imperial secretary and commander of the forces stationed at Pinchow, let his troops run wild. The profligates and ruffians of that district paid bribes to be enrolled in his army so that they could do as they pleased, and the local officials dared not interfere. Bands raided the market each day and, unless they got all they wanted, would beat the vendors, break their arms and legs, or throw pots and pans, pitchers and dishes all over the street before strolling off arm in arm. They even knocked down and killed a pregnant woman. Pai Hsiao-teh, governor of Pinchow area, was seriously concerned, but because of the prince he dared not say anything.

Tuan went from Chingchow to make a report to the governor, hoping that steps would be taken to deal with the situation.

"The Son of Heaven has entrusted some of his subjects to you, sir," he said. "Yet you stand by and watch them suffer. What if there is a riot?"

"What would you advise?" asked the governor.

"I am very well off at Chingchow, with little to do," replied Tuan. "But I cannot stand seeing men murdered in time of peace, and strife stirred up at the border. If you will appoint me provost-marshal, I can end this trouble for you and avert this danger from the citizens here."

"Very good," said Governor Pai. "So let it be."

A month after Tuan took up his new post, seventeen of Kuo Hsi's soldiers, demanding drink, went to the market and stabbed an old wine vendor, smashing his vats so that the wine flowed into the gutters. Tuan sent troops to arrest these seventeen men, and had their heads cut off and impaled on spears which were planted outside the market-place. At that, Kuo Hsi's soldiers set up a great clamour and put on their armour. Then the governor took fright and summoned Tuan.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

"Have no fear," said Tuan. "Let me speak to the troops."

The governor gave him an escort of several dozen men, but he sent them all away. Leaving his sword behind, and with a lame old man as his groom, he went to Kuo Hsi's camp. When armed men came out, he laughed.

"Why put on armour to kill an old trooper?" he asked as he entered the gate. "I have brought my head with me."

*Kuo Tzu-yi, who crushed An Lu-shan's rebellion in the middle of the eighth century.

The armed men were taken aback.

"What harm has the imperial secretary done you?" asked Tuan. "Why do you want to ruin the Kuo family? Report my arrival to Secretary Kuo and tell him I wish to speak to him."

Then Kuo Hsi came out to see him.

"The Prince of Fenyang is famed throughout the world," the marshal told him. "You should see to it that his reputation endures. Yet now you are letting your troops run wild and make trouble, creating a disturbance at the border; but if anyone is blamed, it will be the Prince of Fenyang. The young scoundrels of this district have bribed their way into your army, and are killing and injuring people. Unless a stop is put to this, in a few days there will be a riot, and you will be responsible. And everyone will say that because you rely on your father's might you do not control your troops. Then what will be left of your family's reputation?"

Before he had finished, Kuo Hsi bowed in contrition.

"I am grateful to you for telling me the truth," he said. "I am very much in your debt. I will order my troops as you think best."

Then he turned and spoke sternly to his men:

"Take off your armour and lay down your weapons! Go back to your squads and companies! Whoever creates a disturbance will be killed!"

"I have not yet dined," said the marshal. "May I trouble you for a simple meal?" And after eating he said, "I am not feeling well. I would like to spend the night here."

Bidding his groom come back the following day, he lay down to sleep in the camp. Kuo Hsi did not remove his clothes that night, but warned his scouts to keep a good watch and protect the marshal. The next morning Kuo Hsi accompanied Tuan to the governor's office to tender apologies and ask for a chance to make good. And after that there was no more trouble in Pinchow.

Before this, when Tuan was serving as land officer at Chingchow, a general there named Chiao Ling-chen seized several thousand *mou* of private land, and ordered his tenants:

"When you harvest your grain, you must give me half of it."

That year there was a serious drought, and even the grass there withered. One of his tenants reported this to Chiao.

"All I care about is my share," retorted the general. "Don't talk to me about drought."

And he pressed still harder for payment. But even if this peasant had starved he could not have paid; so he informed Tuan, who wrote a gently worded judgment and sent men to Chiao to persuade him to waive his claim. In great anger, Chiao summoned his tenant.

"Do you think I am afraid of Tuan?" he shouted. "How dare you report me to him?"

He snatched up the judgment and spread it on the peasant's back, then gave him twenty strokes with a great cudgel. The man was carried, half dead, to Tuan's office.

"It was I who brought this on you!" exclaimed Tuan, shedding tears.

He fetched water to wash the blood off the peasant's back, tore up his own linen to bind his wounds, administered medicine himself, and fed him both morning and evening before eating himself. Then, unknown to the poor man, he sold his own horse to buy grain to pay his rent.

A courageous and upright man named Yin Shao-yung was then commander of the Huaihsi garrison. He went to see Chiao, and abused him roundly.

"Are you a man?" he demanded. "All Chingchow is bare and parched, and men are starving to death, yet you insist on getting your grain and beat an innocent man with a great cudgel. Tuan is a kind-hearted, honest, noble man, yet you have no respect for him. He sold his only horse at a loss in order to buy grain to pay you, and you took it quite brazenly. You have disregarded a heaven-sent calamity, opposed a respectable gentleman, beaten an innocent man, and taken a good man's grain, leaving him with no horse to ride. How can you face heaven and earth? How can you hold up your head before your slaves?"

Though Chiao was a violent man, when he heard this he was humbled. The sweat poured down his face, and he could not eat.

"I cannot look Tuan in the face again," he said.

He died one night of remorse.

Later, when Tuan was promoted from Chingchow to the post of minister of agriculture, he warned his relatives not to accept any gifts from Marshal Chu Tsu when they passed Chichow. As soon as they reached that district, Chu Tsu did indeed send them three hundred rolls of brocade; but though Tuan's son-in-law Wei Wu declined again and again, he was forced to accept the gift.

"So you did not take my advice!" cried the marshal angrily when they reached the capital.

"My rank was too low to refuse," said Wei Wu, and apologized.

"Still, this must not remain in my house," declared the marshal.

So he stowed the gift over a beam in his office in the ministry of agriculture. By the time Chu Tsu styled himself emperor, the marshal had died. But his officers told Chu Tsu of this incident, and when he bade them bring back his gift he found the original seal unbroken.

The marshal is usually praised as an impetuous soldier who won fame throughout the empire because he did not fear death. His integrity is not known. In my former travels up and down Chichow and Pinchow, past Chenting and north to Maling, to visit all the outposts and garrisons, I liked to ask old soldiers for stories, and they all had tales of Tuan. The marshal, they said, appeared very easy-going, and walked with bent head and folded arms. His speech was mild, his behaviour unassuming, and

he never lost his temper; indeed, people often took him for a scholar. But if he found that injustice had been done, he would not rest till he had set it right.

During the visit here of Prefect Tsui of Yungchow — a man of the utmost probity — I checked these tales about the marshal with him, and found them all to be true. Fearing lest these incidents be forgotten and lost if not compiled by the official historians, I am making this report to those in charge.

The Snake-Catcher

The country around Yungchow yields a curious snake — black with white spots. Any plant it touches dies, and its bite is fatal. But if caught and dried for medicine, it cures leprosy, palsy and boils, heals putrid sores and checks all noxious humours. In earlier times it was decreed that two snakes should be presented each year to the imperial physician, and that those who captured them should be exempted from other taxes. So the people of Yungchow made every effort to catch them.

I questioned a man named Chiang, whose family had made a living in this way for three generations.

“My grandfather died of snake-bite, so did my father,” he told me in great distress. “Now I have followed in their steps for twelve years, and narrowly escaped death several times.”

I pitied him.

“If you hate this calling,” I said, “I can ask the authorities to release you from it and let you pay land tax instead. What do you say?”

Chiang was appalled. Tears welled up in his eyes.

“Have pity on me, sir!” he cried. “Though this is a wretched life, it is better than paying taxes. If not for these snakes, I would have come to grief long ago. For the sixty years that my grandfather, father and I have lived here, our neighbours have been more and more hard put to it every day. When their soil is exhausted, their savings spent, they leave their homes lamenting to fall hungry and thirsty by the wayside; or toil winter and summer in the wind and rain, contracting diseases till their corpses pile up. Of my grandfather’s generation, not one in ten is left; not three in ten of my father’s; and not five in ten of those who were my neighbours twelve years ago. The rest are dead or gone while I alone live on — because I catch snakes. When those bullying tax-collectors come to our district, they bellow and curse from east to west and rampage from north to south, making such a fearful din that the very birds and dogs have no peace. Then I tiptoe from my bed to look into my pitcher, but breathe freely again at the sight of my snakes and lie down once more. I feed my snakes carefully, and present them in due season, then come

home to enjoy the fruits of my fields in comfort. I risk death twice a year, but live happily for the rest, unlike my neighbours who face death every day. Though I die tomorrow, I shall have outlived most of them. How could I hate this calling?"

At this I pitied the fellow even more.

I used to doubt that saying of Confucius: Tyranny is more rapacious than a tiger. But Chiang's case convinced me of its truth. Alas, to think that taxation can prove more dire than a poisonous snake! So I have written this essay for those who study conditions in the countryside.

The Bear

The deer is afraid of the jackal, the jackal of the tiger, and the tiger of the bear. The bear has shaggy hair and can stand on two legs. Its great strength makes it most dangerous to men.

South of the land of Chu lived a hunter who could imitate the cries of all beasts on his bamboo pipe. One day, taking his bow and arrows and carrying embers in a pitcher, he climbed the hills to make the sound of a deer, so that when a deer came, attracted by the cry, he could show his light and shoot it. A jackal ran up, however, on hearing this cry; so the hunter took fright and made the noise of a tiger. As soon as the jackal left, though, a tiger arrived; then the hunter, more frightened than ever, made the noise of a bear. At that the tiger fled, but a bear came in search of a mate. Finding a man, it seized him with both paws, tore him limb from limb, and ate him.

All those who rely on some power not their own will meet their doom.

Sung Ching

Sung Ching had a shop in the medicine market in the west end of Changan. He stocked good drugs, for he dealt fairly with the vendors and they took him whatever they found in the mountains or marshes. And when the Changan physicians used his drugs in their prescriptions they always proved efficacious; so all spoke well of him. Then the sick applied to him for physic too, hoping for a speedy cure, and Sung Ching supplied them gladly. Though a customer brought no money, he would still give him the best. Notes of hand piled up, yet he never pressed for payment; and even strangers could get credit from him. At the end of the year, if he thought someone could not pay him, he would burn his notes and say no more about them. This amazed all the tradesmen there, who laughed at him.

"What a fool he is!" they jeered.

But some of them wondered: "Can Sung Ching be a saint?"

When he heard this, he remarked: "I try to make money to keep my family. I am no saint. Still, those who think me a fool are also wrong."

By the time he had sold drugs for forty years he had burned scores of notes of hand, some belonging to men who had since become highly paid officials in charge of several districts; and now one after another they sent gifts to his house. So though many did not pay cash and hundreds never paid at all, this did not prevent him from growing rich. For Sung Ching took a long view, and made a greater profit as a result, unlike those petty tradesmen who fly into a rage if they fail to get cash and shout abuse till they make themselves enemies. Such a way of doing business is most short-sighted. In fact, these men were real fools.

Sung Ching, on the contrary, did very well and was by no means a fool, for he stuck to his own way until he was rich. Each day brought him more customers, and he supplied them all. Men in disgrace, whose own friends and relatives shunned them, were never rudely treated by Sung Ching, but continued to get the best drugs. So when they were back in power they repaid him well. This shows his far-sightedness.

But I see the men of today flock to those in the sun and spurn those in the shade — few are Sung Ching's equal. People speak contemptuously of "market friendship." Yet Sung Ching was a tradesman in the market, and not many friends nowadays take such a long view regarding repayment as he. If they did, then many of those in sad straits would not be left to perish. So it seems this "market friendship" is very much needed!

Some may object: "Sung Ching was no ordinary tradesman."

To this I answer: "Agreed. Though Sung Ching kept a shop, he did not behave like a tradesman. Unfortunately many of those who call themselves gentlemen — the men in government offices and colleges — do act like tradesmen! It was not in the market-place alone that Sung Ching stood out."

Camel Kuo the Tree Planter

Nobody knows what Camel Kuo's real name was. Because he was a hunchback with a hump like a camel's when he walked, his countrymen gave him this nickname.

"Very good!" said Camel when he heard it. "I shall use this."

So he dropped his former name and called himself Camel.

He lived in the district of Fenglo, west of Changan, and his trade was tree-planting. All the rich men of Changan who loved gardens, and all the vendors of fruit, tried to hire him. For the trees he planted or transplanted always lived; indeed they flourished exceedingly and bore abundant fruit which ripened early. Though other gardeners watched him and copied him, not one of them did so well.

One day someone asked him his secret.

"I have no special skill," replied Camel Kuo. "To get the best out of each tree I simply respect its nature. A tree's roots must have room to spread and must be evenly laid; the soil must be old and also firmly tamped down. Once a tree is planted you should not move it or fret about it, but go away without another glance. While planting it, treat it as you would your own child; but then leave it alone. For so it will remain whole and develop to the full. I simply refrain from injuring its growth; I cannot make it flourish. I merely keep from spoiling its fruit; I cannot make it fruitful or quick to ripen. Other gardeners are different. They crowd the roots together and use new soil, spreading either too much or too little; or if they avoid these mistakes, they handle the tree and worry about it too much, gazing at it by day and fingering it by night, coming back to it all the time. Some even scratch the bark to see whether it is still living, or tug at its roots to see whether they are firm; and so the tree withers away from day to day. Such men declare they love trees when in fact they are murdering them, and claim they are showing concern when in fact they are doing damage. This is how they fall short of me. But what more can I do?"

"Could your way be applied to the art of government?" asked the other.

"All I understand is planting trees," replied Camel. "Governing is not my line. Still, living here in the country I see the authorities issue order after order as if they had the people's welfare at heart; yet only harm comes of it. Day and night those officials come and shout: 'The magistrate orders you to get on with your ploughing! See that your planting is done! Get in your crops! Hurry up and card the silk! Look sharp and weave your thread! Bring up your children well! Feed your fowl and pigs!' They sound drums and clappers to summon the common people, and we go without both meals to entertain them; but if we have no time to ourselves, how can we thrive or live at peace? Instead, we waste away and are worn out. In this sense, governing men may be rather like planting trees."

The other man laughed.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I was asking how to grow trees, but here I have learned the way to govern men."

I record this as a warning for officials.

The Story of the Boy Ou Chi

The people of Yueh were so unfeeling that they looked upon their sons and daughters as merchandise, and used to sell them for a profit when they had lost their milk-teeth. As if this were not enough, they would

steal other people's children too and bind or chain them. Even men with beards, if too weak to resist, were carried away as slaves; and kidnapping was all too common. He who was lucky enough to reach manhood would catch those weaker than himself. And since this profited the Han officials, provided they got the slaves, they asked no questions. Thus the population of Yueh kept decreasing, for few could avoid capture. It is strange, then, that Ou Chi, a boy of only eleven, managed to make good his escape.

This story was told me by Tu Chou-shih, secretary of Kuei Prefecture. Ou Chi was a cowherd in Shenchow, who was watching his herd and gathering fuel when two brigands caught him. After tying his arms behind his back and gagging him, they set off with him to a market-town more than forty *li* away to sell him as a slave. The boy whimpered and trembled like any frightened child, and the brigands thought him easy prey. So having got drunk together, one of them went to the market while the other lay down, planting his sword in the ground. When Ou Chi saw the brigand was asleep, with his back to the sword he rubbed his bonds against the blade till he managed to cut through them. Then he killed the brigand with the sword and fled.

He had not gone far, however, when the other brigand came back and found him; and, in horror, the brigand prepared to kill him. But he quickly begged for mercy.

"Surely," he pleaded, "a slave shared by two men is not as good as a slave all to yourself. He treated me badly; but if you will spare my life and treat me kindly, I will do whatever you say."

After some thought the brigand said to himself: "It will pay me better to sell this boy than to kill him; and dividing what he fetches between two is not as good as keeping it all myself. Really it is fortunate that he killed the other fellow!"

He disposed of the corpse, and took the boy to the slave-broker. Once more Ou Chi was bound, this time more strongly. But in the middle of the night he wriggled up to the stove and set fire to his ropes to sever them. Even though he burned his hands, he did not falter. Then he drew the sword to kill the second brigand, and raised such a cry that the whole market was aroused.

"I am a son of the Ou family," he told the market people. "I ought not to be a slave, but two brigands kidnapped me. Now luckily I have killed them both. Please report this to the authorities."

Then the head of the market told the magistrate, and the magistrate told the prefect, who summoned the boy. Seeing how small and gentle he looked, Yen Cheng the prefect was amazed. He offered him a small official post, but the boy declined; so he gave him some clothes instead, and sent him back under escort to his district, where all the kidnappers went in such fear of him that they dared not pass his door.

"This boy is two years younger than Chin Wu-yang,"* they said. "But he has already killed two bold men. We had better keep out of his way."

Dung-Beetles

Dung-beetles like to carry loads. They pick up whatever lies in their path, raising their heads to carry it; and refuse to give up however heavy their load and however exhausted they are. Moreover, since their backs are abrasive, things piled on them will not slip off. So at last they stumble, fall, and cannot get up. Sometimes men take pity on them and remove their burden; but they pick it up again as soon as they can crawl on. They like climbing too, and press forward with all their might till they fall dead.

There are people today in the world who are fond of gain, and will let slip no chance to enrich themselves, never thinking that this wealth may prove a burden. Their one fear is that they may not amass enough. When they grow careless and stumble, they may be demoted, banished or involved in trouble; yet as soon as they struggle to their feet they start again, scheming each day to better their position and procure a larger salary, till their greed for more gain brings them to the brink of ruin. They never reflect upon their previous setbacks. Though these seem stout fellows and are known as "men," they have no more intelligence than little beetles. How pathetic this is!

Three Fables

I have always disliked those men of today who, blind to their own shortcomings, take advantage of circumstances or powerful protectors to lord it over others, bragging of their skill and seizing every chance to swagger. Such bullies always come to grief in the end. I shall therefore relate three stories told me, which put me in mind of this, about a deer, a donkey and some rats.

The Deer of Linchiang

A man of Linchiang caught a young deer and decided to keep it. But when he took it home, all his dogs bounded up with lolling tongues and wagging tails, making their master both angry and alarmed. So every day he carried the deer to the dogs in order that they should grow used to it and learn not to hurt it. And by degrees he allowed them to play together.

*A boy of the kingdom of Yen during the Warring States Period (403-221 B.C.), who killed a man at the age of thirteen.

As time went by, all his dogs did as he wished. The deer grew and forgot that it was a deer but thought the dogs were its friends. It would butt them, lie down beside them, and make quite free with them. And the dogs, out of fear of their master, played up to it. From time to time, though, they would lick their chops.

When three years had passed, the deer went out of the gate. Seeing many dogs from other houses on the road, it ran to play with them. But the sight of it threw these strange dogs into a frenzy. They fell on the deer and devoured it, scattering its remains on the ground. And so the deer perished — without understanding the reason.

The Donkey of Kweichow

There were no donkeys in Kweichow until an eccentric took one there by boat; but finding no use for it he set it loose in the hills. A tiger who saw this monstrous looking beast thought it must be divine. It first surveyed the donkey from under cover, then ventured a little nearer, still keeping a respectful distance however.

One day the donkey brayed, and the tiger took fright and fled, for fear of being bitten. It was utterly terrified. But it came back for another look, and decided this creature was not so formidable after all. Then, growing used to the braying, it drew nearer, though it still dared not attack. Coming nearer still, it began to take liberties, shoving, jostling, and charging roughly, till the donkey lost its temper and kicked out.

“So that is all it can do!” thought the tiger, greatly pleased.

Then it leapt on the donkey and sank its teeth into it, severing its throat and devouring it before going on its way.

Poor donkey! Its size made it look powerful, and its bray made it sound redoubtable. Had it not shown all it could do, even the fierce tiger might not have dared to attack. But the donkey gave itself away!

The Rats of Yungchow

A certain householder in Yungchow had a dread of unlucky days* and observed them very strictly. Because he was born in the year of the Rat,** he considered rats as holy. This being the case, he would keep no cat or dog, and forbade his servants to catch rats. Unchecked, they had the run of his store-rooms and kitchen.

As news of this spread among rats, more and more of them flocked to his house, where they could eat their fill with nothing to fear. They

* The ancient Chinese considered certain days of the year to be unlucky or lucky, for doing different things.

**In the old Chinese calendar there was a cycle of twelve years, each year being represented by a different animal.

broke all the household utensils, gnawed through all the clothes on the hangers. The members of the household had to be content with the food they left over. Processions of rats mingled freely with men in broad daylight, and at night they made such a din by stealing food and fighting that no one could sleep. Still the inmates of the house put up with them.

After some years this family left and another household moved in, but the rats carried on as before.

"These are creatures of darkness," said the newcomers, "but now they are running riot. Why were they allowed to get out of hand like this?"

They borrowed five or six cats, closed all the doors, removed the tiles from the roof, and poured water down all the holes, getting slave boys to help catch the rats. Soon a mound of dead rats was piled up in a corner, and the place stank for several months.

This is a lesson for those who think they can fill their bellies for ever at public expense with nothing to fear.

The Whip

A man was selling whips in the market. When asked the price, though his whips were worth fifty cash only, he demanded fifty thousand. If offered fifty, he held his stomach and laughed; if offered five hundred, he frowned; if offered five thousand, he flew into a rage. He must have fifty thousand.

One day a rich man's son went to the market to buy a whip, and paid this fellow fifty thousand for one. He brought it out to show me. The head was knotted and gnarled, the stock was warped and crooked, the grain did not run through the whole, and the nodes were rotten and bare of ornament. When I pinched it my nail sank right in, and when I lifted it it was light as air.

"Why did you pay fifty thousand for this?" I asked.

"I like this yellow colour and glossy sheen," he replied. "Besides, that was the price asked."

I told his servant to wash it with hot water, and at once it turned withered and grey; for the yellow colour was a dye, and the sheen was caused by beeswax.

The rich man was disappointed; nevertheless he kept the whip for three years. Then one day he went to the eastern suburb to race with some friends by Changlo Slope. When the horses started kicking and he lashed out at them, his whip broke into fragments; but the horses went on kicking, and he fell and injured himself. Upon looking inside the whip, he found it hollow, of a texture most like mud, without any substance.

Now there are men with a specious appearance and honeyed words, who try to sell their skill to the government. If others make a mistake and think better of them than they deserve, they are very pleased; but if rightly judged they grow angry, and demand: "Why am I not made a minister?" Many of them, indeed, hold high positions. In quiet times they may go unscathed for three years or more; but as soon as trouble starts and they are sent to responsible posts to take charge, it is no use expecting these hollow, shoddy whips to prove effective. They are bound to break, and then people will be thrown and injured.

My First Visit to the Western Hill

After I was degraded I lived a most uneasy life in this district. I filled in my time with long walks and aimless rambles, climbed hills every day with my men, or explored deep woods and winding streams, visiting hidden springs and curious rocks no matter how distant. Once there, we would sit on the grass and pour out wine, to fall asleep when drunk resting our heads on each other while my dreams followed my roving fancy. Then, upon waking, we would rise and walk back. I thought at that time I knew all the strange sights in this district, but I had no conception of the wonders of the Western Hill.

On the twenty-eighth of the ninth month this year, as I was sitting in the west pavilion of Fahua Monastery and looking towards the Western Hill, I began to be struck by its singularity. I ordered my servants to ferry me across the River Hsiang; then we followed the Jan to its source, cutting down the brambles and burning the rushes on our way till we reached the summit of the hill.

After struggling to the top we squatted down to rest. The fields of several districts lay spread below my seat. There were undulating slopes with gaps and hollows, as well as mounds and burrows. A thousand *li* appeared like one foot or one inch, so compact that nothing escaped our sight. Encompassed by white clouds and azure sky, the hill merged with them into one single whole.

Then I realized that this was no common hill. I felt I was mingling freely with the boundless expanse of heaven, and lost myself in the infinity of nature. In utter content I filled my cup and got drunk, unaware that the sun had set. Dark night came from afar and soon nothing could be seen, yet still I was loath to leave; for my heart seemed to have ceased beating and I felt released from my body to blend with the myriad forms of created things. I knew then that I had never enjoyed an excursion before—this was my first such experience.

So I am writing this record in the fourth year of Yuan Ho.*

*809 A.D.

Brazier Lake

Brazier Lake lies west of the Western Hill. Its source is the Jan which plunges south till, stopped by a mountain boulder, it veers east and races along, pounding against the bank, till now it has eaten away a large tract of land, channelling out the centre down to impermeable rock. After foaming into a whirlpool, it flows slowly into ten *mou* of calm, clear water, embowered with trees and with fountains cascading into it.

The man who lived above this lake saw how often I visited it. One day he knocked at my door, and told me that because he could not pay his taxes and was deep in debt he had made a clearing in the hills and was moving away. He wanted to sell his property by the lake to try to tide himself over.

I fell in with this gladly. Then I rebuilt his pavilion, extended his balustered walks, and made the fountain there fall into the pool from a height with a deep echoing sound. So now no better spot can be found for enjoying the moon in mid-autumn, for here you can see the sublimity of the sky, the infinity of space. And thanks to this lake I can rest content in these wild parts and forget my home!

The Knoll West of Brazier Lake

Eight days after my discovery of the Western Hill, two hundred paces north-west from the mouth of that valley, I hit upon Brazier Lake.

Twenty-five paces further west a deep rapid had been dammed to make a fish-pond, and beside this rose a knoll, grown over with bamboos and other trees. It had countless rocks of fantastic shapes projecting from the ground: here a chain of boulders like cattle trooping down to be watered, there crags rising sheer like bears toiling up the hill. The entire knoll covered less than one *mou* — you could fence in the whole of it easily.

I ask who the owner was.

"It belongs to the Tang family," I was told. "They have no use for it, but haven't been able to sell it."

I asked the price.

"Only four hundred cash," was the answer.

Then I could not resist buying it. Li Shen-yuan and Yuan Ke-chi, who were with me at the time, were in raptures at such unexpected good fortune. We fetched tools to mow the rank weeds and cut the dead wood, and burnt them in a blazing fire. Then the good trees and fine bamboos appeared to advantage, and the strange shaped rocks stood out. From here you have a view of high hills, floating clouds and flowing streams,

while beasts and birds frolic below, displaying themselves merrily. When you lie on a mat, cool greenery rests your eyes, running water soothes your ear, the great void revives your spirit, and the utter quietness refreshes your heart. Thus in less than ten days I have found two remarkable places, which not even the venturesome scholars of old appear to have visited.

Ah, if such natural beauty as this knoll possesses were put near the capital, the lovers of pleasure trips there would jostle each other in their eagerness to buy, offering an extra thousand each day — to no purpose. But in these forsaken parts, the peasants and fishermen pass it by, setting no store by it; and priced at four hundred cash, for years it remained unsold. So now — such is fate! — Shen-yuan, Ke-chi and I are the only ones who enjoy it!

I inscribe this on stone to congratulate this knoll on having found an owner.

The Small Tarn West of the Knoll

A hundred and twenty paces west of the knoll, across the bamboos and bushes I heard with delight a gurgling like the sound made by jade bracelets. So I cut a path through the bamboos till I came upon a small pool of clear water. The bottom was of rock and a spring gushed out from the boulders near the bank. Rocks formed little islets and crags, overhung by green trees and vines which were growing in great profusion. There were about a hundred fish in the tarn, and they seemed to be gliding through empty space without support. In the sunlight which reached the bottom, casting shadows over the rocks, the fish would stay for a while motionless then suddenly dart far away. They scudded to and fro, as if sharing the visitors' delight.

Looking southwest in the chequered sunlight at the jagged, serpentine shore, you could not see the whole.

I sat by this tarn, with bamboos and trees all around me, in utter silence and solitude. The seclusion and quiet cast a chill over me; and the scene was one of such purity that I could not stay there long. So I marked the spot and left.

With me were Wu Wu-ling, Kung Ku, and my brother Tsung-hsuan. And two of the Tsui boys, Shu-chi and Feng-yi, had accompanied us to help us.

Yuan Family Ghyll

Ten *li* southwest of the Jan by boat are five fine sights, of which Brazier Lake is the best. West of the mouth of the Jan by land are eight or nine fine sights, of which the Western Hill is the best. Southeast of

Chaoyang Cliff by boat to the River Wu are three fine sights, of which Yuan Family Ghyll is the best. These quiet scenes are the beauty spots of Yungchow.

According to the local dialect, there is a special word, ghyll, for water-that-runs-in-the-opposite-direction-from-the-main-stream. Yuan Family Ghyll flows into Nankuan and Kaochang in its upper reaches, and further down into Hundred Families Creek. Here you find twin islets, brooks, clear pools and shallows; and the ghyll winds past flat, dark rocks and towering, foam-white crags. Just as your boat seems to reach the end, a new vista opens up. There are small islands in the water covered with magnificent boulders and green foliage which remains luxuriant summer and winter alike. The caves on either side are strewn with white pebbles. The trees are mostly maple, cedar, nanmu, yellow box, oak, camphor-laurel or pumelo. The chief flowers are orchids and irises. And a strange plant resembling acacia, except that it is a creeper, grows on all the rocks in the stream. When a wind blows down from the surrounding mountains, the great trees are buffeted and the flowers toss their heads in a flurry of crimson and green, scattering pungent fragrance. Waves eddy and whirl, and fill every cleft in the rocks, while the bayonet-leaved iris and orchid quiver and bend. Such is the pageant of the seasons, passing my powers of description.

Since the people of Yungchow did not know of this place, after finding it I could not keep it to myself, but spread its fame abroad. The land through which it runs has belonged for generations to a family called Yuan, hence the name — Yuan Family Ghyll.

The Rocky Trough

Less than a hundred paces southwest from the ghyll, I found a rocky trough. A plank had been thrown across it. A spring bubbles out from the stones there, now gurgling merrily, now murmuring softly. This trough measures one to two feet across and about ten paces in length. The brook, coming to a great boulder, passes under it.

Crossing this boulder, I came to a grotto overgrown with sweet flags and with green moss all around.

There the brook turns west and dips sideways under a cliff, cascading northward into a little pool. This pool, less than a hundred feet around, is clear and deep and has many white fish in it.

Northward the brook winds on and on, as if it will never end, but finally enters the ghyll.

By the trough are fantastic rocks, gnarled trees, strange flowers, and graceful young bamboos. Several men can sit there at a time to rest. When the wind strikes the hill top, an echo is heard in the valley. The scene is tranquil, and sound travels far.

After acquiring this property from the prefect, I cleared the dead wood and leaves and made a bonfire of them, then removed some of the earth and stones from the trough so that the water should flow more freely. It seemed a pity that no record had been made of this place, so I wrote a detailed account and left it with the local people to inscribe on the south of the boulder. In this way, sightseers after us will find this spot easily.

On the eighth day of the first month of the seventh year of Yuan Ho,* I cleared the way from the trough to the great boulder. But not till the nineteenth of the tenth month, when I crossed the boulder and found the grotto and pool, did I discover the full beauty of the trough.

The Rocky Gorge

After exploring the trough I struck northwest from the bridge down the north side of the hill, to where another bridge has been made. The water here is one third wider than at the trough. And from bank to bank the brook is paved with rock which resembles in turn a couch, a hall, a banqueting table, or an inner chamber. The water flows smoothly over, with ripples like patterned silk and a sound like the strumming of a lyre. I tucked up my clothes and went barefoot, breaking off bamboos, sweeping away dead leaves and clearing the rotten wood, so that now eighteen or nineteen people can recline on hammocks here. The waves eddy and gurgle beneath these hammocks, which are shaded by trees with green plumage and rocks with dragon scales. What men of old knew such enjoyment as this? Will later generations tread in my footsteps? My pleasure that day was as great as when I discovered the trough.

From Yuan Family Ghyll you come first to the trough, then to this gorge. From Hundred Families Creek you come first to the gorge, then to the trough.

The only accessible part of the gorge is southeast of Stone Town Village, where there are several delightful spots. Further up, the high hills and dark forests grow steep and impenetrable, and the narrow paths are difficult to follow.

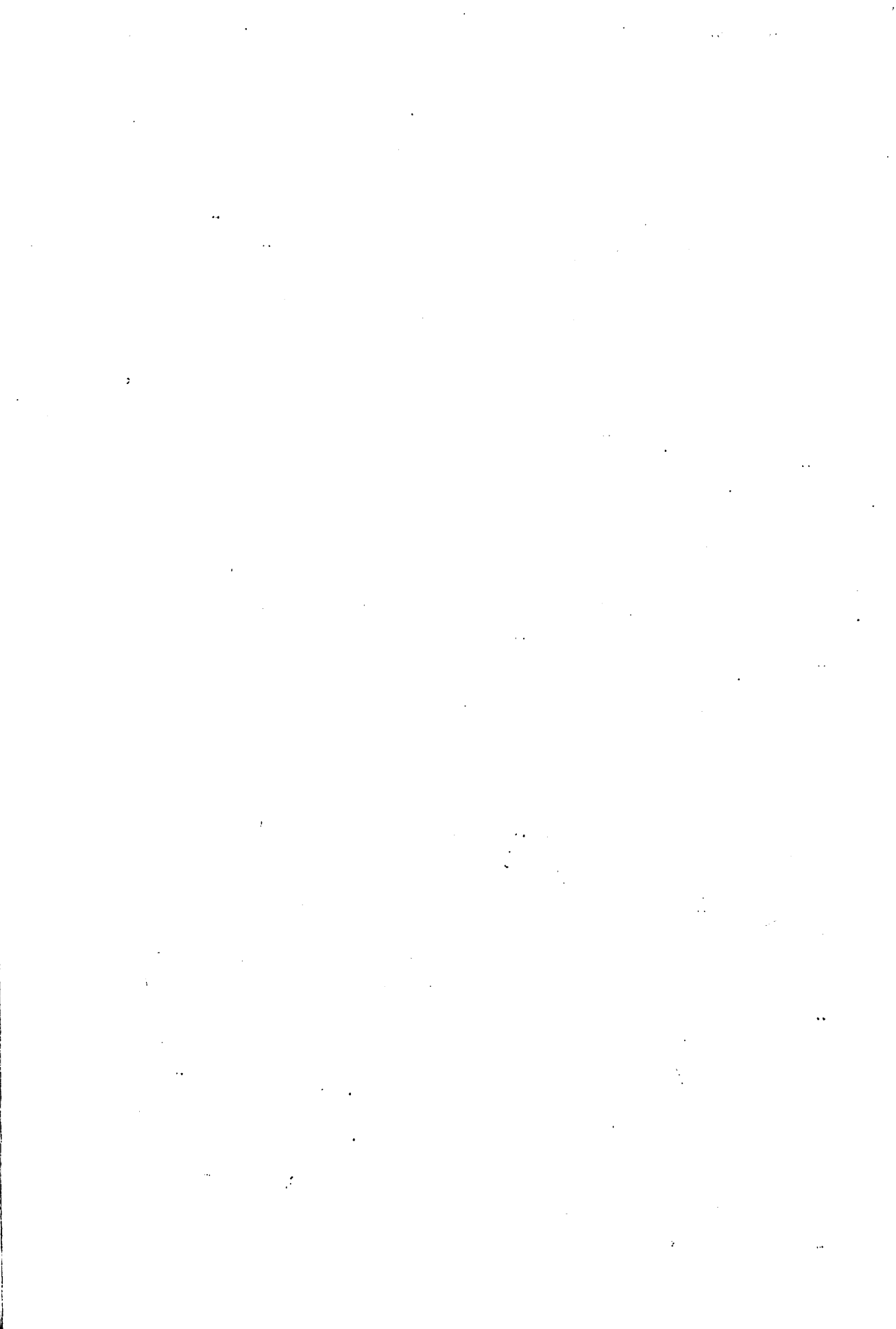
Stone Town Mount

The road north from the Western Hill, down across Yellow Rush Peak, leads to two paths. One strikes west, but I found nothing of interest there. The other veers northeast, and is stopped in less than four hundred feet by a stream with a cairn beside it to serve as a boundary.

*812 A.D.



Watching the Waterfall (176.5 cm. × 104 cm.)
BY MA LIN (c. 1200 A.D.)



The rocks above look like a city wall, and the gate on one side like a gate into a fort. It is very dark within. I threw in a pebble, which fell with a splash, a clear echo ringing after it for some time. You can climb the mount skirting these rocks, and once at the top can see far into the distance. Although there is no soil, the fine trees and slender bamboos which grow there are more curiously shaped and firmly rooted than most. Some are high, some low; some grow in clumps, and others stand apart, as if planted by a skilful hand.

Indeed, I have long been curious to know whether or not a Creator exists; and this sight made me feel that there must surely be one. It seems strange, though, that such wonders are set not in the heart of the country but in barbarous regions like this, where hundreds of years may pass before anyone comes along to appreciate them. This is labour in vain, which hardly befits a god, so perhaps there is none after all!

Some say, "This is done to comfort good men who are sent here in disgrace."

Others say, "This climate does not produce great men, but only freaks of nature. That is why there are few men south of Chu,* but many rocks."

I do not hold, however, with either view.

Fool's Stream

North of the River Kuan is a stream which flows eastwards into the River Hsiao. Some say this stream is called Jan because a family named Jan once lived there; others say it was so called because its water can be used for dyeing.** After I was punished for my folly by being exiled to the bank of the Hsiao, I fell in love with this stream and followed it for two or three *li* until I came to its most delightful spot, then settled down there. In ancient times there used to be a Fool's Valley. Now that I was staying by this stream, the name of which had not yet been determined but was still being disputed by the local people, I had to give it a name. So I renamed it Fool's Stream.

Beside Fool's Stream I bought a hillock, and called it Fool's Mound. Sixty paces northeast I discovered a fountain, which I also purchased and named Fool's Fountain. Fool's Fountain, which has its source higher up, has six outlets on the flat ground at the foot of this hillock. These brooklets join and wind southwards to Fool's Ditch. I had earth and stones carried over to dam the narrowest part of the ditch to form Fool's Pond. East of Fool's Pond stands Fool's Hall, with Fool's Pavilion to its south. In the middle of the pool is Fool's Islet, with an abundance of

*A region corresponding roughly to what is now Hunan Province.

**The Chinese word for "dye" is also pronounced "jan."

fine trees and curious rocks. These are all rare sights, but because of me they have been given a bad name.

Since water is appreciated by all intelligent men,* why did I give this stream the bad name Fool's Stream? Because it flows through low ground, it cannot be used to irrigate fields; and because it runs swiftly and is filled with boulders, large boats cannot navigate it. Moreover, since it is out of the way, shallow and narrow, dragons must scorn to make clouds and rain of its water; hence it does no good to men. This is just like my own case, and therefore I am not wrong to call it Fool's Stream.

Ning Wu-tzu** posed as a fool when his state was badly governed — a case of a wise man turning into a fool. Yen Tzu*** seemed a fool because he never contradicted anyone — a case of a judicious man appearing like a fool. These were not real fools. Now I live in an age of good rule, but I acted counter to reason and made mistakes in my work; so there can be no greater fool than I. This being so, no one in the world can dispute my ownership of this stream: I can keep it to myself and name it as I please.

Though this stream does no good to men, it reflects all things clearly, being limpid and transparent, and tinkles merrily; so a fool is happy to linger here, and cannot bear to go away. Though I am unfitted for worldly affairs, I find great comfort in writing, touching upon all subjects, embracing all forms, and avoiding nothing. When I sing my foolish songs about Fool's Stream, we seem to merge with no discord into one, blending into the infinity of space, growing utterly tranquil and divested of self. Thus I wrote "Eight Poems on the Fool," and had them inscribed on a rock beside the stream.

A Drinking Game

After buying my hillock I spent the first day weeding it and the second cleaning it up, then gave a drinking party on the rocks by the stream.

These rocks, as I have set down elsewhere, look like cattle being watered. Sitting apart on them, we first filled our cups and set them afloat for others to take up and drink. Then we made this rule: when it was someone's turn to drink, he must throw three bamboo slips about ten inches long upstream; if the slips were neither caught up by an eddy, blocked by a boulder nor sunk, he need not drink. But each time one of these things happened, he must drain a cup.

*A quotation from the *Analects*: "The intelligent man appreciates water."

** A native of the state of Wei, who lived in the seventh century B.C.

***The favourite disciple of Confucius.

So we started throwing the slips. They whirled around, dancing and leaping in the current, now quick, now slow, some skimming along, some stopping. And we all leaned forward to watch, clapping and cheering them on. Suddenly one would fly past in safety; thus some drank one cup only, others two.

Among the guests was a man called Lou Tu-nan. His first slip was caught in an eddy, his second was blocked and his third sank; so he was the only one to drain all three cups. We roared with laughter and were very merry.

I have dyspepsia and cannot drink, but that day I was drunk. Then we modified the rules, and went on till night without thinking of going home.

I have heard that when the ancients drank wine, some bowed and deferred to each other punctiliously; some shouted and danced in complete abandon; some stripped off their clothes to show unconventionality; some made music for the sake of harmony; some drank fast in large groups in order to be convivial.

Our drinking, though, is different. It is decorous without formality, unconstrained without noise, informal without nakedness, harmonious without music, convivial without a crowd. Simple yet sociable, free and easy yet polite, leisurely yet dignified, it is an excellent accompaniment for the enjoyment of nature and fit relaxation for gentlemen. So I record this for those who come after us.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

A NEW PAGE IN THE LITERARY HISTORY OF INNER MONGOLIA

Anchinhu

In the short span of ten years the writers of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of the Chinese People's Republic have already written a new page into their literary history. Indeed, it may even be said that the contribution made in this period has no parallel in any decade of their long past. Breaking once and for all from both the double yoke of imperialism and feudalism, and from the Kuomintang's oppressive great-Han-nation chauvinism, the Inner Mongolian people can confidently look forward to an ever more flourishing art and literature.

Our writers have mirrored in brief years, for example, the fierce struggle waged by the famous Mongolian cavalry during the War of Liberation in Malchinhu's "Across the Vast Steppes," Vol. 1, Punsek's long-short story, "The Golden Khingan Mountains"* and Odser's short story, "Son of the Steppe." Then there are the short stories which reflect the new life of the herdsmen, such as Malchinhu's "Spring Song of Joy," Anchinhu's "Winter on the Steppe," Ulanpakan's "Snowstorm on the Steppe," Dzalgahuu's "New Road for the Herdsmen," Yurgei's "Hasa Holiday," and Sayntsogt's "The Spring Sun Rises in Peking." There is also a successful play portraying the new life of the Inner Mongolians, Sognajen's "Song of the Rich Mountains."

The socialist transformation of agriculture and stock-breeding is dealt with in Kanpujipu's "Collective Strength" (a volume of short stories), Li Chuan-lin's short story, "Wang the Cripple Sells His Cart," "Spring Breeze Brings the Thaw" by the minstrel Baje, and Hsueh Yen's play, "In the Current."

As early as 1946, a play, "Murder," was written by Chou Keh, depicting the grim days just before the liberation. It lays bare the Chiang Kai-shek gang's crime of massacring Mongolian youth, and played a very useful role in arousing the readers to defeat imperialist hirelings on the one hand and to get rid of a narrow chauvinism on the other. "The Bag of Gifts" by Buren and Damrin was one of the best written during the Korean war. As for stories for children, the following three

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1954.

are particularly worth mentioning: Yang Ping's "White Lilies," Chang Chieh's "The Little Brown Sheep" and Liu Ying-nan's "Kitok."

A rich harvest of poetry ballads has been produced. Sayntsovt's collected poems, "Our Mighty Voice," were received with great enthusiasm. It is a selection of the poet's best verse over the past twenty years. His earlier poems, such as "The Grass Under the Willow Fence" and "Under the Window" which were written during the gloomy days of reactionary rule, powerfully express the poet's yearning for freedom. Since liberation Sayntsovt's creative urge has been greatly stimulated, and such poems as his "Happiness and Friendship" and "The Blue Satin Gown"* are heart-stirring and vibrant with the breath of life.

Among other poets, Bren Bik has written some very fine lyric poems. His "Greetings to Spring," "Heart and Milk" and "Going Home"*** are all welcome for their vivid rhythm and simple, fresh style. Ammi's long poem, "The Courageous Rider," tells with overflowing revolutionary optimism the story of Wuenpatu, a great son of the people, who gave his life fighting the enemy in the Naiman Mountains. Of later reference is "The Iron Ox" by Muokhin, which celebrates in ballad form the opening of the new railway line linking up China, Mongolia and the Soviet Union. There are other examples of new poems and ballads which could perhaps be mentioned here—Milchik's "Toast to Chairman Mao," for instance, or Chang Chih's "Strange Things in the Desert."

But new writers are not all of one nationality. It should be remembered that the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region is inhabited by some ten other minority peoples besides Mongolians and Han. Formerly they were wholly deprived of any chance to express themselves in art and literature, but already not a few works have been produced in recent years which are true to their individual national characteristics.

In addition to the writers we have already mentioned who make writing their full-time occupation, we are witnessing a burgeoning of writing in many forms from "amateurs," that is, from men and women who are taking part in all aspects of work and life, and who are expressing their emotions and discoveries after working hours. There are over three hundred such regular contributors to Mongolian literature who write from the very heart of the people, and whose work has received high praise. Liu Tsai, for example, a working miner, has written two plays, "Miners" and "Who Should Be Responsible?," and Li Ting, another "amateur" playwright who wrote "Father and Son." Both deal with problems arising in the day-to-day ideological struggle, ardently praising the new moral qualities of the working people.

While the new literature is being produced, however, the old magnificent heritage is not forgotten or neglected. Far from it. Mongolia

*See pp. 131-133.

**See pp. 133-135.

is the proud possessor of a very ancient tradition. Our folklore dates back thousands of years, to before recorded history. By Jenghiz Khan's time, there was a well established and recorded tradition, and a flourishing written literature of epics, legends, fairy tales, sagas, narrative poems. "Gesser Khan," for instance, is well known beyond the confines of Mongolia. It is thought to date from the 11th century and is known and beloved over a wide region, throughout the areas which are now known as the Mongolian People's Republic, Inner Mongolia, the Buryat Mongolian Autonomous Republic of the Soviet Union, and Tibet. Gesser, the people's hero and leader, the brave khan, is the personification of the longings of the people for justice, freedom, peace and security. Gesser was born to put an end to the troubles and calamities which beset mankind, and to be the protector of the poor. Even as a new-born baby he began, when he killed the monster crow who pecks out babies' eyes, and the wicked lama who bites out babies' tongues, and as he began, so he went on. Gesser's whole life was devoted to arduous and complicated struggles to emancipate the broad masses of the people who were groaning under the rule of dark forces.

The first printed version of "Gesser Khan" known to exist was printed in Peking from Mongolian wood-blocks in 1716. It is interesting to note that there were originally thirteen volumes, but until recently only seven were available. The others had disappeared completely, or so it was thought. But last year the Inner Mongolian Philological Society was able, after intense searching, to find a handwritten copy of the lost six volumes. These have now been printed, and once again our people can read the whole story.

Another great epic handed down by word of mouth is "Djangur." The opinion of research workers is that it was recorded for the first time in the early part of the 15th century. Again this reflects the struggle of the people for justice, peace and freedom as personified by a man. It is perhaps an even better manifestation of Mongolian talent of artistic expression than "Gesser Khan." Then there is the famous prose poem of our literary treasure house, the extremely beautiful "Story of Two Horses."

The widely known Mongolian classical work, "Secret Legend," written in 1240, is no less famous for its literary excellence, than for its value as a historical document. Other historical works of literary value are: "Golden Annals," written by Laobusnatanchin in the 17th century, "The History of the Mongols," written by Sagan Setsen in the 18th century, and "History" by Yinchinasi of the 19th century.

The long tradition of epic poems and ballads was broken by circumstances towards the end of the 16th century, when lamaism was introduced to Mongolia. The Manchu conquerors ruling China then, and having suzerainty over Mongolia, tried by every means to spread lamaism and pursued an obscurantist policy in culture and education. At the same

time the Manchus systematically imposed a strict censorship over all literature, even going to the extent of physical destruction of many books. While, however, there was a perceptible diminution of indigenous creative writings, a great flowering of translation work, both of classical Buddhist literature and of Chinese, took place. The famous Buddhist works, "Danjur" and "Ganjur," were translated at this time, as were the Indian or Tibetan works, the "Anthology of Stories," "The Biography of Milaraiba," "Shetedur," "Moonchild" and others of similar fame. "Panchatantra," a collection of Indian stories which came to India from Persia, was translated as early as the 13th century.

Chinese classics translated during this period include some of the best novels and great tales: "Strange Tales, Old and New," "All Men Are Brothers," "Stories from a Chinese Studio," "The Romance of Three Kingdoms," "The Pilgrimage to the West," "Dream of the Red Chamber," "Chin Ping Mei" and so on. Again only recently, a translation of the "Book of Songs" has been discovered.

The truly indigenous folk literature of Mongolia is of a very high order. The ballads, stories, prayers and sagas handed down by word of mouth are both innumerable and precious. Very careful research and study has been made of recent years into this treasury of folk art and all danger of loss has been avoided. Tens of thousands of songs have been collected, written down and published in book form. One of our experts in folklore, Han Yen-yu, has collected and published some twenty thousand songs in three volumes. Similarly there have been collections of folk-tales, fairy tales and fables.

As far as modern literature is concerned, great attention is now being paid to translations from Chinese, Russian (modern Soviet works) and other languages. Lu Hsun, Chao Shu-li, Yang Shuo and Ai Ching have all appeared in translation, to mention only a few. And nowadays translation is a two-way affair. Both new and old Mongolian works are being translated into Chinese, where they are meeting with great interest.

Now there are three literary periodicals in Inner Mongolia, "The Flowery Meadow" (in Mongolian), "The Steppe" (in Chinese) and the "Wild Geese" (in both Mongolian and Chinese). They maintain close contact with the writers, and the young ones in particular, and many brilliant creative writings have appeared in them.

As far as the general position of literature is concerned, perhaps it could be best illustrated by a few figures. The Inner Mongolian People's Publishing House alone has recently put out eighty-two titles of new works, classical and folk works and translations, the total number of copies printed being 361,000. It has reprinted 45 titles in 100,000 copies of the literary works of the Mongolian People's Republic and of foreign literature translated and published in the latter country. In addition, 18 titles (166,000 copies) of literary works have been printed in the new Mongolian script.

The call of the Chinese Communist Party to "let flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend" is as inspiring to the Inner Mongolian writers as it is to those of all other places in China. It has provided a great stimulus to our literary activity, for creative writing, criticism or research work. It was under the new circumstances that the Conference of Writers of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was held in December last. The conference was attended by more than a hundred writers, both professional and "amateur," representative of Mongolian, Han, Tahuerhs, Huis, Olunchuns, Solons, Manchus and other minorities in the region. It marked the beginning of a new period of growth. The opportunity was taken to do a general summing up of all the last ten years' work and effort, and the Inner Mongolian branch of the Chinese Writers' Union was set up at the conference.

The conference criticized a tendency among the Inner Mongolian authors to write according to fixed formulas or preconceived ideas, the failure of some writers to adopt a serious and responsible attitude in creative writing, and the weakness in literary criticism and theoretical work. All those who took part in the discussion voiced their desire for greater unity among literary workers of the whole region and for more and better works to be produced, especially in Mongolian. Writers were urged to learn more and work hard, to get an ever deeper insight into life and to constantly improve their writing technique. Literary and art criticism was to be developed. The conference stressed the needs to better edit and assimilate Mongolian national classics and folk literature, to bring up more young writers and spare-time writers, and thus enable the literature of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region to grow from strength to strength in serving its working people.

THE BLUE SATIN GOWN

by Sayntsogt

A vast and grass-clad plateau.
A new white yurt so gay . . .
There lives a bonny lassie
Who dreams of — who can say?

She sews a gown of satin
With stitches small and fine.
“Now who’s that for, I wonder,
O busy lass o’ mine?”

Like willow leaves her brows are,
Her cheeks of rosy hue.
For wit and skilful fingers,
Sweet lass, who rivals you?

See, where the light falls on it,
The rich blue satin shine.
O bonny dark-eyed lassie,
’Tis a masterly design.

Her fingers move so deftly
With needle and with thread.
The rich brocade, bright orange,
Is round the collar spread.

She works at speed amazing,
Yet forms each stitch with care.
I ask the maiden slyly,
“For you yourself to wear?”

And softly she makes answer,
“No — I wear red and green.”
I follow up and ask her,
“’Tis for your husband then?”

Perplexed she smiles and answers,
"Oh no, I'm still unwed.
I'm only just eighteen years old."
"Your brother then?" I said.

"I only have one brother,
A schoolboy and no more."
She goes all pink, reluctant
To tell me who it's for.

Her mother hears my questions
The while she makes the tea,
And since the lass won't tell me
She breaks in quietly:

"Girls nowadays are lucky —
They wed the man they love,
And no one dares to interfere,
To chide or disapprove."

And kindly to the lassie,
Whose cheeks are fiery red,
She says, "Put down your work now
And drink some tea instead."

"But *Nadom* Fair is coming:
He'll wear the gown that day..."
She pulls up short — the silly
Girl's given the game away!

The old lady stoops and kisses
Her smooth and snowy brow.
"You've said so much I'd better
Tell all the story now.

His name is Jargal Saihan
And he's old Uner's son,
Fine horseman and fine wrestler,
The pride of everyone.

Our lassie and young Jargal
Who's honest, true and gay
Have reached an understanding,
And who shall say them nay?"

“Oh stop your chatter, mother!
Your tongue is much too free!
Of course he’s a good fellow,
But what is he to me?”

And bashfully she picks up
The satin gown again . . .
Despite her protestations
Her blushes make all plain.

Translated by Peng Fu-min

GOING HOME

by Bren Bik

Eat up the boundless steppeland,
You engine bright and strong!
And bear me back to that old home
I have not seen so long!

A moving picture — hamlets, trees —
Unfolds along our track,
And miles and miles of co-op fields
Are swiftly left far back.

I sit in cushioned comfort,
But quiet I cannot keep.
I cannot rest by night or day,
Nor, though I long to, sleep.

Dad’s joined a farming co-op now —
How happy he must be!
And Mum, with so much news to tell,
Can hardly wait for me!

I see it all — across the plain
The great new road will run,
And on the mountain brown and high
Prospecting has begun.

And tents now dot the hillsides cool,
The summer pasture-land,
And co-op flocks and co-op herds
Are thick on either hand.

I expect the lads I wrestled with
Now shine at lathe or plough,
And those I played with as a boy
Are in the Youth League now.

And Dad may have less wrinkles now
Than once his forehead bore,
And — who knows? — Mum's grey hair may turn
To raven black once more.

Oh, bow your heads, green mountains that
On the horizon stand!
Bar not my view but let me see
My reborn native land.

Disperse, disperse, you murky haze
That hangs above the plain,
That I may see my dear old home
Grown fair and young again.

This was the very route I took
The day I went away
To join the people's army
In a lumbering, ox-drawn dray.

The route on which the train now speeds. . . .
My journey's nearly done.
O native land where I was born,
You soon shall see your son!

Before the festal mutton fat
Congeals I'll see my dad,
And e'er the tea she serves is cool
I'll make my mother glad.

No sleek black horse that ever lived
Was ever half so fleet;
No camel's gently swaying back
Gave half so fine a seat.

Eat up the boundless steppeland,
You engine bright and strong!
And bear me back to that old home
I have not seen so long!

Translated by Peng Fu-min

BY THE RIVER SHAND

Malchinhu

The sun, having blazed on the earth for a whole day, was now tiredly reeling to the western horizon. A cool, damp breeze swept over the steppe. The withering herbage slowly began to stand up again, and the birds came out of their shelter in the tall grass and began to fly around again in the sunset glow.

The river water was clear and sweet — the steppe folk affectionately called it "good enough for saints and fairies." It was shaded by thick willows. The girls used to rinse their faces in it in the morning, and now, after the day's toil, they were frolicking down to freshen themselves again.

One of the girls, Dulmaa, ran far ahead of her companions. When she reached the river bank, however, she did not start to wash or comb her hair, but hung over the limpid water and used it for a looking glass. She was so intent that she might have been looking for fish or studying the pebbles on the river-bed. Little Uyon, the tease of the mutual-aid team, had noticed this habit of Dulmaa's, and creeping softly over the lush grass she got up close behind her, and whispered in a hoarse voice:

"Looking at yourself in the glass, dear Dulmaa?"

Dulmaa jumped and her heart began to race. "Why, it's him, here!" she thought, happy and amazed. She turned round slowly, only to see Uyon's mischievous face instead of the one she expected. Furious at having been made a fool of, and disappointed, she jumped at her, calling: "Little wretch! I'll pull your hair for this!"

Little Uyon could add swift feet to her crimes. She made off through the willow trees as quickly as a young colt. The chase went on for some time, but Dulmaa could not catch her. She gave up, and leant against a willow tree to get her breath back.

As she stood there she heard the faint cry of a pair of wild geese as they flew overhead. Dulmaa loved these geese when they flew in pairs so faithfully. She looked around her, at the glitter of the ripples in the river, and the glory of the light on the hill to the west, lying golden like ripe millet at harvest time. Suddenly she saw that there was someone moving on the hill. "Who's that?" she thought, coming back with a jump from her reverie. Her face lit up. "It's Gonchik!" she cried, and began to run over to the hill, calling happily as she ran.

Gonchik was sitting down when she got near, watching his sheep as they drank at the river. He had been startled by her call, unpleasantly so. At any other time he would have been delighted, and it would have been hard to say which of them moved the quicker to meet. But today. . . . He turned pale and would have liked to escape. He got up, hardly knowing what he did, and walked slowly down to his sheep. . . .

Half an hour later Dulmaa came back alone. What could have taken place? Dulmaa was trembling. The tears were welling and her step was like a tired old woman's.

The river bank was deserted. All the other girls had gone home. Dulmaa stopped listlessly by the little willow tree where she had rested before. Despite the anguish she was in, she did not let herself break down, however, but stood there, fighting to get control of herself, and determined to let no one know of her trouble.

As she stood there a shepherd came up, driving his sheep. It was old Dzamba, one of the respected elders. He saw Dulmaa by herself under the tree and limped towards her. He had been an underground worker during the War of Liberation carrying messages for the Eighth Route Army, and in the course of his work he had been badly thrown from his horse. He had limped ever since. He was affectionately dubbed "Meritorious Service Dzamba" locally, and deeply beloved. He was the oldest member in the local branch of the Communist Party.

When Dulmaa saw him coming she hastily tidied her dress and stood up, partly to show her respect for him, but partly to hide her feelings.

"All by yourself, Dulmaa?" he said.

She was not sure if anything lay behind his question, and answered warily, "Yes."

"I hear they're opening a milk collecting and processing centre here," he went on. "You're being sent to the city to learn how to work in it, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"When do you leave?"

"In a couple of days."

"It'll be a fine thing for us steppe folk, having that here," he said contentedly. "It'll buy our milk and make it into all sorts of things and sell it all over the country. It'll benefit us and a lot of other people too. You see that you put your mind to studying properly. You're a fine young girl, and it's high time you learnt a proper job, don't you think?"

Such words from old Dzamba went straight to her heart. He had said, so kindly, what she herself had been thinking ever since she knew she was going. An hour ago she would have been transported with joy, but now, after what had happened between herself and her lover, she could not feel happy about anything. She was afraid, if she said anything about herself at all, that she would say more than she wanted to say, so she deliberately made no comment, and merely asked, "How are your sheep doing, Grandad Dzamba?"

"Mustn't grumble. They're all right at present. But who can say we shan't get that sheep-pox that's about? We've had the devil's own time with it, on and off, ever since we began getting it on the steppe."

He had gone straight to the heart of the matter that was causing her such anguish! Sheep-pox! The dread words rang in her ears like a bell tolling in an abandoned temple. She felt stricken and could not answer him for a moment. Then she managed to summon a wan smile to her face.

"Yes," she said. "Our comrade vet said that germs were no respecter of persons. You never know where they'll choose their victims next."

Old Dzamba knew that it was Dulmaa who had helped the vet to vaccinate all the sheep in the *bago*,* and that she was on the anti-epidemic committee. He thought it would be a good time to ask her about it. "When are my sheep going to be vaccinated?" he asked.

"Any day now. Don't worry, it'll be your turn soon. But the vets are awfully busy. They never got any proper rest."

"That's true. They work without thought of sleep. Come to that, you've worked through the night yourself several times, I hear." He cleared his throat, and then said, with cunning, "Perhaps that's what has made your eyes so red!"

He looked her full in the face. He knew something was the matter, but he was not sure what.

"Have you just washed your face in the river?" he asked.

"No. . . ."

* Administrative unit. Village in Mongolia.

There was a pause, while old Dzamba wondered how to set about it. Then he said, in a voice that brooked no nonsense:

"You've been crying then, I reckon."

Dulmaa did not know what to say. "However did he know?" she thought to herself. She knew that according to steppe tradition it was very wrong to deceive her elders, but she felt she had to.

"I haven't," she said.

"You haven't just washed your face, and you haven't been crying. Is it sweat, then, that I see in drops on your face?"

Dulmaa rubbed her face awkwardly, but did not say anything. The old man saw she was at a loss, and refrained from further probing. Young people are always having lovers' quarrels, he knew. It's her first love, too. He left the subject.

"Oh well," he said. "Give me a hand with driving my sheep down to the river to water them, will you?"

"Down to the river?" she said in consternation. Her face showed her horror, while her thoughts raced through her head. "I can't let him do that! Our river's all contaminated, thanks to Gonchik's behaviour. Oh, what shall I do! He's already started driving them down."

She made up her mind she must speak. "Grandad Dzamba!" she called, her voice betraying her urgency.

"What's the matter?"

She had begun, but she did not know how to go on. Old Dzamba could not make her out today. She seemed to be so evasive. Why, for miles around, everyone, young and old, trusted him. What ever was the matter with Dulmaa?

"Grandad, why don't we take your sheep to drink at the well?"

"Why should we?"

"I think maybe it rained in the upper reaches today. The water's all muddy."

"Sheep don't mind that! They always prefer muddy river water to well water. Come on, give me a hand."

He said this deliberately. The flock was almost at the water's edge. In desperation Dulmaa ran up to him and caught his hand.

"What ever you do, don't let your sheep drink river water today! Take them back to the well, and I'll tell you all about it!"

Dzamba smiled. He was so anxious to get her to talk that he was now quite willing to water the sheep at the well. It had a good water wheel and would be quite simple, anyway. But they had a job to persuade the sheep who had already seen the river and had no intention of turning back. By the time the girl and the old man had managed it they were both quite exhausted.

As she followed the sheep back through the glory of the sunset, Dulmaa made up her mind she would tell old Dzamba all about it. She paid no heed to the chuckling river, nor heard the birds singing along the

banks. In a few days she was going away. It would have been pain to leave her lover behind at the best of times, but now. . . . Once she had told anyone else what had happened would there be any hope left him? As a betrothed pair they had already had their ups and downs. Was this the end? Her heart pounded in her breast and her breath came quickly. But she had no choice. She would have to tell. She had already been weak enough in her attitude to him, and it had made him worse, not better. He had turned out to be such a bad lot! But whatever it cost her, she could not let Gonchik contaminate the whole steppe with his infected sheep, just because he was her betrothed.

It was five days before, when two of the sheep in Gonchik's team had died. The vet did a post mortem and found that they had died of sheep-pox. He immediately took steps to quarantine the whole flock. A two-mile wide sanitary cordon was declared between his territory and Dulmaa's team, with notices all along the boundary saying: "No sheep from either team are allowed to graze beyond this point." Besides this, sheep from Gonchik's team were not allowed to drink from the river.

The further steps to be taken were to vaccinate all the sheep in the neighbourhood.

The day after the sheep-pox was discovered Dulmaa had set out to go and see how Gonchik's sheep were getting on. But on her way she found that Gonchik was grazing his sheep right in the two-mile stretch which should have been kept empty.

"What are you doing with your sheep here!" she cried in dismay.

With a nonchalant smile Gonchik replied, "You know, the *ottel* took up all the withered grass here last year, so it's now all new grass, tender and nourishing. See how the sheep like it! I'll graze them here once or twice and fatten them up. Why shouldn't I?"

"But this is the sanitary cordon. Don't you understand? You've got pox in your flock. . . ."

"Oh, bother your sanitary cordons!" he interrupted. "You can't expect me to keep our sheep in the miserable little patch you left me . . . it's not big enough for them to turn around in. D'you think I'm going to keep them away from this good pasture, and away from the river, just because I lost two? You know as well as I do that if I don't get them in good condition now, when the grass is tender, they'll never come through the winter blizzards. Anyway, d'you think I don't know what's behind it all? You're just trying to play a dirty trick on our team!"

Dulmaa could hardly believe her ears. What callous impudence! How could he call the cordon a dirty trick! She must rebuke him. She did not know what words to use, however. Gonchik was famous for his brains and his eloquence! She was no match for him, that she knew. She tried to think of a tactful approach.

"We all know you're — no fool," she began. "I don't need to tell you about sanitary cordons. But I can't believe you really meant what

you said just now. If you did, you must know you were in the wrong. Don't you?"

She kept her voice even, so as not to offend him, but Gonchik did not seem to be at all impressed. He pushed at the brim of his hat in quite impertinent way, as much to say that he was not taking any notice of her, and said not a word in answer, but just turned round and shouted at the sheep.

"Think it over carefully, Gonchik," she said to his back. "You must know you're not in the right about this."

"What makes you think I haven't thought it over?"

"If you had, you'd drive your sheep back."

"Back? Where d'you mean?"

"Back to your own proper pasture."

"Catch me driving my sheep anywhere else! This is the best pasture in the banner, I tell you. Why do you want to stop me using it?"

It was no good. The more she argued, the angrier the two became. She was on the verge of really flaring up but she managed to keep the hot words back. She did not want to quarrel with the man she loved, and the true patience of a woman triumphed over her anger.

"What are you doing, Gonchik? Are you trying to quarrel with me on purpose?"

"I've not started the quarrel, I tell you. It's not I who's trying to bring ruin on someone."

"Bring ruin on someone! What ever do you mean?"

"Look for the last few years my team's kept the red flag and held the model honours. You're all jealous of us, and you're just using the death of two sheep as an excuse to hem us in and stop us having this tender grazing, and stop us getting to the river. You want our sheep to lose weight and be unable to stand up to the winter. You want them to freeze to death or starve. You want to destroy the reputation we've earned by our years of labour and sweat. So you're keeping us off the sweet pastures while you're secretly using them yourselves. Yes, here, on this very pasture! You think you'll be able to win the red flag and you'll be the models. Don't try to tell me that's not what's behind all this!"

Poor Dulmaa! She had never thought she would ever hear him say such dreadful things. How could she have imagined that such ideas existed in him? But this knowledge was a tragic blow to her.

"Oh, Gonchik!" she said. "We can't be quarrelling like this! We've only just declared our love to one another, and I've got to go away in a few days. Oh, this is hateful! But it seems to have happened. I never knew till now that you could be like this!"

Her voice failed her and a sob rose to her throat. She turned blindly away, pulling the corner of her turban over her face, and made for home.

The next day she had got up very early, and only swallowed a few mouthfuls of milk-tea and some cheese. She saddled up her horse and galloped off, never heeding, not even hearing, her old mother's anxious cries.

The mother stood by the door, watching her daughter go. "Oh dear!" she thought. "What ever's the matter? She's in some sort of trouble, I'm afraid. Look at the way she was tossing and turning all night. And she looked terribly upset this morning!"

Dulmaa was soon out on the endless steppe, heading straight along the road to the district government office. "I'll show him up!" was the thought in her mind. All night long she had been making up her mind what to do, and now she was on her way to do it.

Suddenly she heard the clatter of hoofs behind her, and someone calling. Her horse started, pricked up his ears and looked round. He knew who the rider was, the same one who met his young mistress every evening, and reassured that it was no stranger, went along again steadily. For her part Dulmaa gave no answer to the call.

They rode along in silence for a moment.

"Dulmaa! Stop a minute, please."

"You'll have to talk as we go along, if you must talk at all. I'm in no mood to stop for you."



Gonchik saw he could not do anything with her, so he spurred his horse forward until they were riding abreast.

"There's something I want to say to you," he jerked out.

He's only trying to deceive me again, Dulmaa thought, talking as though he's stammering. Never mind! He'll find out that the lack of a glib tongue doesn't mean that people are fools. Let him wait until the Youth League calls a meeting tomorrow to say what they think about him!

She could see the *som* government office in the distance now, and dug her heels into her horse. He went into a gallop again. Gonchik guessed the reason for her haste, and found that his heart was thumping. He pulled himself together and called after her again.

"I was wrong yesterday, Dulmaa. I know it, really."

Has he seen his mistake, eh? Oh no, he's fooling me again! She could not believe in his sincerity, but reined in her horse a bit.

"I was wrong, I own it. . . ."

"I don't know that I can believe what you say, now."

"Oh, Dulmaa, you must listen. I was quite in the wrong yesterday. After you'd gone off in such a rage, I went home and couldn't sleep a wink all night, nor lie still in bed. I shouldn't have said such hard words to you, and made you so angry, but that's what happens when two young people quarrel! Can't you understand I was talking nonsense? I wasn't myself. Can't you forgive me for such a little thing?"

His voice trembled, and his eyes begged forgiveness. But the smile at the corners of his mouth gave him away. Dulmaa did not believe he was sincere, but she could not stop herself suddenly thinking, "How lovely it would be if he really saw he's in the wrong!"

"You must believe me, Dulmaa!" he said, seeing that she was hesitating.

"Look, Gonchik, the sun's quite high. It's time you had your sheep out to pasture. Go back now. We'll talk about this later."

"So you don't believe me?"

"I can't. I only wish you really mean it. Goodbye!"

She cracked her whip and galloped ahead. When she reached the government office she ran into the secretary of the local Youth League branch, who came up to her.

"Comrade Dulmaa! You're here very early. What's up? Something urgent?"

She could not make up her mind what she was going to say now. When she left home she was perfectly clear — she was going to denounce Gonchik. But now, since he had followed her and told her he had been wrong, should she do it? Was he sincere? She would give him the benefit of the doubt.

"There's nothing particularly urgent," she told the Youth League secretary. "I want to buy some more note-books at the co-op."

They exchanged a few words about the pasture and the condition of the flocks, and then she went on to the consumers' co-op. There, however, she just looked round aimlessly and then went home.

Her relaxed mood lasted for two days. She was busy helping the vets and had almost persuaded herself to take Gonchik's words at their face value. Then came the episode on the hill in the sunset. She had run to him, feeling as she felt before, glad to see her lover, only to find that he was even worse than she had thought.

Of course, Gonchik had not felt he was in the wrong at all. He thought he could keep Dulmaa quiet for the few days before she went to the city to train for the new factory, and just used his honey words to that end. He continued to pasture his sheep in the forbidden cordon, and watered them in the river . . . his personal pride, his desire to keep his team in front were stronger than his duty to his people as a whole.

*

She told old Dzamba the whole story. He was furious. His old eyes shone with anger and his mouth trembled. Kind old man that he was, he was gentle with Dulmaa, and refrained from touching her raw spots.

They penned the sheep and Dzamba took Dulmaa into his yurt for a bowl of tea. She was still half stunned by her woes, and sat listlessly on a calf-hide rug toying with the silver drinking bowl.

Twilight fell, and the old man lit the ewe-butter lamp. A word from an elder is a key for the young, he knew. But what should he say to her, poor child?

Dulmaa was herself conscious of the long pause. She picked up the local newspaper and glanced over it, not really reading it closely until her eye caught on the Readers' Letters. There was a letter from a herdsman, complaining of mistakes made by a local government worker. She read this with great attention. The idea came to her that she could use this medium to expose Gonchik. If everyone knew about him, public opinion would soon help him to see the error of his ways, she realized. No sooner had the thought entered her head than she stood up and ran out, not even saying goodbye to old Dzamba.

She went straight home, and found her mother had prepared a special dish for her. She was sitting by the fire and greeted Dulmaa eagerly.

"My poor Dulmaa!" she said. "You've been running about all day. You must be tired! I've got some stewed mutton for you. Get your knife and have your supper."

"Mother, I had supper at Grandad Dzamba's. Don't wait for me. I've got something I must write tonight. Don't stay up for me." She got out her writing things and started straight away to write her letter to the local newspaper. Her mother was very disappointed, but saw there was nothing she could do about it so she began her supper alone and quickly finished. There was no flavour to it, eating by herself. She lit the lamp in front of the Buddhist shrine—it was the 15th day of the

lunar month — and prayed for a long time before she went to bed. “Mind you don’t stay up too long, my child,” she said.

“I’ll go to bed presently, mother.”

“I don’t know what the young folk are coming to nowadays, I’m sure,” thought the old mother. “They’ve no idea of night and day, but are busy, busy, busy, all the time. Heaven only knows what they find to do! It was different when I was a girl. We were none of us so crazy then. But I don’t know . . . they’re doing very well.” The old lady remembered how much she loved her daughter and how proud she was of her.

Dulmaa’s mother was old for the steppes — turned fifty. She and her daughter were the only ones left of the family. Her husband had been a camel driver, and was caught by the Kuomintang troops, while carrying winter clothes for the People’s Army in the War of Liberation. They had roped him to a tree and left him to freeze to death. Dulmaa was fourteen when he died, and the old mother had devoted all her life and love to her ever since. She watched over her all the time, in her work and her studies, her home life and her love affair.

When Dulmaa, growing up, began to join the other lads and lasses under the willow trees by the Shand her mother spent many a sleepless night worrying about her future. Her heart was set at rest when she found that Dulmaa had decided on her love, and that it was Gonchik. Gonchik was the one the mother had secretly hoped for. He was everything a mother could want, she thought; a good lad, with a name honoured throughout the banner as a team leader. See how his flock had increased in the last few years, more than any other’s. And his father had been an old friend of her husband’s, which made it all the more gratifying.

But now, looking back, the old mother remembered that Gonchik hadn’t been round for quite a number of days, and in these same days her daughter had begun to look worried. The night crept on, and the mother managed to fall asleep. But Dulmaa was only halfway through her letter when the hands of the alarm clock pointed to midnight.

*

The third morning after Dulmaa had sent the letter off Gonchik was taking his horse to water it at the well when he saw postman Dobdan riding towards him.

“Brought the newspapers for your team,” Dobdan called when he got near, and handed them down without dismounting.

“Aren’t you going to stop a moment?”

“No, thanks! What d’you think? Postmen don’t have time to rest.” He cracked his whip and was away.

Gonchik finished watering his horse and went back to his yurt, where he settled down to have a look at the papers. The first page was national and international news. Overleaf (the local paper was a single sheet) was about local production. He read steadily through it. It was all of deep

interest to him, and he did not look up even when his sister came in and poured him out some tea.

"Sunk in your newspaper again!" she said resignedly.

"What d'you know about anything?" he said didactically. "Newspapers are most important to thinking people. We gain knowledge from them, and our eyes are opened. A young man falls behind nowadays if he doesn't study the news."

His sister was properly chastened by this rebuke and stole away. Gonchik returned to his steady perusal. He reached a favourite column — Readers' Letters. That often had very good stuff in it, he knew.

The first heading was "I Must Show Him Up." "Oho!" he thought. "That looks a good one." He settled down to it.

Comrade Editor,

I feel I must bring to light a mistake committed by my friend Comrade Gonchik. . . .

There it was, all laid bare. It was signed by Dulmaa.

He read it through, and then let the sheet slip out of his hand, while he sat sadly, his head down and tears coming to his eyes.

"Oh, Dulmaa, Dulmaa! I must see you!" He spoke the words aloud as he rushed from the yurt, swung on to his horse bareback, unable to wait to saddle it, and galloped, to Dulmaa's home, tearing along as though he were in the race at the *nadom* fairs.

He threw himself off and burst into the yurt. There was no sign of Dulmaa; only her mother was there, putting away the breakfast bowls.

"Good day, mother. Where's Dulmaa?"

"Dulmaa's gone. She's gone to the city to train for the new milk factory."

"When did she go?"

"Only a little while ago. She got a lift in an ox cart."

He turned brusquely on his heel, and was rushing out again when the old mother stopped him. "She left a letter for you, and said I was to give it you when you came." She drew a letter out of her pocket.

Gonchik snatched at it and began to read.

Dear Gonchik,

I will have gone when you read this. I'm sorry I couldn't see you before I went. Just recently you have done things for selfish reasons which can harm our steppe and will bring disgrace on the honoured name of the Youth League. You even went so far as to lie to me, and try to deceive me. I am very ashamed of you, Gonchik. A man who cares only for his own interests is no better than a handful of dust.

Because you've read the letter in the newspaper you feel you have begun to see what grave mistakes you have made, and want

to come after me. Please hold back. The test will be your deeds, not fair words.

I shall be three months here in the city, training. At the end of that time I will see you.

Dulmaa

Gonchik had no words. He walked slowly out to his horse where it was cropping the dew-wet grass. He stopped by it, hardly knowing what he did, gazing sadly at the fresh ruts made by the ox cart that had taken Dulmaa away.

"All right, Dulmaa. I'll wait till you come back. But three long months. . . ."

Translated by Peng Fu-min

A BLIZZARD ON THE STEPPE

Anchinhu

I

Towards evening the sky began to cloud over. Thick brown smoke from dried cow dung drifted up from the conical tops of the yurts, and an icy wind that chilled you to the bone whistled over the glistening snow.

Sitting on a worn-out saddle, old Anda was absorbed in mending a long-handled whip. Though he had on a thick sheepskin and a warm wolfskin hood, his exposed hands and face were purple with cold. His warm breath froze into tiny beads of ice on his eyebrows and grey beard, which he wiped away from time to time with the back of his hand before bending over his work again, as if this cold was nothing—he was used to it.

"Ai. . . ." A long-drawn-out herdsman's cry rang out in the distance.

Thanks to his trained sense of hearing, the old man knew at once where this cry came from. He hastily finished binding the leather thong, cut off the piece that was left with his curved knife, then stood up supporting himself with his whip and limped rather painfully forward. After sitting in one position for so long, his left leg was numb.

At the top of a hummock, he pushed back the hood which had been hiding his eyebrows, and strained his eyes into the distance. The vast steppe had donned its pure white winter dress, and its whole undulating immensity was being swallowed up in the twilight, so that the horizon

was lost in a grey-brown haze. From the foot of Sacred Mountain advanced a great flock of sheep, dotting the white snow like so many pearls rolling over soft, glossy white satin. Behind the flock, sitting sideways on a sturdy grey horse, rode a young girl. She had tucked her hands into the sleeves of her purple fur-lined gown, and was trailing her whip under one arm so that its handle danced over the snow leaving prints of different sizes.

She wore her *daha** with the fur outside, and beneath it gleamed shining riding boots, encased in goatskin also with the fur outside. Most striking in that white expanse of snow was her bright red turban which fluttered in the wind. Her two black braids swung in time with the horse's trot, and her black, expressive eyes and firmly closed lips rendered her oval face extraordinarily winsome and solemn.

Having grown up with the flock, if any sheep misbehaved itself she could call it at once by name: White Nose, Black Pate, Little Crescent, or Silly Girl. . . . As a mother knows all her children, she knew the age, ways and idiosyncracies of each of her charges.

This was Anda's grand-daughter, Subudan.

The old man went to meet the flock with a smile, calling his daughter-in-law Yangima, who was busy cooking supper, to hurry up and help them fold the sheep.

Bleating broke the silence of the *howta*** A brown terrier curled up nearby sprang up and ran barking towards the flock. And another middle-aged woman came out from a neighbouring yurt at the same time as Yangima to help.

"Aunty Shaliwa!" Yangima called to her. "Do you think it's going to snow again tonight? Look how thick the clouds are again! *Hosh!* Into the fold with you! *Hosh!* In you go!"

"Yes, we've never had such a winter," agreed Shaliwa. "Hey! Spread out there! Into the fold now! It's snowed so much that even the roads are buried. Hey! In you go!"

"When I went for water this morning, I had to hunt ever so long before I could find the spring!" complained Yangima in conclusion. "The water-wheel's frozen too. I don't know what we'll do if this goes on much longer."

Some distance away, Anda was talking to Subudan.

"You've had a hard day of it, lambkin," said the old man.

"I'm all right, grandad," she answered from the saddle.

"It's cold. Weren't you nearly frozen?"

"No, grandad."

"Did you meet any wolves today, lassie?"

"No, I didn't."

* A fur coat.

** The village where the herdsmen live.

Subudan slipped to the ground, stamped her numbed feet, tethered the horse to the water-wheel, then silently went inside.

Old Anda stared after her, surprised by her brief answers and strange behaviour. His grand-daughter generally called out cheerful greetings, overflowed with accounts of her doings with the flock all day, and rode to the door of the yurt to ask her mother what there was for supper. She often sang, too, in a sweet, clear voice. Knowing the girl as he did, the old man decided that something must have upset her. He walked over to Yangima.

"Keep a good eye on Subudan," he said. "She looks rather poorly today."

"I know! I noticed there was something wrong."

"She may have caught a chill in all that snow. It's no joke herding in the winter!" Muttering to himself, the old man walked off.

II

A stove was burning merrily in the yurt, the mutton broth in the pan smelt delicious, and the small table glistening with grease was piled with food. Before Anda stood a plate of well-cooked mutton and a small copper jug of milk wine, before Subudan a white flour cake fried in butter and a bowl of milk-tea; while Yangima had provided herself with brown-sugar butter and popped rice. Each had his or her favourite dish.

Subudan had changed into a light padded gown of blue cloth. In the rays of the mutton-fat lamp on its tall stand, her cheeks looked rosier than ever; but the corners of her mouth were drooping, her mischievous eyes were cast down, and resting her chin in one hand she was sipping her tea in silence.

Subudan was an only child. Her father had been conscripted by the Japanese and never heard of again. So since her childhood her grandfather and mother had been devoted to her, making much of her, letting her have her own way, and hoping she would grow up a capable girl. The old folk knew she could be trusted completely with the flock, but sometimes she behaved rather childishly at home. And whenever she felt in low spirits, the whole family would be silent and depressed.

To break this depressing silence, Anda smacked his lips as he drank his milk wine, and chatted of this and that.

Yangima filled a small wooden bowl with mutton broth, and handed it to her daughter.

"I hear Auntie Shaliwa's brindled cow isn't giving enough milk now," she said. "Here, have a hot cake — what a winter this is!"

"Don't talk about her, mum!" pleaded Subudan.

The girl had a secret which was making her unhappy. A few days earlier the local people's government had announced that a big fair would

be held at Ulan-nor to celebrate the New Year. All herdsmen in that area were welcome to attend, and a song and dance ensemble from the city was expected to give a good performance.

Since the herdsmen have not many chances to take part in big social gatherings, as soon as they heard this all of them wanted to go, and it seemed there would be no one left to mind the cattle. Then Subudan declared she was willing to stay at home to look after the sheep, and a young herdsman named Bata volunteered to stay with her. So the matter was settled, and two days earlier the others had left.

Subudan sensed that Bata had stayed behind because he had something very important to say to her. And of course, like every girl when she first falls in love, she was waiting impatiently for the time when they had arranged to meet. She had not slept properly all the night before. But that morning another notice had suddenly arrived, telling Bata he must attend the meeting that evening to report on the factories he had seen during his recent visit to the town. So Subudan was left alone to watch the sheep from dawn till dusk in the cold and snow, without a soul to speak to. She had felt exceedingly lonely.

Thus when her mother mentioned Shaliwa, she thought of Shaliwa's son, Bata, and was so upset that she put down her chopsticks and left the table.

"Oh dear! What's the matter, child?" Yangima stared at her in surprise. "Aren't you feeling well?"

Old Anda had just taken a mouthful of fat mutton, but now he stopped chewing to listen to Subudan's reply.

"No, I thought..." She flashed her black eyes cunningly, determined they should not discover her secret. "I've had enough," she murmured.

"You're not ill, are you?" chorused the other two.

"No! I don't suppose I shall ever be ill in my life!"

She smiled and the worried old folk breathed more freely again. Yangima began to clear the table.

Leaning against the framework of the yurt, Anda produced a jade snuff bottle from his pocket, poured a little snuff on his first finger, put it to his nose and inhaled greedily. This done, he closed his eyes, opened his mouth, and waited to sneeze.

Subudan sat quietly beside him, thinking over the past.

One day while she was still a child, she remembered, her grandfather and Bata's grandfather had suddenly taken it into their heads to lay a wager as to which would win—Subudan or Bata—in a race riding bareback. The loser would forfeit a sheep. The two grandfathers lifted the children in their powerful hands and set them on the horses' backs, then whipped the beasts' rumps so that they flew off into the steppe. Thus their life on horseback began at one and the same moment. Subudan crouched on her steed's back, clutching its mane with both hands, her

two small legs pressing firmly against its flanks. She saw the ground flash past, while the wind whistled in her ears . . . and she was the first to reach their goal! Her grandfather was so jubilant that he swung her high in the air and kissed her cheeks, nose and eyes, as he sang her praises.

As the boy and girl grew older, they worked together. But it would be hard to say when Subudan first realized that she was in love with Bata. So long as she was with him, she felt like talking and singing — his company was as delightful as a drink of refreshing mare's milk wine on a hot summer's day!

Naturally they often heard other folk speculating as to whether or not they would marry; but they themselves had never spoken of what was in their hearts. Once, though, one summer morning the previous year, they were standing side by side on the summit of Sacred Mountain, watching the sunrise. The emerald steppe stretched as far as eye could see, the morning wind carried the scent of wild flowers, bright dew sparkled in the sunlight, and their flocks roamed the green hillside peacefully cropping the grass. Suddenly Bata flushed and he seized both Subudan's hands.

Subudan's heart beat fast in agitated delight.

"Tell me, Subudan . . . isn't our steppe lovely in the morning!" At the last moment the youngster's courage failed him, and he came out with this irrelevant remark.

"Yes," replied Subudan slowly. She was vexed with Bata for not speaking out frankly. With an indignant look, she pulled her hands away.

"Kindly don't do that again!" she said angrily. And without so much as a "goodbye" she turned and mounted her horse, then galloped away.

Not long after this, Bata joined the herdsman's training class of the league. For the three months that he was away, Subudan did not answer a single one of his letters. That autumn he had come back. Since then neither of them had referred to this incident; but all the same. . .

"A — tchew!" Her grandfather gave a tremendous sneeze which broke the train of Subudan's thoughts.

III

Suddenly the dogs started barking, and someone called out: "There's a horseman coming from the north!"

As they hurried out of their yurt, Subudan saw at a glance who it was.

"A dappled horse!" she cried. "It's Tanshen Sanbu, the government messenger from the township!"

They marvelled to see the speed at which he was going. Fast as his horse was galloping, he was still whipping it on. Old Anda tweaked his moustache indignantly.

"Bah!" he exclaimed in the querulous way of old men. "These youngsters are all alike. What kind of way is that to train a horse?" He shook his head pityingly. "Even the best of horses can't stand up to treatment like that!"

Watching the messenger draw near, they feared he must be the bearer of bad news.

"Ah . . . you've all come out!" he called out from a distance. "I've important news for you!" Galloping up, he pulled sharply on the bit.

"The government . . . has had word . . . from the meteorological station," he panted. "Tonight . . . about midnight . . . there'll be a great blizzard . . . I'm to tell you to hurry up . . . and prepare for it. Don't let yourselves be caught napping!"

Before they could speak, he was off like the wind to another *howta*.

They stood there aghast. It is simple enough to talk about a blizzard, but it hits you like a sledge-hammer and cuts like a knife at your vitals. This was a matter of life and death; for unless adequate steps were taken, the cattle and sheep thousands of herdsmen had raised over the years by hard labour and loving care might all perish in the snow.

"Heavens!" With a cry of dismay, Yangima ran to the sheepfold.

"A blizzard — what shall we do? What shall we do?" cried Auntie Shaliwa hoarsely. "Oh, dear, and my Bata isn't back yet!"

"Don't lose your head, aunty," Subudan said calmly. "First help my mother pick out the weakest sheep and carry them to Team Leader Dawa's empty yurt! Oh — bother this wretched blizzard!" She ran grumbling back to the yurt, where she slipped off her padded gown, put on her *daha*, tightened her belt and tied on her turban, like a soldier preparing for battle.

Old Anda marched heavily back to the yurt as well. He decided he should try to encourage his grand-daughter.

"The weather hasn't changed so much, Subudan," he said. "I don't suppose it will be too heavy a snowstorm."

"What? Grandad!" Her face was very stern — this was how she always looked in a serious mood. "Didn't you hear what Tanshen Sanbu said just now?"

"But is that news of his reliable?"

"Of course it is. It's the meteorological station's report!"

"What's a meteorological station? We've never had such a station here."

"Now we get reports from it. It looks after the weather for us." She started quoting Bata to the old man: "When there's going to be a gale or heavy snow, they radio a message to the government, and the government sends someone to let us know!" This struck her as incomplete, and after a moment's thought she added: "This is specially done for us. It's done to help us."

"I don't believe it! I've lived twice thirty-five years, but I never heard of anybody doing such a thing." The old fellow trusted nothing but the evidence of his eyes. Judging by past experience, though, the sky today *did* show signs of a storm blowing up. "Well, what do you mean to do?"

"Let mum take a message to the people looking after the horses, and aunty take one to those looking after the cattle. I'll drive the sheep to the natural cave in Sacred Mountain." Subudan spoke firmly, as if to brook no argument.

"The natural cave in Sacred Mountain? Of course, that's the best place you could find; but it must be five miles at least from here. Have you time to get there?" While giving his tacit consent, the old man was rather worried as to whether the sheep which had been on the move all day could go so far.

"We've time to make it, grandad! I'll do my best to get there before the blizzard! What else can we do? We can't leave the sheep in the open, and let them be buried in snow!" Her preparations completed, Subudan stood up.

"Well, here's to wishing you luck! May Buddha protect you!" Old Anda had great confidence in his grand-daughter. He gave her a resounding kiss on her forehead.

By this time, Yangima and Shaliwa had carried all the weakest sheep to Team Leader Dawa's empty yurt. Subudan ran up to Shaliwa.

"Aunty!" she cried. "Can you take a message now to the herdsmen, telling them to look out?"

"All right," promised Shaliwa. "That's something I can do!"

"You take a message to the folk looking after the horses, mum, and tell them to look out too!"

"Very well, daughter. But what about the sheep?"

"I'll see to them," was her prompt and confident answer. "I'm taking them to the natural cave on Sacred Mountain. It's absolutely safe there. You needn't worry!"

"What shall I do then?" asked Anda, handing her the whip he had mended.

"You stay at home, grandad! There are seventeen weakly sheep in Team Leader Dawa's yurt. If I can't get back before dawn, take them some fodder. Oh yes, and give them some water too. That speckled ewe is very poorly; so keep a special eye on her. Is the horse ready, mum? I hope all goes well with you! Go on in, grandad. Good night!"

"May all go well with you too! May we meet in joy!"

Soon the three women, leaving in different directions, were swallowed up in the darkness. Only Subudan's cries and the bleating of her flock floated back through the night.

IV

Dense cloud banks were surging forward, the lowering sky seemed about to descend on men's heads, and a bitter wind was blowing the first snowflakes before it—the harbingers of the swiftly approaching storm.

The sheep battled their way through the wind and snow, their pitiful bleating carrying across the vast, empty steppe.

With eyes as keen as a mountain deer's, as Subudan gazed at Sacred Mountain which was looming through the blackness her heart nearly jumped out of her mouth in impatience—the way was so long and the flock was moving so slowly. Cut to the quick by the sheep's pathetic bleating, she had yet to whip them forward; for if the storm overtook them they might all be swept away and frozen to death.

The snow was falling thicker and faster now, while the sheep straggled more and more sluggishly along. Those in front were halted by the wind, those behind pressed forward and thrust their heads under each other's bellies, till the whole flock looked like a single tangled fleece.

Subudan galloped here, there and everywhere, cracking her whip and shouting:

“Hey! Hey! Break it up! Break it up!”

Winding into the mountain, the sheep limped into a valley.

Suddenly the storm was upon them in all its force raging and howling like a wild beast charging out of its mountain lair eager to throw down the hills and swallow the earth.

Subudan had experienced a number of storms, but never in the evening, never on the way into the mountain, never when she was on her own. She felt a certain indefinable fear, only now fully aware of her heavy responsibility.

“More than one thousand four hundred sheep the shepherd's team has entrusted to me,” she thought. “They expect me to look after the flock, and trust me completely. I must live up to that trust. Not a sheep must I lose, not one!”

With new determination she lifted her head proudly, ignoring the wind and snow which beat on her cheeks, and followed hard behind her flock, shouting at the top of her lungs. But her cries were swallowed up by the gale, and her charges could not hear her. The whole flock had come to a standstill. In fact, those in front were beginning to head back, to escape the force of the wind. She frantically spurred her horse into the flock, raising her whip and lashing out with it wildly till the sheep at the head were forced into the gully and those behind scrambled after them, finding a brief respite from the driving snow in the shelter of cliffs and trees.

When the natural cave came in sight, Subudan nearly shouted for joy.

This cave was in the depth of a narrow gully between two sheer cliffs, at the top of which grew some old pines. Their thick, slanting

branches covered the top of this chasm, which was roomy enough beneath. Provision had also been made for keeping warm, and here every winter Subudan's mutual-aid team came to take shelter.

The storm was raging with unabated force, howling over their heads.

The sheep had filed into the gully and were running on and on. Some old sheep fell and could not get up again; some young ones slipped in the snow and panted pitifully.

Subudan rode this way and that to urge them on; but it was impossible to keep an eye on them all. Fortunately the sturdy flock had already swept into the natural cave. Holding up her long-handled whip, she waited at one side till the last sheep had trotted through the mouth of the cave. But no sooner did she wipe the sweat from her face and draw a deep breath of relief than she thought with dismay of the stragglers, and turned to go back. Then a fall of snow from the cliff grazed her horse's head, making it rear in fright so that Subudan—taken unawares—was thrown and lost consciousness.

Some time later, she became aware of a trickle of icy water down her spine. When she opened her eyes, her head swam and she could not see. She wanted to rub her eyes, but her hands would not obey her; she tried to raise her head, but it was too heavy. She had a vague recollection of setting out from home with the flock to take refuge from the blizzard. Grandad must be worrying about her at home. Mum had gone to tell the folk minding the horses. What about Bata? He might be giving his report at the meeting this very minute. And what about the flock? Ah!—Her heart started thumping wildly, and breaking into a cold sweat she came to herself completely.

She sat up and found she was being buried under the snow. Her broken whip was sticking out of a snowdrift nearby, and her faithful horse was stamping in the snow. She remembered what had just happened, and the sheep that had slipped and fallen or floundered into snowdrifts. Wracked as she was with pain, she crawled forward on numbed hands and knees. Her horse, supposing his mistress wanted to mount, drew near of his own accord. Then, clinging to one of the stirrups, she slowly rose to her feet; and leaning on the saddle limped painfully back along the way they had come.

The dense clouds were racing towards the horizon. Though snowflakes still whirled through the air they were smaller now. The ground was a sheet of white, with not a sheep to be seen. She knew from years of experience that the stray sheep had been buried, and searched for them at every mound of snow. Soon, to be sure, she found two black holes the size of a little finger, which a sheep had melted with its breath.

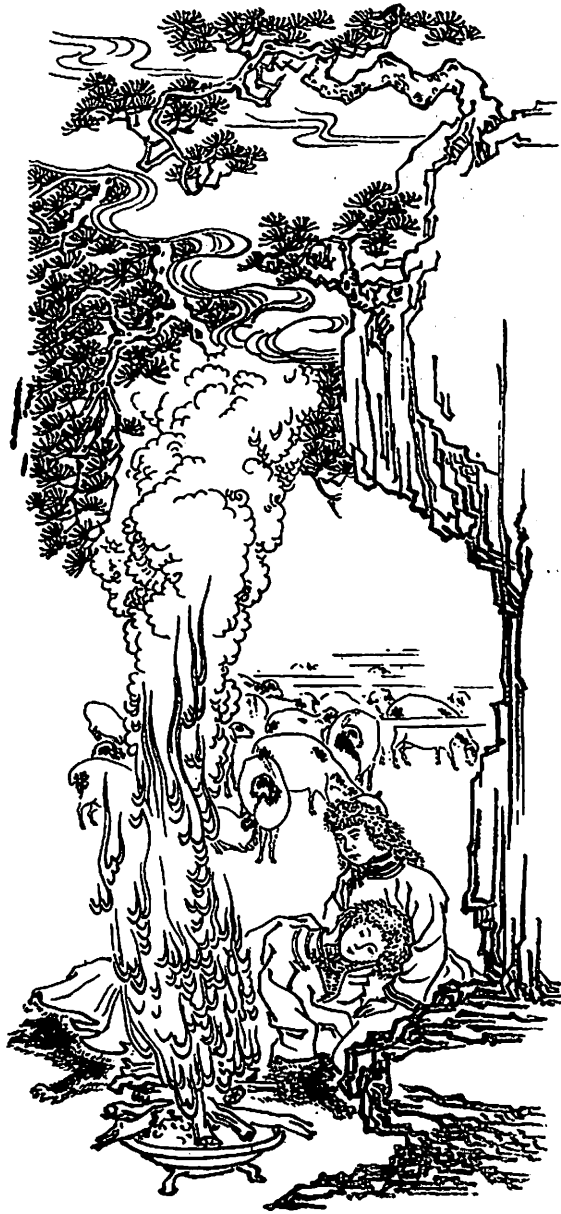
She knelt down and frantically scooped the snow away, to uncover a sopping wet lamb. Like someone who meets a dear friend after many years. In her delight she hardly knew what to do. She gathered the

lamb in her arms, shaking it, calling out and kissing it; then gave it a playful pat on its back side, so that it trotted into the cave.

Subudan uncovered twelve sheep one after the other. Though her feet felt better now, her hands were agonizingly painful. And her blouse, wet by the snow, had frozen as cold and stiff as iron in the icy wind. She paid no attention, however. She had but a single thought: Not one sheep must be lost!

She hurried back and forth through the snow, searching for all the stragglers.

But by now so much time had passed that though the last sheep she found was still alive, it lay curled up, shaking with cold, unable to stand. Without hesitating for a moment, Subudan untied her belt, opened the front of her *daha* and carefully placed the sheep in it, then carried it as gently as a child towards the cave. She felt wearier now, though, than ever before in her life. Her steps began to falter, her aching legs grew limp, sparks danced before her eyes, her head felt as heavy as lead, and once again she fell senseless in the snow.



V

The air reeked of alcohol. Subudan was glowing with warmth, and could feel soft fleeces all round her. How did she come to be lying among the sheep? And where did this smell of alcohol come from? As she stirred, she heard a familiar, well-loved voice:

"Are you better, Subudan? How do you feel?"

Subudan gave a cry, and turned her head in surprise to look around. She was lying on two layers of *daha* and sheepskins. And sitting beside her watching her was that same young Bata who was always so shy. She felt extremely embarrassed. Her cheeks began to burn, and she struggled to sit up. Bata hastily put his arm round her, and gazed into her eyes, which had black smudges beneath them caused by exhaustion.

"Lie down and rest, Subudan!" he said fondly.

"How are the sheep?"

"You've done very well — not a single one is missing! They're all in the cave!"

"Bata!" Subudan was too moved to speak. The hot tears welled from her eyes and, her head against his shoulder, she began to cry. . . .

A bonfire was lit in the cave, the firelight danced merrily, the air was rank with the smell of animals' bones, and milky smoke filled the valley. Springs bubbled up from crevices in the rocks, the souging wind blew pine needles on their heads, and the sheep nudged and jostled each other, standing contentedly on the soft, dry straw. All was so calm and peaceful, you would never think there had just been a snowstorm here.

Translated by Gladys Yang

THE WISE BIRD

Long, long ago, in the North Hangai Mountain lived an extraordinarily wise bird.

Many wealthy people and high officials wanted to lay hands on it. Although their feet had made a veritable path up the North Hangai Mountain, they could never catch it. As a matter of fact, they never even caught sight of it. Yet the bird had not gone elsewhere. It was there, perched on a green pine tree on the mountain, singing the most beautiful songs.

Now Irtgerkhan lived to the east of the mountain and had heard about the bird. "How can this bird be so cunning?" he thought to himself. "I cannot believe that I may not catch it." So he made his way to the North Hangai Mountain.

Irtgerkhan found that green pine tree on which the wise bird perched. It was not afraid of him, nor did it fly away. He took the bird in his hands and walked down the mountain. "It was easy to catch me, Irtgerkhan," the bird said. "But if, as we speak on the way down, you feel sorry for anyone, I shall fly away before you can blink your eye."

"I don't mind. You may talk if you like," said Irtgerkhan.

"Let me tell you an interesting story then," said the bird.

— There was once a hunter who had a game dog. One day when they were out hunting, they came upon a cart loaded with silver which had broken down. A man sat hopelessly beside it. The hunter went up to him and asked him what was the matter. "Oh hunter," begged the man, "please look after my cart for me, while I go to fetch a carpenter from the nearby *bago* to repair it." The hunter agreed and the man, relieved, went off.

Darkness fell, yet the man had not come back. The hunter began to worry about his mother. She could hardly see and was at home alone, and had had no food all day. "Now, you look after this cartload of silver and mind you don't let anybody steal it," he told his game dog. "I must go home and get a meal for my mother."

The game dog did a sentry round all the time, and prevented the ox who was harnessed to the cart from walking away.

The driver had had to go to many *bago* before he could get a carpenter to come. When he finally returned he found that the hunter had gone but the game dog was faithfully guarding his cart.

He was very pleased with this good dog and rewarded it with a piece of silver. The dog went back to the hunter, very late in the night, carrying the piece of silver in his mouth. But the hunter was furious when he saw the silver. I told it to look after the cartload of silver, he thought, and it dared to steal a piece and bring it back! He took up a rod and beat the dog to death.—

“Oh, what a pity! Such a good dog to be wrongfully killed!” said Irtgerkhan.

“Ah, you feel sorrow!” said the wise bird, and flew away before Irtgerkhan could blink his eyes.

Irtgerkhan had only himself to blame for forgetting that he must not feel sorrow about anything.

He went again up the North Hangai Mountain and caught the bird once more. This time the bird told him another interesting story.

—Once upon a time there lived a woman who had a very nice cat. One day she told the cat to keep an eye on the baby in the cradle while she went out to fetch water.

The cat sat by the cradle, keeping off the flies and mosquitoes. Suddenly, from the back of the door a rat ran out stealthily and made for the baby's ear. The cat immediately swooped upon it. But while it was engaged with this rat, another bigger



rat came out and bit a piece off the baby's ear. The baby cried and the cat quickly turned round, saw the big rat and killed it. Then it began to lick the baby's ear to stop the bleeding.

When the woman came back with the water and saw that the baby's ear was bleeding, and the cat was licking it, she thought: Oh wicked cat! I asked you to look after the baby, but you have bitten its ear instead. So she beat the cat to death with a rod. Almost immediately she found out what had really happened when she found the body of the big rat with a piece of the baby's ear in its mouth. She wept when she realized how unjust she had been. —

Irtgerkhan could not help sighing and said: "What a shame! Poor cat!"

"You are feeling sorry again," said the bird and flew away.

Irtgerkhan went up the North Hangai Mountain for the third time and caught the wise bird on the green pine tree. The bird told him an even more interesting story on their way down.

— Once upon a time there was a bad drought, and a certain man, Alipie, searched for a place of abundant harvests. As he went the wind lashed him and the sun scorched him and he became so parched with thirst that he had no strength left at all. He sat down under a rocky cliff to wait for death to come. Suddenly he felt liquid dripping down from above. He quickly held out his wooden bowl, which was slowly filled, drop by drop. Just when it was filled a magpie flew past him, knocking it out of his hands. Alipie was very angry. "Oh magpie!" he cried. "Why must you tip over the bowl of water which Heaven gave me!" He took a stone and killed the magpie. Then he saw, just where the body of the magpie lay, that there was a spring of clear water welling out of the rocks. He ran to it, and drank his fill. Then he went back to the place where he had been sitting, and looked up. On the cliff above him was a huge snake, with its tongue out, dripping venom. "Oh, poor magpie," he said regretfully. "You saved my life, yet I killed you." —

"What a tragedy! Such a good magpie to be wrongfully killed!" sighed Irtgerkhan.

"You are feeling sorry for the third time now," said the wise bird, flying away in the blink of an eye.

"Oh, let it go!" said Irtgerkhan, seeing the bird flying away for the third time. "Keeping that bird is too difficult." So he gave up the idea of going up the North Hangai Mountain any more. It is said that the wise bird is still perching on the green pine tree.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin

THE LAW AND SILVER

Once upon a time there lived a blind musician on the Mongolian steppe. He had neither home nor family and spent his life wandering from place to place with his fiddle, singing songs or telling stories to amuse the people. He was very frugal, and managed to put by some silver dollars for his old age. At that time there were groups of bandits and thieves frequently raiding the villages, so he was very worried for fear he would lose his savings, and wanted to do something about it. Moving about all the time, he had no regular home to store his treasure in. So one day he asked a very kind-hearted man, who was in the audience listening to his performance, if he could make him a



little cowhide purse for the silver so that he could keep it tucked in the fold of his gown. He determined that he would never be parted from this purse. However, despite all his trouble, bad luck came to him. . . .

It was a fine day. There was a little fresh breeze and a bright sun shone in a blue, clear sky. The blind musician was performing in the market place, and had drawn a big crowd of enchanted listeners. While this was going on, a gorgeously clad stranger was to be noticed coming towards them. He had on a satin robe with a blue woollen jerkin over it and a black satin cap set on at a tilt. His long black leather boots shone as he swaggered over. He wore a very knowing look. He glanced over the crowd, his eyes seeming to take everything in. They lighted for a second on the singer as he slowly edged himself into the crowd until he was crouched down right in the front. This time there was no doubt of his look. He stared straight at the musician's chest.

The blind man finished his stories, and the audience drifted away. The richly dressed man, however, waited a moment, and then shot out his arm and snatched the cowhide purse. In a flash the blind musician, always quick witted, grabbed the thief's sleeve and shouted, "Wretch! Robbery in broad daylight!" The people heard him and rushed over. When they saw what had been attempted they were very angry. "Blood-sucking devil!" they cried. "Robbing a poor blind man!" They surged round him and seized him. The robber, the purse still in his hand, yelled: "How should a poor blind man have so much money! Of course he's slandering me!" This barefaced lie enraged the crowd even more. Half pushed, half dragged, he was hauled to the yamen.

When the magistrate heard of the matter he at once opened the court. He asked the blind man to sit down and then addressed the robber: "Kneel down and confess! You bully! Daring to rob this poor man in bright daylight! How can you do such a thing on our prince's territory? You violator of the law!"

He was shaking with rage. But the robber seemed quite unabashed, as though he had not heard a word, and said:

"I come from a family of good reputation. Is it likely that I should be a petty thief? My ancestors are great people. I am not so poor that I must stoop to rob a poor blind man."

The magistrate lost his temper when he heard this. "There can be no virtue in your ancestors, or they would not have a descendant like you—a thief who robs the poor and weak! Your family are surely not good people."

"Master," said the robber, "my father has great fame. There is not a man who does not know him throughout the four seas. He has the ear of the emperor; he is close to the princes, the high officials, the nobles and all the great men." Misgivings grew in the magistrate's heart when he heard this. The robber saw what he said was taking effect, and hastened to hoist the sail when the wind was favourable, saying quickly: "If I tell you who my father is, you will recognize him at once."

"Who, then, is your father?" asked the magistrate with dread.

With a meaning look the robber said: "My father is fifty years old; he is pock-marked and hunch-backed."

After a moment's thought, the magistrate said, with an uneasy smile: "H'm. I see this case is very complicated. I shall adjourn the court until tomorrow!"

So saying he dismissed them. The robber and the musician were put into separate cells. During the night the thief gave the magistrate a silver ingot weighing fifty ounces as a bribe.

The next day the case was opened again. The magistrate was quite changed. He abused the poor musician, saying angrily: "You wretched blind man! Why are you not contented with your given fate? You are

jealous of the rich man. You dragged the son of a good family into trouble and impudently slandered him. Have you no shame?"

When the musician heard such words, he knew just what he could expect from the law. He said not a word, but bent down and scratched the earth and then put his ear to the ground as if he was listening. Then he scratched the ground again. . . .

The magistrate could not make head or tail of this so he asked: "Hey, there, blind man! What are you doing?"

The musician replied calmly:

"Master! Yesterday I could hear the true sound of law ringing here. Today it is overlaid with a metallic sound curiously like silver. So I would like to dig here. If I find silver, I would present it to you, great master." He paused for a moment. "My eyes are blind. I see no light in this world, but my ears are good. I can hear not only the sounds underground, but also the sound of human hearts. . . ."

The magistrate became more and more uneasy, as though he were on thorns, when he heard the blind musician talking thus. He was afraid to hear any more and he hastily ordered the court attendants to throw the musician out of the yamen.

Translated by Chang Su-chu

THE HUNTER WHO HAD A BEAUTIFUL WIFE

Many years ago a very clever hunter, Anchinhu, lived on the steppe. He had a beautiful and intelligent wife, by the name of Gua. All who saw her could only say, "Gua's eyes are brighter than the moon; a fresh flower is hardly a match for her." Anchinhu and Gua cared much for one another.

One day in spring the prince of that part went out hunting. Gua was just going to the well to fetch water when he and his retainers happened to be passing. She had nowhere to hide so she just stood still by the roadside. When the prince saw her he was so overwhelmed by her beauty that he could not pull his eyes away.

When his attendants saw this they knew what was in his mind. So they said, ingratiatingly: "Lord, have you taken a fancy to this woman?"

"Who is she?"

"She is the wife of the hunter, Anchinhu. Her name is Gua."

When they returned from the hunt the prince told his son about the beautiful woman he had seen.

His son, as lustful as his father, was seized with desire for Gua and planned to abduct her. One of the officials heard about it, and in order to please his master, conceived a plan.

They waited until autumn. The prince went out hunting again, and took Anchinhu with him. As they rode along they saw several crows flying by overhead. The prince ordered Anchinhu to ask the crows what they were calling to one another. Immediately Anchinhu whipped up his horse, and chased after the birds. He came back quite soon, and said, "The crows say that if we come out to hunt with the lord, we shall get cups of blood to drink." The prince said nothing and went on.

They rode on again, and saw a dead man lying on the ground. "Anchinhu," said the prince, "I order you to go and ask that corpse what he is talking about." The hunter did as he was bid, returned, and said: "The corpse says that to be alive like us and accompany you, lord, on a hunt, is a fine thing; far better than to be a dead man and be put under the earth and lie there month after month and year after year." Again the prince was silent.

They went on again and came to the open steppe where they could hear the rushes whistling in the wind. The prince again said to Anchinhu: "Go and ask the rushes what they are talking about." Anchinhu spurred up his horse and galloped off, and in a moment came back to report: "Lord, the rushes say that they were born in spring, they dance in autumn, they wither in a deep pit, and they die in a dry well."

The prince had intended to confound the hunter with his questions so that he could condemn him and seize his wife. But he completely failed to do so, and made his way home discontented.



Still he did not give up hope and another plan was thought of. He summoned Anchinhu to him, and said, "Make a rope of ashes. It must be a thousand feet long. It is to be made by tomorrow. If you fail to do this, you will hang."

Anchinhu went home and told his wife about it. "Don't worry," she said. "I know what we can do." So saying she ran out and gathered a great armful of rushes and plaited them into a long rope. She coiled it up on a big platter and then set it alight and let it burn to ashes. Then she told him to take it to the prince, and whispered to him what to say. Anchinhu nodded; his courage was high.

Anchinhu came to present the platter to the prince and said: "Here is the rope. It is made out of ashes and it is a thousand feet long, as you ordered." "Oho!" said the prince. "Let me see you measure it!" "Nay, lord," replied Anchinhu. "Surely he who receives the goods measures them, not the maker."

The prince could find no words to answer this. He racked his brains, and then said to Anchinhu: "Tomorrow you are to come here riding on a horse with two heads. If you fail, you are a dead man." Anchinhu went home and told his wife and together they made a plan.

The next day the hunter set out. He had chosen a mare just about to foal, and had urged to drink her fill. He girthed her up very tightly, and as he rode he made her gallop up hill and go slowly down. When they reached the prince's mansion he tethered her, and loosened her girth. Immediately the head of the foal was born. He had come on a horse with two heads!

The prince, unwilling to give up, once more set him a difficult task: "Anchinhu, you are to come tomorrow to see me but you must be neither in nor out of the room." Anchinhu went home to consult with his wife. Again she thought of a way out for him.

The following day Anchinhu came to see the prince. He said never a word, but he stood astride the threshold, with one leg on either side. And now the prince was at his wit's end. He summoned his son to him, and asked him: "What do the crows talk about?" "They are only crying," answered the son. Again the question: "What does a dead man say?" The answer: "A dead man can say nothing." The father put in his last question: "What do the rushes say as they rustle in the wind?" "They say nothing: they only shake" was the answer.

The prince had to give up. Neither he nor his son was a match for the intelligent hunter.

Translated by Chang Su-chu



HOW THE HORSE-HEADED FIDDLE CAME TO BE MADE

You know our Mongolian horse-headed fiddle? Did you ever wonder how our favourite instrument came to be made? Let me tell you: it is a sad story.

The first horse-headed fiddle was invented by Suho, a little shepherd boy who lived in the pasture-land in Chahar. He was an orphan, and was brought up by his grandmother. They owned about a score of sheep. Suho used to take the sheep out to graze and help his grandmother to prepare meals and keep house. When he reached manhood at seventeen, he was a gifted singer whose singing was loved by all the shepherds and herdsmen of the neighbourhood.

One day the sun had set and night was rapidly drawing on, but Suho had not come home. The grandmother was worried, and the neighbours began to get worried too. Then, late, Suho came home, carrying a woolly white thing in his arms. It was a new-born colt. Suho looked at the surprised faces around him and said, smiling, "I came across this little thing lying on the road struggling. There was no sign of its mother there. I was afraid the wolves would get it, so I brought it back here to the yurt."

Time went by, and the little colt grew up strong, thanks to the care Suho took of it. It was snowy white, healthy and beautiful. Everyone who set eyes on it loved it. But it was especially dear to Suho.

One night Suho was woken up by excited neighing. He scrambled out of bed and hurried out of the yurt. By now he could hear wild baaing from the sheep in the fold as well. The white pony was defending the fold from a big grey wolf! Suho drove the wolf away. The white pony was sweating all over. It had apparently been fighting for quite a long time. "Oh white pony, you have saved the sheep. . . ." Suho patted the sweating pony, speaking to it as though it were a dear human friend. Ever

since then Suho and the white pony were fast friends who grudged even a minute's separation from one another.

Time slipped by. One spring time the news that the prince was organizing a horse-race at the lama temple spread over the pastures. The winner would have the hand of his daughter. Suho heard about it. His friends encouraged him to enter for it. So off went Suho with his white pony whom he loved so well.

The race began. Many strong and healthy young men were competing. They whipped up their steeds and galloped at full speed. — But Suho and his white pony were the first to pass the winning post.

"Tell the rider on the white pony to come here," said the prince on the watching stand. However, when he saw that the winner was only a simple herdsman he made no mention of marriage to his daughter but said cunningly: "You will be given three big ingots for your horse. You may go home."

Suho was infuriated. "What? Does he think I would sell my precious white pony?" he thought. So he answered bluntly: "I came to run a race, not to a horse sale."

"Scoundrel! A poor herdsman dares to resist his prince? He must be punished!" His servants rushed up immediately.

They beat Suho till he lost consciousness and then threw him down from the watching stand. The prince went triumphantly home with the white pony.

Suho's friends took him home. His grandmother nursed him tenderly and he recovered after a few days. Then one night just when Suho was going to sleep he heard knocking at the door. "Who's there!" he called. There was no answer, but the banging went on.

"Oh! It's the white pony!" The grandmother had gone to see what it was, and was surprised when she opened the door.

Suho immediately ran out. Yes, it was the white pony indeed! Sweat was dripping from it, and there were seven or eight arrows sticking in it. Suho clenched his teeth and held back his grief, and pulled the arrows out. Blood immediately poured out from the wounds. The pony was very seriously wounded and died the next day.



What had happened was that the prince, overjoyed at having secured such a fine pony, had invited his family and friends to a feast to celebrate it one fine day. He wanted to show off the pony and ordered it to be led out to him.

But when he mounted its back it reared, threw him

down and galloped pell-mell through the assembled guests. "Catch it!" the prince shouted, picking himself up angrily. "If you can't, kill it." A shower of arrows rained on the pony. But it managed to reach home, to die in his real master's house.

Suho mourned it very deeply, and could not rest day or night. One uneasy night, as he lay tossing, he seemed to see his pony, alive. It came right up to him, and he made much of it again.

"Will you not think of a way that I may be with you always and keep you company, dear master? Make a fiddle of my bones," the pony said. Next morning Suho carved a model of his dear pony's head out of its bones, and used it for the end of the fiddle where the stops are. He used its tendons for strings, and hairs from its flowing tail for the bow-strings. Whenever he played his horse-headed fiddle he remembered his hatred of the prince, and his own feelings when he galloped on the pony. These thoughts went into his music and made it speak of all the desires and emotions of the herdsmen. It became the people's voice, and all the people used to come to listen to his playing in the night-time after work. Listening, they would forget their weariness.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin



How Life Unfolds . . .

THE SONG AND THE FLUTE

— *A sketch of the life of the Shani people in
Kueishan, Yunnan Province* —

FANG CHI

It was 45 *li* from Weitse to Oshohi. There was no proper road, and our driver began to frown when our car started to bump badly. The track was all right for the usual wooden-wheeled ox-cart, but it was simply impossible for a car. There was nothing we could do but let our driver take it back to Weitse. Luckily, an old Shani woman we found in a nearby field let us borrow her ox-cart, which took us as far as the next village, Icheng. There we got pack-horses for the rest of the journey to Oshohi.

The way led by a narrow path along the cracks of the rocks — a well-trodden path, made by shepherds and pack-horse teams. It was getting dark now, and drizzling on and off. The stony path was slippery and muddy. We had several falls, but, thanks to the fact that the custom was to sit side-saddle, we none of us came to any harm, as we just slid down on both feet.

But the beauty of our surroundings more than made up for the fatigues of the journey. Yunnan seemed to be a treasure house of hidden beauties — wherever you turned were delightful trees and flowers, which indeed, seemed to abound in the remotest hills and woods. The rain-washed pine groves were verdant and glossy. It was impossible to say whether it was their needles that were glistening with rain, or whether they were actually distilling pearly drops of themselves. Everything looked dreamy and translucent. The very air was different, and seemed to well out of the dewy drops on the pine needles, thence to the whole wooded hill. We breathed this delicate but distinctive scent, mixed with the fragrance of cassia. . . .

What charmed me particularly was the way the birds sang in these woods. The flowers and shrubs in Yunnan were almost wholly strange to me, but the singing of the birds was at once enchanting and familiar. It took me back to my childhood when I used to stretch out of an autumn day on the grassy plain near our village and watch the drifting clouds in the blue sky, my ears strained for the lilting song of the skylarks high up in the distant heavens.

But night was coming and the rain continued. That would not have been so bad if we hadn't lost our way. The further we went the steeper the hilly path became, and the thicker the pine groves. Eventually, when we turned round a spur we could find no trace of a path at all, not even marks where cattle had made a track that might reassure us that men had ever passed here. The only sign of human habitation was a stretch of buckwheat in flower glimmering white in the falling dusk far below us in the valley.

We were being escorted by the horse team of Icheng's producers' co-op. The leader, Pu, was an old Shani. We were told that he was a very experienced guide, but this time, whether it was due to a momentary carelessness or because he was unfamiliar with this route, he had taken the wrong path after Yusheng Village and led us to this tall mountain where we lost the way.

The old man looked as if he felt really upset about this. He dashed up and down between the horses trying to find the path. His knowledge of Chinese was scanty and though now and again he tried to mutter something to us we could only catch something to the effect that there must be a path. He was talking to himself more than trying to console us.

We were not really as worried as he imagined us to be. In fact, we were mentally prepared to spend the night out, making some sort of a makeshift camp with our raincoats, and lighting a fire round which we



would sing a few folk songs or tell mystic tales about the hills. I felt that it was the old Shani who needed the assuring words.

"Grandad Pu! Don't worry," I said, half in jest. "If we can't find the way we'll spend the night here. . . ."

"Oh no! No, no!" said the old man, his voice full of self-reproach. "I tell you, there's a path here, sure enough."

He was right. When we reached a huge crag, apparently blocking our way, we suddenly heard the clear soft trills of a flute coming from behind us on the left, and then a rich passionate woman's voice ringing out: "From the red east. . . ."

To us travellers lost in the hills such music and song coming out of the dusk roused unimaginable feelings.

". . . rises the sun,

"There appears in China, Mao Tse-tung."

The poignant flute and the singing continued. The rain stopped and patches of clear sky appeared between dark clouds. A warm breeze swished through the pine trees and the rustling of the leaves became more insistent, like the gentle lapping of waves on a calm sea. The mountain stream gurgled an accompaniment to the duet of flute and voice.

All our fantasies and our feeling of helpless impatience were swept away. We turned our horses in the direction of the singer.

II

But our night ride continued for a long, long time. It was nearly ten o'clock when we finally neared Oshohi Village. Our clothes were drenched and the horses almost too tired to move. It was so dark now that nothing was visible except the dark clumsy shape of Kueishan Mountain which loomed against the sky, on and off, as the heavy clouds dispersed or collected. Everything was quiet: we could hear the smallest sounds—the rustle of one another's clothes as they caught on over-hanging branches, the clopping of the horses' hooves on the stones and their difficult breathing as they struggled up the slope. As for us riders, we gripped our bamboo pannier tight and rocked along sleepily.

I was nearly jolted off when my horse made a slip. Then suddenly, from over our heads shone the bright gleam of a flashlight, like a streak of lightning. "Here, turn left! Up here . . ." called a friendly voice.

I shook myself vigorously, opened my eyes and pulled myself out of my doze. The horses were going up a steep, twisting track. After numerous turns right and left we finally stopped in front of a house. The flashlight blinked again and someone came over to me. I was practically lifted out of the saddle, and then felt my hands gripped warmly. "Lost your way, I guess," said a young and rich voice.

It never occurred to me to wonder how he knew we had lost our way, but I took his hand gratefully. "Are you the township head?" I asked.

"No. I'm the Party secretary of the township branch, Wang Chih-chang."

In the darkness I couldn't see his face. But the tone of his voice and his warm handshake gave me some idea of how old he was and what sort of a person.

He took me into the house and went to fetch the others in. There was no light where I was, but the dim light from the hearth in another room further in showed us we were standing in a kind of entrance room, opening into a small yard. In one corner of the entrance room were the embers of a dying fire, round which we crowded, and tried to make blaze again so we could dry our clothes.

The Party secretary must have gone to tie up the horses. We were left on our own, a bunch of thoroughly drenched visitors, cold, hungry and tired. The wood was very damp. We couldn't make the fire burn again, though we blew on it till the ashes got into our eyes and the whole room was filled with smoke. Our candles were still outside in our bags, so we could only sit dismally in the darkness, unable to do anything for ourselves.

At this juncture, there was a flash of light and two bright torches emerged out of the darkness. With a peal of laughter, two young Shani girls appeared on the threshold. The room was suddenly brought to life, with the glitter of their silver necklaces and bracelets, and their black eyes and white teeth.

We asked them to sit down. They said not a word, but smiled and seemed hesitant to join us. Then, with expert skill, they quickly rekindled the fire we had given up. It began to flare brightly, the wood crackled merrily, scenting the air with pine smoke. The room became bright, warm and cosy. We were no longer cold and dismal.

It is very difficult to describe these two lasses. They seemed to be about the same age and were equally pretty. Perhaps I should say one had softer features while the other had a more lively and merry face.

In a few minutes, the Party secretary came in and sat down with us. Only then could I see by the firelight that he was a very handsome young man. He had inky black eyebrows, a generous mouth and a well-turned forehead and nose which made his black eyes seem even more brilliant. He was of medium height with broad shoulders, and stuck down the back of his jacket was a long flute with a coloured tassel.

The girls lowered their eyes as soon as he entered. One of them giggled a little while the other one blushed—I thought I saw her poke the giggling one playfully. They seemed to embarrass the Party secretary, who awkwardly rubbed his hands on his knees.

"Why don't you say something? Are you shy because we have visitors?" he asked, as the girls went on giggling.

"Our girls are fine, really, you know," he said, turning to us. "But these two seem to have lost their tongues and can only giggle. Other

Shani girls can sing!" At this the girls laughed till they had to double up, and covered their faces with their hands.

"Fine! Won't you sing us something?" asked one of our party.

"Yes, please sing *Ashma*,"* I pleaded.

"No," said the Party secretary, waving one hand. "No good asking these two! They can only giggle. . . ." The merry-faced girl jumped up at this injustice. "I like that! Just now on the hill, who was it sang to your flute?" she asked in perfect Chinese. The other one shyly hid her face in both hands again.

"Our Shani girls can sing," said the Party secretary, ignoring her merry face. "Many of them sing exceedingly well. You'll see in a moment. Our girls will entertain you properly with singing, and dancing too."

III

The night was deepening. The rain had finally stopped. Unbeknown to us the moon had risen over the blue Kueishan Mountain, behind a thin film of cloud. Now we saw that there was an open space in front of us, round a huge tree with widespread branches, with a bonfire burning under it brightly. Blue smoke trailed up into the dark night and enveloped the tree in a kind of mist.

The moon came through the clouds, its gleaming rays lying like silver on the open space and multiplying itself in the myriad puddles until the village by Kueishan Mountain seemed to be in a strange, crystal fairyland, on this magic May night.

All around, from the far-away foothills to the nearby woods and the thatched huts, bright torches flashed. Bobbing up and down, on the wings of song and merry laughter, they drew nearer till the fire was surrounded by gaily dressed Shani lads and lasses. The girls went on with their embroidery or twisting raw flax into thread in the moonlight, while the young men stood round them, their three-stringed guitars slung across their shoulders, their hands idle and their tongues silent, but their eyes alight, watching the girls so apparently bent on their work. . . .

It looked as if a ceremony of some kind was going to begin: There was an expectant hush. Not a word was said. We wondered whether this was their usual custom or whether it was due to our presence. The fire crackled and hissed, the threads whispered in the girls' hands; in the distance the frogs croaked softly and crickets chirped in sympathy. . . . Perhaps it was only a prelude to a great heart-stirring symphony.

Indeed it was! Suddenly the twang of a guitar was heard, like the rumbling of distant thunder, and down dropped a young man from the high rocks. He landed lightly in the midst of the crowd; his fingers

*A famous Shani epic—see *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1955 and *Ashma*, published by the Foreign Languages Press 1957.

strumming on his guitar. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he began to dance as he played.

I was transfixed by this sudden, strange beginning. To my surprise the bold young dancer turned out to be our Party secretary, Wang Chih-chang.

He was quickly surrounded by the young folk, who, swaying to the powerful rhythm of his guitar, paired off in a joyous dance.

The three-stringed guitar is very popular among the Shani people. According to local custom, every young man must be a good hand at work, an expert guitar player, a good singer and able to play the flute. Without these qualifications he could never capture any girl's heart. All the young men in the square had a guitar and each of them had a partner. But the Party secretary was the best player and the best dancer.

In glimmering blue moonlight, round the bright fire, the guitars throbbed like the sea, echoing across this meeting place at the foot of Kueishan Mountain, where once guerilla fighters used to assemble. The music rose and fell, now soft and sweet, now majestic and bold, rising to a roar like the pounding of ten thousand steeds and then dropping to a barely audible hum, as if they were trotting with muffled hooves. It murmured as softly as the whispering of lovers and then burst out again in daring, open avowal.

Suddenly the strongest guitar, which had been roaring like a battle drum, fell silent. In its place rose the poignant trill of a flute flitting amidst the background of countless guitars like a stormy petrel singing in the midst of lightning and thunder, ringing out as clearly as the siren of a ship sending out its message across a tempestuous sea.

The dance went quicker and quicker: the couples whirled in time to the simple, vivid stress of the music. The beat of their feet and the resounding hand-claps of the dance, the glittering moonlight and happy laughter filled Kueishan Mountain with joy and strength.

The Party secretary was dancing with a partner now — it was one of the two girls we had seen already — the one with the soft features. She was dancing as though in a dream, her eyes fixed on his handsome face.

Then the guitars stopped and the dancers came to a halt. Everything became motionless and silence reigned. It was so quiet that you felt you could hear the moonbeams falling on the square and the clouds drifting across the sky.

But the silence lasted only a second. In a flash, the sweet notes of a flute, soaring like a lark, speared the deep blue of the night and, as if caught by the drifting clouds, swayed between the hilltops for a long, long time.

A warm sweet soprano began to follow the flute: "From the red east. . . ." It seemed familiar, somehow. Surely I knew that voice? Of

course! On the road, when we were lost. It was the voice which guided us to Kueishan.

The whole company joined in. Their voices were not trained, but the effect was very pleasing as the young voices rang out full of feeling:

*From the red east rises the sun,
There appears in China, Mao Tse-tung.*

IV

The concert came to an end. It was past midnight and the moon was now high over the blue mountains. The young people dispersed in twos and threes.

We weren't in the least inclined to sleep. The fatigue of the journey, the chill from our drenching and the hunger from the day's fasting were nothing. We had fed our souls on the delightful music of the guitar and the flute, and the gay dance.

The Party secretary came over to us, his big guitar across his shoulders and his flute sticking out of his collar. His feet still seemed to remember the dance rhythm; perhaps the music was echoing in his heart.

I wanted to congratulate him, and thank him for the way he and his friends had let us see how the Shani people live and laugh. It had been a strange evening — but what open, genuine feeling it had shown us. But words failed me so I gripped his hand tightly. Smiling bashfully, he took my arm. "Come," he said. "Let's go to the young people's camp."*

We followed a moonlit, smooth path and entered a pine-fenced enclosure. There we were greeted by moonlight and a dark house, with only the flickering shadow of a fire dancing against a shadowed window-pane. All was silent. He pushed the door open and went in. There was the fire, smouldering faintly in a square stone hearth, but no person to be seen.

"The production brigade's meeting must be still going on," said our young friend. We went on with him again.

We came to a similar house, rather larger. Round the square hearth with its blazing fire sat a ring of young girls, some busy with their flax, some embroidering, some with open note-books and pens. Behind them was a ring of young men with guitars, flutes and Shani mandolins. They were all listening quietly to our Shani girl, the merry-faced one, who sat facing the door and was speaking as we entered. She stopped when she saw us, and made a sign to the girl opposite her who seemed to be taking notes. When she turned round we saw it was our other acquaintance. She spoke to the original speaker, ignoring us completely. "Go on," she

*Shani lads and lasses, from the age of twelve to the time of their marriage, sleep in separate camps for boys and girls. See *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1955, p. 12.

said. "Finish what you were saying." It was evident she was the chairman and the leader of the production brigade.

"I have finished," said the first girl; she seemed a bit agitated and wanting to end her speech. "That's about all. As I said, he's a strong young man but he does less work than the girls. How can we give him the same number of work points?"

"That's all very well!" another girl piped in. "But he does the guitar dance very well and he's always chasing after you. . . ."

There was a burst of laughter. The speaker blushed, and shook her fist in assumed anger. At this point a young lad — he looked no more than seventeen — stood up, very red in the face, and began to sing:

*The work itself is up to me,
The work points you assess.
If only she'd come to the point,
What are a few points less?*

Laughter burst out again. The Party secretary joined in, and so did we.

"All right," said the chairman — she looked as though she wanted to laugh as much as the others, but was restraining herself because of her responsible post — "If he's got no objection himself, we'll leave it at that."

It was the end of the meeting. Some left, but most remained seated. Those who went, went in pairs softly thrumming the guitar and humming a tune, their music drifting back from different parts of the village as they went.

The Party secretary sat down by the girl with the soft features, took up her little note-book and looked through it. "Has your brigade finished the planting, Pu Shih-chen?" he asked.

"Of course," she answered, her shining eyes fixed on him. "You know, we were experimenting this year, but we still finished a day ahead of schedule."

Merry face was still sulking. The sight of the secretary and his lass only seemed to add fuel to her annoyance. She got up abruptly and without a word took herself to the window and looked out.

Pu Shih-chen nudged the Party secretary. "Pi Chih-ying," he said, turning to merry face, "you shouldn't tease him; he is still a child."

"I don't tease him!" said Pi Chih-ying, with a face of woe. "He teases me!" She looked close to tears, but her friends couldn't help laughing at her woebegone face.

"Oh come! You've already found your lover. Don't forget you are a member of the Youth League. . ." the Party secretary went on. His words were cut short by the trill of a flute outside the window. The player was not very skilful but he played with passion and feeling.

All the girls smiled knowingly and the Party secretary smiled too. "I wonder who that serenade's for," said Pu Shih-chen, with a mischievous twinkle.

Pi Chih-ying looked as if she wanted to hide, but smiled despite herself. She stayed by the window, cleared her throat and sang with the flute:

*Before the bitter buckwheat buds
Sweet buckwheat's bloom is shed;
You're but a lad — you must grow up
Before you think to wed.*

That silenced the flute at once and there was another burst of laughter from the girls.

Pi Chih-ying came back listlessly to the fireside. She took up a Shani mandolin and began plucking the strings softly, her eyes on her friend and the Party secretary. Then with lowered head she sang:

*The almond blossom turns to fruit,
The best fruit comes in pairs,
Oh Pu Shih-chen, your mother's pride,
Friend in my childhood years.*

*Alike in every way we were,
Alike in joy and sorrow.
Now you have found a lover true:
I face a lorn tomorrow.*

*In singing only can I find relief,
My mandolin the sharer of my grief.*

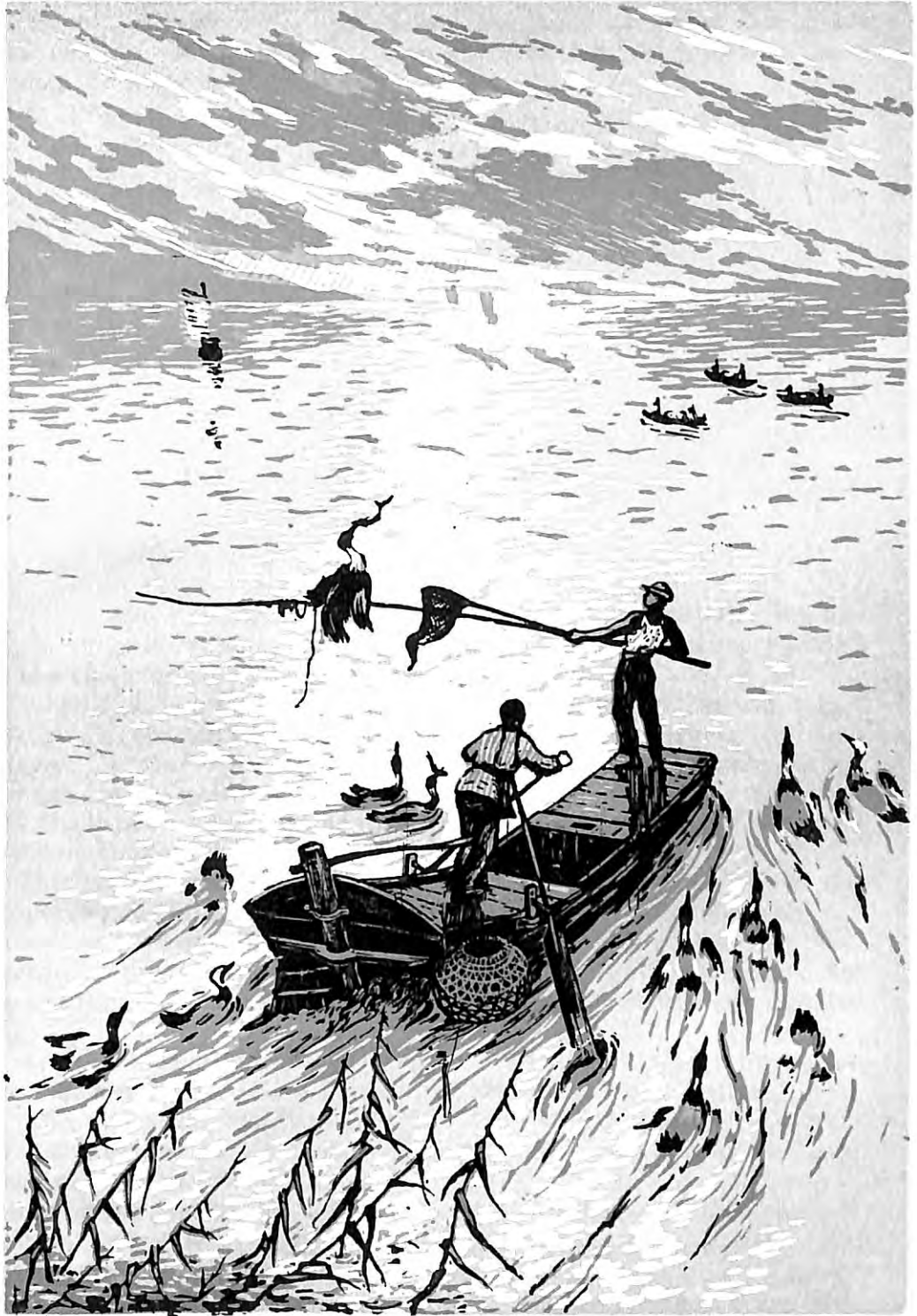
We were surprised that merry face sang with such melancholy and grief. Smiling sweetly, Pu Shih-chen and the other girls exchanged a look and began to sing together:

*When the tree's felled for timber it lies by the way.
Your love, like the wood, lies unclaimed on this day.
Your loved one is guarding the frontier afar,
And you, sadly pining, must bide where you are.*

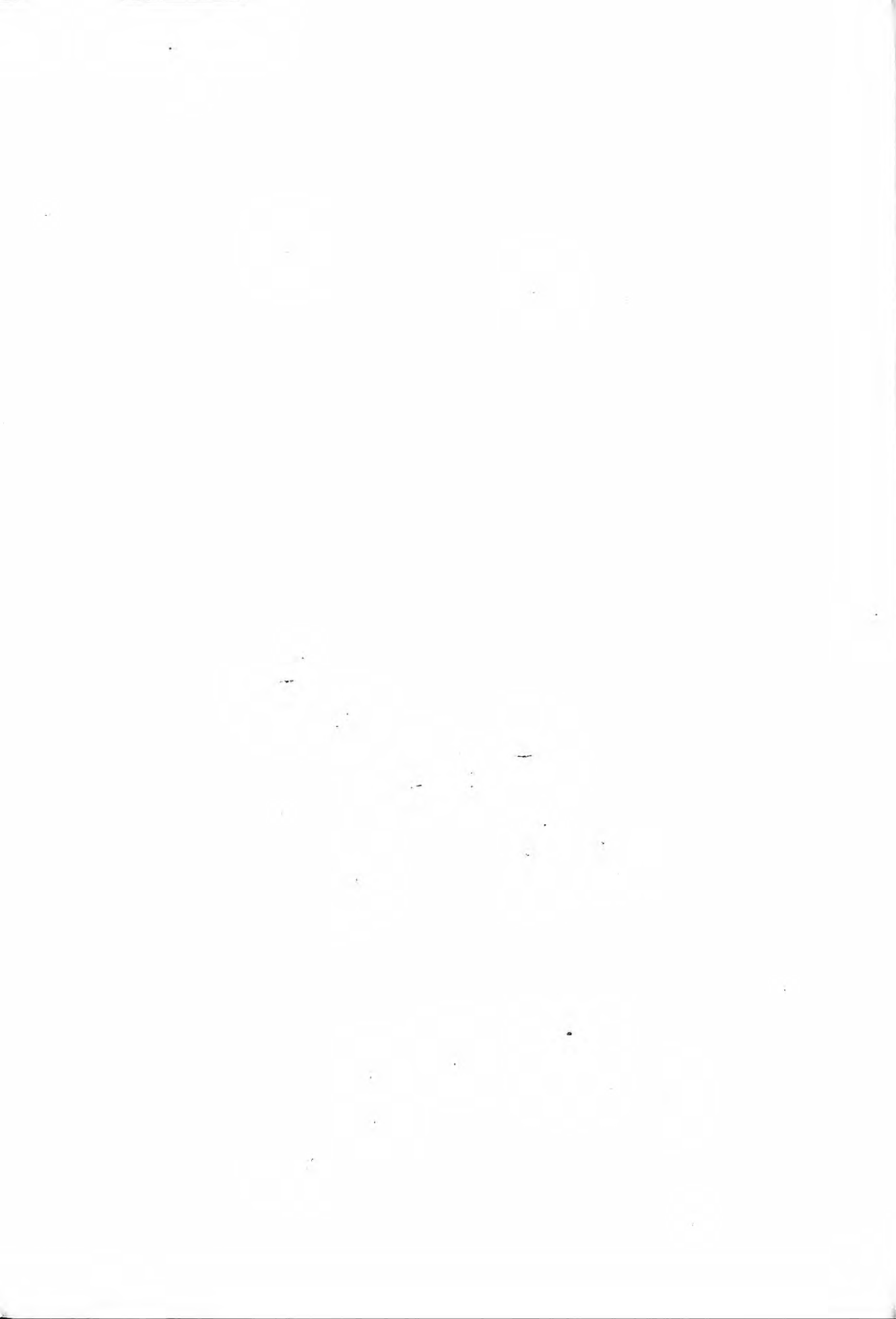
*Yet like the moon's glory does love shed its light —
Can the moon be obscured on a mid-autumn night?*

Pi Chih-ying shook her head sadly and, still not looking at anyone, sang:

*Like stones well-hewn that form a wall
We nestled side by side.
But now we've seeds that, tempest tossed,
Are scattered far and wide!*



Cormorant-fishing (20 cm. × 30 cm.) Woodcut by Mo TSE



Before the girls could answer this, the Party secretary cleared his throat, rubbed his hands on his knees, tilted back his head and began in his warm baritone:

*O lass straight as the young bamboo,
Lass pure as snow-white jade,
Your lover guards the frontier —
Wait, lass, be not afraid.*

*Three hundred days and sixty more
Will see a whole year flee;
A thousand days and eighty more
Will see the end of three.*

*So count the days, my bonny lass,
And keep your love in store;
When he is back and in your arms
He'll know the love you bore!*

V

It was nearly daybreak when we returned to our quarters. We unpacked our bedding, spread it out on the bare floor of the primary school loft and snuggled down. But sleep took long to come.

When I woke up I felt as if I had only just dozed off. It was bright daylight, and the sun was streaming in through a tiny window. Rubbing my eyes, I settled myself more comfortably, cushioned my head on my arms and let my eyes wander across the cobwebbed ceiling. I wanted to think about last night. Into my musings broke a musical chant, as below the school children recited their lessons.

This prosaic sound broke through the haze of my memories of the strange, dreamlike scene of the previous evening, like the morning sun clearing up the mists of dawn! My sense of mystery and fantasy was dispelled by the children's clear voices. Now last night's experience, the song and the dance, and the people came into clear life as real and familiar things.

As I lay musing, the Party secretary entered on tiptoe, thinking we were still fast asleep. He grinned when he saw we were awake.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked, coming to my side and squatting down. "Sorry we couldn't put you up properly." He touched the bare boards with an apologetic air.

His young glowing face showed no trace of fatigue! "Have you had any sleep yourself?" I asked.

"Of course!" he replied, with a chuckle.

We got up quickly, rolled up our bedding and went downstairs with the Party secretary for breakfast. The doorway and the whole place was

full of people: there were leading members of the co-op, and former guerilla fighters and the teacher and children from the school, all gathered to see us off. Merry face and her friend were among the crowd.

We spent some time chatting with them and photographed an old woman in her best clothes who had brought her whole family along. The Party secretary disappeared for a while but returned when our horses were saddled and we were ready to go.

"It's too bad you are going after only one night," he said regretfully. He seemed at a loss for words again.

"Even if we'd stayed a bit longer, I don't think we'd have attended your wedding feast," I said. I couldn't resist trying to change his over-serious face.

"You're a funny one," he said, grinning now.

"I'm serious," said I. "Send us a wire when the wedding day is set. We'll come."

"Really?" said he earnestly. "You won't have to come on horseback then. By next year the highway will be built. According to our long-term plan our co-op will be buying motor-cars by 1958."

We turned down the same slope we took the previous night and reached a proper path—not the route we had taken before, when we had lost our way and had entered the village from the back. I recalled again the duet of the flute and the girl singing. "You're a very good flautist," I told the Party secretary.

He pulled the flute out of his collar and put it to his lips. "And she sang so well with it," I continued. This made him shy again. He held the flute in his hand and would not play it. Neither of us said any more.

We went on for quite a distance, leaving the village far behind; still he said nothing, nor bade us farewell.

Finally we were going uphill again. I stopped. "Go on back, Comrade Wang Chih-chang. You've come a long way with us."

He stopped too, his eyes on the hills, beautiful with tall green pines, straight young firs and big stretches of pear, peach and other fruit trees. White cassia and golden tulips were in full bloom and ruby red berries sparkled in the bushes.

"Look!" he said, his hands sweeping the wooded hills. "What a fine place we've got here. Not much cultivable land to be sure, and so far we've got little arable fields, but we've got so much forests, orchards and herbs. If we make the most of them as the Party tells us to, we'll become prosperous very quickly."

He went on to tell us about his co-op—the Rock Peak—and he spoke eagerly. Just then a production brigade appeared on a distant hilltop and the girls' singing drifted to our ears.

"Do you know?" he continued, his eyes on the hilltop, "these parts used to be an old revolutionary base. When the Yunnan people joined the revolution, the first shot was fired at Kueishan.' It started right here,

you see. The people are highly conscious politically. Since we began the co-operative movement they are putting their whole heart in getting the most out of our land. Though our area is a comparatively barren district we'll be able to ensure that no household lacks grain this year."

He seemed so different now from the gay young dancer of last night. He was like any other experienced village or township Party secretary, familiar with his work and full of confidence. I felt a wave of deep respect for this young Shani who was so modest and gentle but underneath so sensible and confident.

I gripped his hands tightly and he responded with a firm clasp, but neither of us said anything more. I mounted, and my horse cantered up the slope. Again we threaded our way through the pine grove with the strong scent of cassia flowers while cold dewdrops dripped on my head and face. The sun was above the hilltop, and the morning sunbeams filtered through the trees, making patterns on the damp path like sunshine through a bamboo screen. The mud splashed from our horses' hooves as we clip-clopped along.

The trill of the flute and the passionate voice rang out again from a neighbouring hilltop behind us:

*From the red east rises the sun,
There appears in China, Mao Tse-tung.*

From the blue Kueishan Mountain the song soared upwards through the pine-scented air, past rainbow coloured clouds, higher and higher into the azure sky.

Translated by Tang Sheng

TRAVELLING COMPANIONS

LI HUNG

Our train was drawing close to my stop. One of the other men in the carriage knew the place. The town was four miles from the station, he said, but there was a bus in the station yard. However, there would be a crowd from this train, and they would all want to catch the bus. If we wanted to get into it we should have to rush out immediately, or we'd be faced with a tedious walk. I was glad of his advice, and got my luggage all ready in my hand, and tried to push my way to the door of the carriage, ready to run.

This was the first time I'd been home by train — the line had only been laid since I'd left. When I reached the town I still had another day's bus ride, and I'd only the one day left to do it in. Next day was New Year's Eve. . . . I was picturing the joy on my mother's face when I came home just when she was putting the meal ready on the table. It was nearly six years since I last spent the New Year with her; and I knew how she loved it. I was her only son. This New Year would be a special feast for us together. But how hatefully slow the train was! My heart had long flown back home.

It seemed an eternity before the train, with a long whistle, came to a stop. My companion and I scrambled off as quickly as we could. He seized my arm and began to run across the yard. I could see the big bus standing in the square opposite the station with a crowd of people already round the doors.

My friend urged me to hurry. Our carriage happened to be near the end of the train, so it was impossible for us to get to the front of the queue. He impatiently let go of me and ran ahead as fast as he could. In his rush he knocked down an old woman, but like a runaway horse he went straight on without taking any notice of her.

"Hey! Comrade Hsu Yi-an!" I shouted. "Stop, can't you?" He paid no heed to me and disappeared into the crowd. I hurried over to help the old lady. Fortunately she was not hurt, but her glasses were broken and she was badly shaken. She brushed the dust off herself, saying indignantly, "I've never seen such behaviour!"

I said nothing, but I felt very uneasy. I had only just met Hsu Yi-an a few hours ago on the train. We found we came from the same province so we got along fine. I was glad of his company on the journey, in fact, but I was ashamed to see how he behaved now.

I helped the old lady across the square; the bus had not started, but it was crammed full. Sure enough, there sat Hsu Yi-an, comfortably installed in a window seat.

He had the grace to apologize when he saw me. "I wanted to keep a seat for you," he said, "but there were too many people. I couldn't do it."

"Comrade Hsu Yi-an," I said to him, "I don't want your apologies for myself, but I think you ought to give up your seat to this old lady. You knocked her down and broke her glasses. She'll never manage that long walk to town."

I thought the rude man would at least want to make up for what he had done to the old lady, but to my surprise he was not at all abashed.

"I was in a hurry, wasn't I?" he said. "It wasn't my fault." Obviously he had no intention of giving up his seat. He lit a cigarette, as though that was the end of the matter.

I wasn't going to let him off. "Aren't you going to do anything about it?" I asked.

He said not a word, but puffed away, looking at the sky.

What more could I say? Who would have thought that he could be like this!

Just as I was about to turn away in disgust a stocky young man came down from the bus.

I vaguely recognized him by his cotton-padded jacket — I'd seen him somewhere recently. Then it came to me. He'd been in the same train, across the carriage from me, engrossed in "The Youth of China." He had been so concentrated on his reading that he never said a word to anyone, and nobody had cared to interrupt his studies. He came over to us now, however, and said to the old lady, "Mother, please take my seat. I know this place very well and can easily walk to the town."

The old lady was embarrassed. She did not want to accept his offer. Just at that moment, though, the driver started up his engine, and before she knew what was happening, the young man had boosted her up on to the bus, saying, "Go on — get in! It's far too long a walk for you!" I saw her sit down with a bump just as the bus started.

The young man, his kitbag on his shoulder, walked away with big strides. He was away before I could speak to him. All I could do was to watch his disappearing figure.

I suddenly remembered that I should start on my way too. I'd never walked so far before with such a load of luggage. There was nothing for it, though, but to make up my mind to it and start. There were plenty of other passengers who could not get on the bus, and we hurried along together. Now I didn't know a soul, and felt as though I had to drag myself forward. Only a few moments ago I had been so pleased to think I had a companion: I had not expected to be on my own like this. What a miserable journey it was!

It was dark when I reached the town. I went straight to the bus station there to buy a ticket for the last stage of my journey home. But when I got there, the man in the ticket office told me that all the tickets for Tsanghsien (where I lived) were sold. I asked him whether there was anything else going that way — a goods lorry for instance?

"There are no more tickets, and there's no more transport!" was all I got for an answer.

Oh dear! This meant that I could not get on tomorrow and would not be home for New Year after all. Oh, my mother! You will be disappointed. I was very upset and went dismally away to find a hotel to stay in. I was exhausted by now and all the joyful hopes I had entertained in the train had vanished.

As I put down my bundles and began to unpack enough for the night, someone came in. It was Hsu Yi-an, who spoke to me all smiles:

"You must be very tired."

I did not want to have any more to do with him, but for politeness' sake I said as calmly as I could, "Yes, I am rather tired."

"Did you get a ticket for tomorrow's bus?"

"No."

He had the nerve to chuckle with delight. "It was lucky that I was able to get here a bit earlier! There was one ticket left when I got to the bus station. It's my great luck, great luck!" He glanced at me. "That means you won't be able to get home for New Year, though, doesn't it?" He sounded sorry for me, the wretch! As if he cared.

"I've no option, have I?" I said rather crossly.

He seemed to have an idea, and said: "I know someone who works in the bus station. I can ask him to do something for you, if you like."

The way he had behaved, knocking down an old lady and then refusing to make up for it, came back to me. I felt so disgusted at him that I felt I could accept nothing from such a man. In fact, I nearly said just that. He saw that something was up, and went away, rather embarrassed.

I had a bath and went to bed. Just after I'd got in there was a knock on the door again. "Who's there?" I asked.

"Me!" It was a man's voice.

"That's that horrid Hsu Yi-an again!" I thought to myself. I was fed up with him. "I've gone to bed already," I called. "Tell me tomorrow if there's really anything."

Whoever it was hesitated a minute and then, probably realizing from the tone of my voice what sort of mood I was in, went away.

I suddenly thought that the voice did not sound like Hsu Yi-an's. It would be terrible if I'd spoken like that to the wrong person! I hurriedly got up and went out, calling: "Wait a moment!"

It was the young man in the cotton-padded jacket. He saw that I had got straight out of bed, and said apologetically: "I'm sorry to have disturbed you."

He would not come in but stood in the doorway. "I only wanted to know whether you want to go to Tsanghsien," he said. "Did you get a bus ticket for tomorrow?"

I stared at him, completely taken aback by his thoughtfulness.

"I am going there myself," he explained. "I failed to get a ticket so I thought I'd see how many others are in the same position. If we can get twenty-five people together we can ask the station to run an extra bus, and all get home for New Year."

I was beside myself with joy. "Yes!" I said. "I do want to get to Tsanghsien and I couldn't get a ticket. It's very kind of you to bother, but won't it be too much trouble for you?"

"Don't call me kind yet," he said with a grin. "I'm not at all sure that I can do it. Anyhow I'll do my best."

Off he went and I heard him going to the other rooms one by one. I hurriedly got dressed again and ran after him. "Can't I help you?" I said. "Let's do it together." He looked at me. "Aren't you pretty worn out with that long walk? Hadn't you better rest?"

"But it's not only your worry," I said. "I should do my part too."

I insisted strongly and he gave in. "All right, then," he agreed. "You see how many people in this hotel want tickets and I'll go to the other hotels. I'll be back here at eight." I was glad he let me help.

He came back sharp at eight, his face beaming with triumph. "It's all right!" he burst out directly he saw me, "I've already got more than twenty from the big hotels alone. That was enough, so I didn't go to the small inns. I'm going to go to the bus station now to see what they will do. Tomorrow, with any luck, we'll all get home."

"I'm coming with you," I said, putting on my coat and muffler.

"Don't bother: there's no need, I'm sure. I can manage. It's so cold out. Why don't you stay in the warm?"

I wasn't having this, either, and managed to make him agree that I could go with him.

It was really like winter outside, with a bitter wind which made us shiver. Hardly anyone was out. We talked as we went along. I told him about my family and said what great joy my coming home would give to my mother. His family, it seemed, were peasants, and had joined a co-op this year. They'd had a good harvest. He himself had been away from home for years now, and his parents, too, longed to see him. He was longing to see them and his brother and sister. He had written some time back at the beginning of winter to tell them he would be back for New Year. There would be a fine feast ready, he knew, with all his favourite dishes, and the whole family united again. He had got a week's leave. He figured that he would need two days each way for the journey, and an extra day stuck here would mean only two days at home. Many of the others here too, he said, had the same problem. No bus would mean a lot of disappointment.

We reached the ticket office. It was long after office hours, but we just opened the door and went in. Several men were there playing cards by the fire. They looked rather annoyed at being interrupted by two unexpected visitors. We told them what we had come about, and one of them, a thin fellow, turned round to us. Looking sideways, he said: "The actual comrade in charge is not here, but I can tell you the answer. There's not going to be an extra bus; we've not a single bus in the garage."

"Well, if there isn't a bus, a lorry will do — any sort of thing. You know. . . ."

"I know, I know! But our lorries are only for goods."

It was the thin man's turn to deal. As he did so he threw a few words to us over his shoulder. "Lorries carry only goods, not people,"

he reiterated. "Anyway, there are so many people wanting transport, another three buses wouldn't be enough."

"Can't you even consider the matter?" pleaded my friend.

"There's nothing I can do. For goodness' sake stop worrying us." He picked up his hand and turned his whole mind to the game.

"Look here, comrade, can't we see the comrade who is in charge?" besought my friend, still unwilling to give up hope.

"There's nothing he can do either. Leave us alone, can't you?" — The thin man was fast losing his temper. "We are off duty now and he's gone home."

We trudged back to the hotel, thoroughly discouraged. The north wind seemed to be more piercing than ever, in spite of the fact that our hearts were burning with rage.

"Rot! 'Our lorries will not carry men! Damn them!" said my new friend. "Why shouldn't they? What are they for, anyway?"

I thought of Hsu Yi-an. Hadn't he said that he knew somebody in the bus station? There ought still be some hope if we could get round this man.

Directly we got back to the hotel we went and found Hsu Yi-an and asked for his help. He half shut his eyes, and said as though he didn't care at all, "If the situation's like this, I don't see that I can help. They have their difficulties too, I suppose."

"But we didn't see the responsible comrade," said my new friend. "The fellows there paid no attention to our request, it's true, but I can't believe that it's so hopeless as they make out."

It wasn't really late but Hsu Yi-an yawned, leaned lazily back, and looked out of the window. After a long pause, he said, in what he obviously meant to be a final tone, "Well, if there's no bus, you'll just have to make up your mind to stay here another day, then."

This was not what we expected from him. We walked away, downhearted. I suddenly felt thoroughly chilled, physically and at heart. I lay down on the sofa. We both lapsed into silence. I was frankly homesick, missing my mother. Oh, how I wanted to spend the New Year with her! Only yesterday it seemed that this joy was within my reach but now it had vanished away like a dream. My heart ached at the thought of spending the festival alone in this strange town.

My friend said nothing. I did not know what he was thinking about. He did not look as though he shared my feelings, exactly. He lit a cigarette, now and then casting a sympathetic glance at me or frowning. He seemed to be deep in thought. His cigarette glowed irregularly as he drew hard on it, and was reflected in his eyes, full of resentment and rage.

"It seems there's nothing we can do now!" I said, trying to smile.

He answered me nothing but ran over to the telephone and dialled the operator.

"Hello! I want to be put through to the director's office at the bus station," he said. He turned to me and said, "I've just thought we may be able to reach him by telephone."

I went over to the telephone and stood beside him tensely. I could hear the phone ringing at the other end.

"May I speak to the director?"

"Who is it speaking?"

My friend paused, as if thinking what to say.

"Tell him, just an ordinary passenger." He emphasized "ordinary passenger."

"What do you want him for?"

"It's very urgent. Please put me through."

There was that in his voice which told his listener that the matter was important.

"Oh," the man at the other end yielded after hesitating a little. "Hold on. I'll fetch him for you."

My friend's face brightened. "See!" he said. "We were unable to see him personally but we can reach him by telephone. That's queer. There's something wrong with this set-up." He broke off—I guessed he had heard the director coming. He spoke into the receiver again in his slow, clear voice.

"That you, director? Good evening! I am just an ordinary passenger. I would like to make a request to you on behalf of twenty-five of us. The day after tomorrow is New Year's Day and everyone is anxious to spend it in their homes. We have all been away from our families for a long time. We are dying to see our dear ones. But there is no bus. Director, can't you find a way out for us and help us to this joy? We'd be for ever grateful. Director, please think it over and see if you can't put on an extra bus."

There was no answer for what seemed ages. I hoped the director was thinking it over! I looked at my friend. He was sweating with anxiety.

He could bear to wait no longer and spoke again.

"I know you have your own difficulties, with so many people traveling and not enough buses, and I realize you are overworked. But I'm sure that many people have already passed through here without trouble all through the year. Can't you let one last group of passengers, the last in 1955, go home happily for New Year? You will be able to say with pride that you really did a good job!"

At last there was an answer: "All right, I'll go over to the dispatch office and see what can be done. Can you come over?"

"Oh yes! Rather!" My friend was overjoyed. He jammed the receiver down, whipped up his cotton-padded jacket and ran out.

"I'm coming too," I shouted.

"No, there's no need! It's nearly ten o'clock. I shall have to run and you'll never keep up with me."

He was away out of sight down the dark street.

He came back at eleven and fairly bounced into my room. "We can go home for New Year!" he said. "The ticket office will open tomorrow at five a.m." He was red in the face with pleasure and his eyes shone.

I jumped up and grabbed him, whirling him round in my joy. He broke away, beaming, and hurried off to notify the other would-be passengers. I heard him phoning the other hotels.

"That you, Su Hung? We've got a bus! You'll have to be at the ticket office at 5 a.m. Be sure you don't miss it." And, "Hello! Is that Huang Chih-min? Good news! We can go home tomorrow after all. They've laid on a big bus. You'll have to get the ticket at 5. Mind you get up in time!"

We went off next morning to the ticket office in good time, but there was already a queue. Some of them had been there since 3 a.m., we found. My friend hurried off to see if everyone was there.

All went well. I bought my precious ticket, and my heart flew on ahead again to my home. "Oh, mother," I murmured, "I'll be seeing you soon."

The bus filled up. At half past seven the driver made ready to start. I looked round for my friend. He was sitting by himself on the waiting-room bench smoking moodily.

"Come on, quick!" I yelled anxiously.

He saw me and came over. "I had no luck. I didn't get a ticket."

"What?" I was astonished.

"I was at the end of the queue," he said. "There were more people than we expected. I only counted them from the big hotels, and quite a few turned up from the small inns. There were thirty-four people altogether—and thirty-two places. I was one of the unlucky two." He sounded sad, but calm.

I stared at him, unable to say a word.



"Anyway, I hope you and your mother will have a very happy New Year!" he said. "I'll have my New Year here with the other unlucky one." He managed a smile as we shook hands.

I was so taken aback I had no words. After all that he had done! "No, it isn't fair!" I broke out. "You must have my place." I grabbed my luggage and tried to get out of the bus.

"No, don't be silly." He waved me back frantically. The bus started with a jerk, leaving me still in.

I hung out of the window, and saw him waving to me.

"Goodbye. . . ." I cried at the top of my voice: What a damn fool I was! I didn't even know his name! "Goodbye, my dear friend."

The other passengers in the bus looked at me and laughed. I didn't care, but hung out of the window until we had gone too far to see him.

I sat back. The bus was taking me nearer and nearer home. But my mind now was in the town I had just left, with the hotel, the bus station and a young man in a cotton-padded jacket.



Translated by Chang Su-chu

HIS FIRST PRIZE

HSIN JU

The business of the day was over, and the younger salesmen had all left the shop. But two fluorescent lights were still burning brightly in a corner by the right-hand counter, where some ten or so people were sitting grouped around a desk. Among them was Tsao Ping-kang.

It was the first time Tsao Ping-kang had ever taken part in such a meeting. That afternoon, Liu Pin-hsiang, the sales manager, had come to him with the air of one who brings good news, clapping him on the shoulder and smiling broadly.

"We're going to hold a trade union section meeting this evening," he had said, "and we want you to come along."

This invitation, ordinary enough in itself, carried special meaning for Tsao Ping-kang. For more than twenty years, he had been a private wholesale merchant. And until today, the only meetings he had attended with the workers were the labour-capital consultative conferences. At that time, he represented the owners, and the workers all addressed him as "Mister" Tsao. This was how they had always addressed him. But now, whenever he heard the word "mister" he felt distinctly uncomfortable. In fact, he had long wanted to get rid of this bourgeois label. Last autumn, when the government had reorganized the wholesale trade in hardware along socialist lines, the role of the private dealers had come to an end. Their stock, capital, buildings and other business assets were transferred to state ownership with proper compensation to the former owners, and they and their employees began to work in the state companies. Tsao Ping-kang had come to this state hardware shop as a consultant. That was less than a month ago, and now he was asked to attend the trade union meeting. Already, he was being drawn towards the working class! He could hardly contain his excitement.

Now, as he sat in the meeting, he listened with rapt attention to all that Liu Pin-hsiang and others had to say about the sales plan. Each member of the group showed as much concern for the success of the plan as they would for their own family. Why should this be so? Before Tsao Ping-kang could puzzle it out, he saw a familiar face rise to speak.

It was the young salesman Little Chen. This young man was a tiger for work. No one knew where he got all his energy. There he would be, behind the counter from morning till night, surrounded by customers. Off-duty, you would see him helping the cashiers tot up the day's takings, or giving the stock-keeper a hand in checking the goods. One incident stood out with exceptional clarity in Tsao Ping-kang's mind. . . .

It was Tsao Ping-kang's first day in the shop. Business was brisk, and the shop manager asked him to help behind the counter. Customers were crowding forward, waving their order forms and shouting for attention. A middle-aged man, with a bag slung over his shoulder and sweat pouring down his face, edged his way to the front.

"Have you got any brass sheets?" he shouted.

"Yes," answered the young assistant, "but they've got some blemishes on them. Would you like to go out to the back with me and have a look at them?"

The customer looked displeased. "You're a state company," he retorted. "We trust you! Why should I have to see them?"

The assistant flushed with embarrassment. "Eh . . . eh, you don't see what I mean," he stammered. "I'm only afraid these sheets mightn't do for your job."

The customer quietened down and followed him out to the back.

The young assistant was Little Chen. Tsao Ping-kang stood and watched the scene, dumbfounded. He had never seen such a thing in all the years he had been in the trade. How could people expect articles of steel, iron, copper and tin—the usual stock of the hardware trade—to be free of rust or blemish? In the past, when they had come across a fussy customer, they would say: “As long as the quality is good, the surface spots don’t matter!” Otherwise how could one sell anything? It had never been like this—that the salesman should do the worrying instead of the customer. Then he remembered. Of course, the shop was no longer the Tsao Ping-kang Ironmongery, but the State Hardware Shop. He recalled something he had once heard in a report at a meeting of the Federation of Industry and Commerce — that the aim of state trading was to serve both the makers and the consumers. At that time he had brushed the statement aside as too obvious a fact to be worthy of mention. Now, however, he was beginning to see how the idea worked out in real life. The incident left a deep impression upon him.

Usually Little Chen spoke quite loudly, but today his voice was so low that Tsao Ping-kang had to lean forward to catch what he was saying.

“. . . After lunch I went to the shelf to straighten things up,” he was saying, “and I knocked a drill on to the floor and it broke. It was sheer carelessness on my part. But then I thought to myself that after all nobody had seen me, and I might be able to write it off as broken in shop use. But the more I thought of it, the worse I felt. The drill was state property, so if I had broken it, I should have paid for it. I don’t know what you must think of me, but I know I’ll deserve everything you say.”

As Tsao Ping-kang sat listening, he was filled with deep respect for Little Chen. Suddenly, something he had done earlier in the day flashed across his mind. And when he compared it to Little Chen’s experience, his heart started to flutter. Of what the following speakers said, he heard not a word.

The shop steward looked up at the electric clock; it was almost nine. He wanted to bring the meeting to a close. But Tsao Ping-kang had not said a word. The shop steward wondered what he thought of it all.

“Well, Tsao, old chap,” he said, turning to him. “Do you have anything to say?”

On hearing his name, Tsao Ping-kang woke up with a start.

“That’s all right, I have nothing to say!” he said, hurriedly.

That night, he lay in his redwood bed, tossing and turning. Sleep seemed far away. It was as though his brain was a cinema screen, with scenes flashing before his eyes. When such a keen and responsible person as Little Chen does something wrong, like breaking a drill, he feels duty-bound to own up to it and pay for the damage . . . so his thoughts ran on. Surely that is how a worker today should behave? What a difference

between him and myself — a capitalist, although I'm now working in the state company, too. . . .

On the day of the trade union meeting, he had happened to pass by the sales counter, and had caught sight of a bench-cutter — part of some old stock — lying in its usual place on a shelf. It was for cutting steel sheets, but it was so rusty it could hardly be used. Many a customer had asked for a bench-cutter, but when this was offered, they would shake their heads. Once someone thought of buying it, and wanted to try it out. But when he pulled with all his force and could not even open it, he burst out laughing. "In this condition," he said, "it'll never cut a steel sheet. I doubt if it'll even cut a potato!" Tsao Ping-kang came across it every day. He had enough experience to know it was a fairly good tool, barring the rust. If it could be cleaned up, it would quickly be sold. He ran his eye over it again and again. The longer he gazed, the more he felt like doing something about it. In the past, in his own shop, whenever he had seen a chance of turning something to good account, he would immediately set about it. But now it would never do, he thought. This is a state shop. . . . If I do it well, there'll be nothing said . . . but if I make a mess of it, where will it end? Best to say nothing to anyone and try it on the quiet. If it turns out all right, I'll tell them, but if not, I can slip it back on the shelf and no one will be any the wiser. . . .

So he made up his mind. When everyone had gone for dinner, he took a tin, filled it half-full with kerosene, and dropped the bench-cutter in. He meant to leave it until the evening, when he would be able to tap the screws loose with a hammer, take it to pieces and rub the rust off the parts one by one. Once reassembled, he thought, it would be as good as new. But later in the afternoon the unexpected invitation to attend the trade union meeting put the matter right out of his mind. After supper, he had gone straight to the meeting.

Little Chen's experience reminded him of what he had done. The bench-cutter was still in the kerosene tin! He had meant well, but if anything went wrong and people came to know of it, he would not only have to repay the damage, but also to own up to what he had done, like Little Chen. And for him, that would probably not be enough. Little Chen is a worker and when he makes a mistake, all he has to do is to say so frankly, in the trade union section meeting. But if I make a mistake, people will point at me and curse me: "You, you are nothing but a private trader!" If I disgrace myself publicly, how can I ever stay on and work here? How will I ever hold my head up again? At this point, he broke into such a sweat that he dampened his pillow. Clenching his fists, he pummelled his head and groaned. At my age how could I be so stupid? How could I let myself forget the old saying, "It is better to keep quiet than to take action." But it's lucky no one knows anything about it yet.

Lying in bed, Tsao Ping-kang mused upon all that had happened, and decided that early the following morning he would put things right.

At dawn the next day, he was up. His wife peered at him with half-opened eyes. "Why are you up so early?" she asked.

"I've got to see to something in the shop," he replied shortly, and walked out.

As he left the house, he remembered that the iron shutters of the shop would not yet be open. To kill time, he took a couple of turns around the block and had a bowl of bean milk at a pedlar's stall. He was too agitated to eat. As soon as he finished the milk, he rushed to the shop. It was not yet seven by his watch. He hastened to the counter. There was nobody around except a messenger, cleaning up. Ignoring him, Tsao Ping-kang fished the bench-cutter out of the kerosene and put it back on the shelf. Having done this, he went to his desk, poured himself a glass of water, lit up a cigarette and settled himself in his swivel chair to read the newspapers.

His sense of relief was only marred by a slight tinge of regret for the bench-cutter. Before long, he was fully occupied with the day's business. It needed all his attention, so he tried to put the bench-cutter out of his mind. This was easier said than done, however, and he finally pushed aside the pile of papers and charts and rose to take a walk.

As he paced the floor, he heard a voice at the spare-parts counter opposite:

"Comrade, I'm from the Ta Ta Ship-building Yard. We want lead and asbestos washers with a six, seven and ten centimetre diameter. Do you have any?"

"Six, seven and ten centimetres? I'm sorry, we have none in stock."

"No? What am I to do, then? I've been to so many shops and there are none to be had. I really did hope I'd find them here. If you haven't got any, our job's going to be held up. Is there anything you can do to help us out?"

It was true that they had none in these sizes. But Tsao Ping-kang knew that in the storehouse there were some of a different size, all tangled up in bunches. In the trade, it had always been common practice to undo them and make them up into other sizes, small into big, or vice versa. Although not so good as the new, they were usable; and by this processing, vastly greater profits could be made. Tsao Ping-kang was well aware of this practice, but hesitated to speak. After some moments, seeing the disappointment on the customer's face, he finally spoke up.

"Indeed, you won't find any in the size you want, not in Shanghai, anyway. But it's always possible to make small sizes up into bigger ones. However, we don't know what our heads would have to say to that."

"You don't have to. If you know how to do it, go right ahead. I will back you up!" It was the sales manager, who had come up unseen behind Tsao Ping-kang.

"Yes, do, we need them . . ." said the shipyard buyer, and he was about to say how many he wanted when Tsao Ping-kang interrupted him.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry! Before you make up your mind, I'll make you a couple of samples, so you can see what they're like." He told himself that this time he would not be rash again. If the samples turned out all right, he would take the big order; if they were no good, no one could accuse him of wasting material. Whatever he did, he must take great care to avoid making a fool of himself before others!

The ship-building buyer bid him a warm goodbye. As Tsao Ping-kang returned to his desk, Liu Pin-hsiang, the sales manager, brought him a great stack of documents.

"Here's all the stuff we have on lead and asbestos washers," he announced. "You'll find everything you want here, the year of their production, function, composition. There're also some reports on laboratory tests. You may need some of them for reference when you get to work on the washers."

Liu was one of those people who could get along well with everyone. Young and full of confidence, he was always ready with a helping hand or a word of encouragement to anyone in difficulties. One day, the whole staff, from the manager to the messengers, were doing the spring cleaning. Tsao Ping-kang also plunged into the work in high spirits. As he and a young assistant were about to shift a piece of machinery, Liu ran towards them. "Put it down! Put it down!" he shouted. Startled, Tsao Ping-kang blinked his eyes.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You, with your weak heart, how can you carry such a heavy thing? You must remember, now you're working here, you're a state employee, and I'm responsible for your health!"

Tsao Ping-kang drew a deep breath and lowered his burden.

In all his twenty years as a private merchant, never had anyone other than his own parents shown so much concern for him. A new warmth crept into his heart and the constraint which he normally felt in the presence of the sales manager seemed to vanish.

As to making up the washers, Tsao Ping-kang was an expert. Taking along the tangled bundles, he went straight to his old place — the Hung Chang Asbestos Factory. Within a day, the samples were ready — in six, seven and ten centimetres. Tsao Ping-kang telephoned the buyer to come and see them, and the man was so pleased he at once asked to have a contract signed.

But Tsao Ping-kang was cautious. Since the buyer was not the one who would use them, how could his judgement be relied upon?

"Wait a moment," he said. "These are not the original things, you know, and you don't know yet whether you can use them. You'd better take them back to one of your old workshop hands and let him try them

out on the actual cylinder. Then you can see how they go. If they're O.K., you can come and sign the contract."

Before long he got his answering call. The old worker had tested them out, and pronounced them satisfactory. Five reels in each size were wanted.

Now the work began in earnest. Tsao Ping-kang had it all worked out to his own satisfaction. There are no such washers on the market, so the price is not fixed, he reasoned. We may charge a fair sum and make a tidy little profit for all to see. But when he spoke to the sales manager and suggested his price, Liu smiled. "You've done a fine job with the lead and asbestos washers," he said. "But as for the price, it's already been settled by the pricing section." As he spoke, he handed him a piece of paper. Tsao Ping-kang looked at it, stunned. It was only half of what he had suggested.

"We have to charge according to the costs," explained Liu. "We're a trading enterprise, of course, and we must expect to make some profit for the state. But as we're a *state* trading enterprise, we have to keep our feet on the ground and remember that we're here to serve the consumers as well as the makers."

Tsao Ping-kang was embarrassed. He could see there was a big gap between his outlook and that of the sales manager. Handing back the slip, he said in a low voice, "Yes, that's about a fair price."

Two months passed. The weather was getting warmer and the spring breezes blew through the windows and doors of the shop. With the backing of the management and the help of the workers, Tsao Ping-kang was bringing all his knowledge of the "tricks of the trade" to bear on the problem of dead stock. Gradually he came to feel that it was, after all, the same old trade in which he had been engaged for so many years. And yet there was all the difference between today and yesterday in the purpose of what he was doing now and what he used to do. Although he lived quite close, only a few blocks from the shop, he found himself preferring to stay back and have his lunch in the shop rather than go home.

All this time, he still kept remembering the bench-cutter. Even though he knew his misgivings and fears were groundless, the thought of it nagged at him like an old wound. Several times he thought of confiding to Liu, but when it came to the point, he would fall back in embarrassment. Every time he walked by the counter, the bench-cutter drew his eyes like a magnet. It was getting worse and worse, entirely covered with dust and splotches of rust. If it was left like this, it would certainly finish as scrap.

Some time later, a socialist emulation campaign was launched in the shop, putting everybody on their toes. One day, while Tsao Ping-kang and Hsiao Chu-huang, a former manager of a small hardware shop, were discussing how to remake the steel rulers previously imported from Britain, the sales manager dashed in with a radiant face.

"I've come to congratulate you!" he said, beaming at Tsao Ping-kang.

"What for? Am I invited to attend the trade union meeting again?"

"No, not that. The Awards Committee has just announced that you have won a cash prize for doing so well with the old stock." He paused. "Your name will go up on the honour board," he added.

A prize? I'm to be given a prize? Tsao Ping-kang was incredulous. He stared at Liu, and only when he read the assurance on his face, could he believe it was true.

Such a possibility had never entered Tsao Ping-kang's head. And speaking of honour, surely he could never come in for this? It was only three months since he had started work in the state company. He had come to the state shop, yes. But could he say that he was really wholeheartedly for it? So many times he looked at things through his old capitalist spectacles and judged matters from a private trader's point of view. Now he was being given a prize, the first he had ever won in his life! Surely, others could not know him as well as he knew himself.

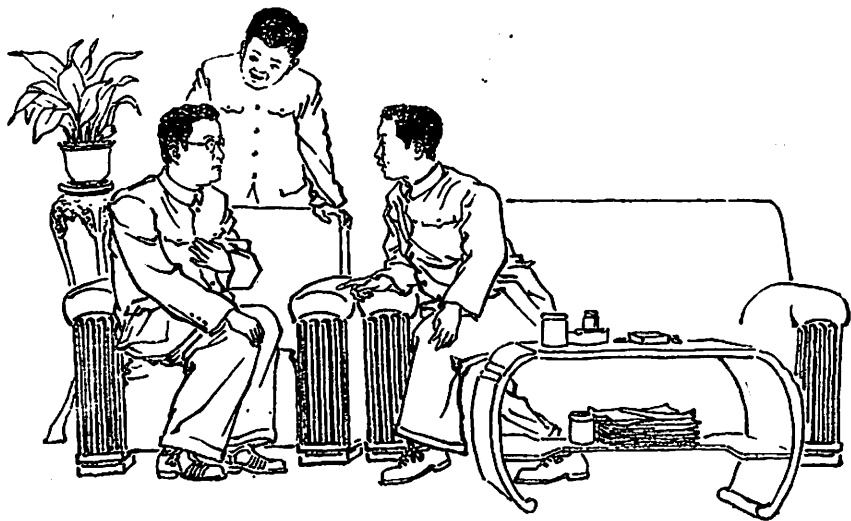
Standing up abruptly, Tsao Ping-kang pulled Liu by the arm towards the manager's office.

The manager was involved in a discussion with the trade union chairman and several other people. When he saw Tsao Ping-kang enter, however, he greeted him and invited him to sit down.

Tsao Ping-kang started to speak. "You know, I should not be given a prize."

"Why not? This was something that was decided after collective discussion and the decision is based on mass opinion."

Summoning up his courage, Tsao Ping-kang told him about the incident with the bench-cutter. Coming to the end of his story, he said,



"I knew I could do it, but I didn't, I left it to go rusty. This was very wrong, so I don't deserve a prize."

The manager heard him through to the end.

"It's very good that you see things this way," he said, sincerely. "But there's really no problem, you see, because you know where you went wrong. And you have such rich experience in the hardware trade! This can help us enormously. If you're willing to use your knowledge for the benefit of our work here, you are helping the country as a whole."

Tsao Ping-kang was tongue-tied. He felt that the usual polite thanks would be quite out of place.

In a day or two the bench-cutter, shining brightly and complete with new screws, was standing proudly on the counter waiting for its new owner to take it away and put it to work.

Translated by Chang Su-chu

China's Classical and Modern Literature

Editor's note: These are two of the reports made by Chinese delegates to the Conference of Asian Writers, held in New Delhi, India, from December 25 to December 28, 1956.

THE FINE TRADITIONS OF CHINESE LITERATURE

YEH SHENG-TAO

If we compare literature and art to flowers, we must admit that they are flowers of a unique type, for the best of them retain their fragrance and colour for thousands of years. Every country has a rich heritage of literature and art which, combined, make a beautiful garden for the whole of mankind. When we enjoy these immortal blossoms which have sprung from our own soil, and reflect that they form a part of the priceless heritage of all humanity, our hearts brim over with gratitude and admiration for our ancestors who created and cherished these works of art. If only men had devoted themselves solely to creative work and never committed acts of vandalism, we could look back upon history without regret! All of us who work in the field of literature want to build up and defend civilization, and our prime need is for a peaceful environment to ensure that culture will not be destroyed. We believe that, by introducing our own literary traditions in order to promote mutual understanding between different peoples, we can all make a great contribution to human culture, as well as to world peace and the future happiness of mankind.

In very ancient times China began to create her own civilization. By the Shang dynasty, which was founded in about the seventeenth century B.C., we already possessed written records, not many of which have come down to us, however. Apart from seven historical documents reputed to be written during the Shang dynasty, all we have left are some simple prose inscriptions on tortoise shells, bones and bronze vessels.* In this brief outline of China's literary traditions we shall start, therefore, with the *Book of Songs* which appeared considerably later.

*The Shang people used bones and shells for divination, and inscribed the result on them. During the last half century more than one hundred thousand oracle bones and shells have been unearthed, which provide us with most reliable data for the study of Shang culture.

The *Book of Songs* is the earliest collection of poetry in China. It was compiled in about the fifth century B.C. Nearly all the three hundred and five poems in this anthology are by anonymous writers, the earliest dating from the eleventh and the latest from about the sixth century B.C. Among these early poems are short epics, political satires, songs for all manner of ceremonies, and folk songs which reflect the lives of people in different walks of life. These folk songs, which form the main bulk of the collection, are particularly rich in content and varied in form. In them we hear the authentic voice of the people, singing of life, showing us reality as seen through their eyes, describing their labour and happiness, love and hatred, and thus revealing their character, wisdom and genius. In general, these songs are simple yet profoundly beautiful, easy to follow yet expressing great depth of emotion, and they reflect the people's simple mode of life and the purity of their feelings. Other songs in this collection give us a fairly truthful picture of the society of that time. The greatest of our later poets were inspired by the realism of the *Book of Songs*, its concise and vivid language, and rich variety of forms; thus we have always considered the *Book of Songs* as the source of the finest traditions of Chinese literature.

In the second half of the fourth century B.C., a new form of poetry — Chu poetry — appeared in the kingdom of Chu in present-day Central China. Chu Yuan, who used this form, is the first great Chinese poet whose name is known to us. Chu Yuan was a nobleman in the kingdom of Chu. Since he had his own ideals and his views on politics differed from those of the king and other nobles, he was banished from court and finally drowned himself. His most famous work is the long poem *Li Sao*, remarkable for its rich imaginative power and passion. Readers are moved by the poet's love for his country, his perseverance in seeking his ideal, and his refusal to compromise with the forces of evil.

By the time of Chu Yuan, prose writing had also developed to a great extent. This was the period when rival schools of thought were contending, and the writings of this age are most rich and varied. The rhetoric of Mencius and the inventive brilliance of Chuang Tzu had the greatest influence on later prose writers. *Chuang Tzu* contains many remarkable parables and fables, and is the most outstanding of the prose writings of this period.

More than one hundred years after Chu Yuan's death, the great Han dynasty prose writer, Ssuma Chien (145-87 B.C.), devoted his life to writing the *Historical Records*. Many of the biographies in this great historical work are also great literature, having excellent characterization and depth of feeling. For this reason the *Historical Records* occupies a most important place in the history of Chinese literature. The characters described by Ssuma Chien are not only emperors, princes, generals and ministers, but men of all classes. He sympathized with the assassins and gallant outlaws who justly opposed tyrants, and with such leaders of

peasant revolts as Chen Sheng and Wu Kuang. He was against the heartless officials who were tools of the rulers, and occasionally even made a thrust at the emperor. From this we can see how close he was to the people.

During the Han dynasty, the Imperial Conservatory of Music collected and edited many folk songs, some of which have been handed down to us. Among these we find narrative poems which touch upon the social problems of the time. The long narrative poem *The Peacock Flies Southeast*, dating from the end of the Han dynasty, represents the highest achievement in this genre. This poem was popular for several centuries before it appeared in a collection of poems entitled *Yu-tai-hsin-yung* (new poems from the jade pavilion) during the Chen dynasty (557-589 A.D.). The artistic perfection and attention to detail in this poem show that it was polished by scholars, but it still retains the characteristics of folk poetry. *The Peacock Flies Southeast* tells of two young lovers at the end of the Han dynasty, whose happiness was destroyed by the feudal system, so that they were forced to commit suicide to express their protest. The story of their love and marriage reflects the revolt against the feudal system and feudal morality, and won sympathy on this account.

Under the influence of folk poetry, towards the end of the Han dynasty and during the Three Kingdoms period — that is, the end of the second century and the beginning of the third — a new form of poetry arose with five characters to a line. This form is not found in the earlier *Book of Songs* and Chu poems. We still have a number of these poems by anonymous writers; they are usually called “ancient poems,” and include the famous *Nineteen Ancient Poems*. There are also many poems of this type by known authors, of whom the most famous is Tsao Chih (192-232 A.D.). Many poems of this period reflect the spirit of the age very clearly, and they are written for the most part in a tragic and heroic vein. This is because their authors grieved over the constant wars of that time and all the suffering they entailed, and aspired to achieve great deeds and pacify the empire. The poems of Tsao Chih and other outstanding poets of this period are tragic without being mournful, magnificent without being effeminate, and have been taken as models of this type of verse by later poets.

The great poet of the fourth century, Tao Yuan-ming (365-427 A.D.), lived a hermit's life and tilled his own land. Because he detested the dark politics of that time and the superficially splendid but corrupt ruling class, he expressed his passive resistance by living as a recluse. He spent many years in the country as a farmer, and through his own toil gained an understanding of life. His poems describe a country life, contentment with poverty, and a Utopia where there are neither rulers nor exploitation. He also wrote, however, poems on politics, from which we can see that he had not forgotten the actual society of his day. His poetic style is natural and his language simple, in the best tradition of ancient Chinese

poetry, unlike the ornate verses of his contemporaries which were loaded with classical allusions.

Buddhism came to China from India in 67 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty, and from that time onwards monks from Central Asia did not cease to travel to China to propagate Buddhism and translate Buddhist canons into Chinese. At the end of the fourth century, the famous Indian monk, Kumarajiva, who was born in Kucha, came to China and translated more Buddhist sutras.* Thus Buddhist lore became widely known in China and exercised a considerable influence on Chinese literature. This was the time when short anecdotes and tales were beginning to appear in large numbers, and the fact that many of these tales contain strange and fanciful episodes is attributed to the introduction of Buddhist legends. We naturally find many Buddhist stories retold and many Buddhist ideas in Chinese literature. And our literary forms were also influenced, as in the case of the "new poetry" which arose in the fifth and sixth centuries and laid stress on tones. This new form of verse arose owing to the introduction of four tones in Chinese and, according to some Chinese scholars, the four tones came into use in conjunction with the translation of Buddhist sutras.

In the Tang dynasty (618-907), every branch of culture flourished. All forms of literature developed, and many excellent works appeared, surpassing all previous ages.

The greatest literary achievement of this period was poetry. About fifty thousand poems have been handed down to us, and the names and works of more than two thousand three hundred poets are known today. Li Pai (701-762) and Tu Fu (712-770) had outstanding genius. They continued the fine traditions of previous ages, and were also innovators. From the poems of Li Pai, we can see his sympathy for the common people of his age and his dissatisfaction with contemporary politics. His indignation was aroused by social injustice and the lack of opportunity to develop his genius. He scorned the great and mighty, laughed at the vulgar, and sang of fairies, wine and China's beautiful land. In his works we find a passionate quest for ideals and a demand for full freedom for the individual — the whole tone of his poems is romantic and individualistic. Tu Fu, who lived during the same period, had an unhappy life and shared the sorrows of the people. He makes a more penetrating criticism of feudal society, and sings consciously for the people. By the use of such strong contrasts as:

*Behind vermilion gates, wine and meat grow stale;
By the roadside lie bones of men dead of cold and hunger —*

*Kumarajiva translated over three hundred volumes of Buddhist sutras, the most well known being the Vajrapana or Diamond Sutra, the Lotus Sutra and the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa.

he exposes the most fundamental conflict of feudal society. He had deep sympathy for the working people who created wealth by their labour yet had to go cold and hungry, and he scourged the nobility who robbed others to indulge in dissipation and luxury. Since Tu Fu's poems give such a truthful reflection of society as well as of the thoughts and feelings of the people, and show such consummate skill and variety, their influence on his contemporaries and on later Chinese poets has never been surpassed. The poet Pai Chu-yi (772-846), who lived a little later, was Tu Fu's spiritual successor and declared that literature should be topical and serve a definite purpose. He wrote many brilliant satires which go to the heart of the problems of his age.

During the Tang dynasty, short poems consisting of four lines with five or seven characters to each line were very popular, because the songs of that time were usually in this form. Later, as new melodies were composed and a regular metre ceased to fit the music, there arose another type of song called *tzu*, with irregular lines. Some of the new melodies were folk tunes, others came from abroad. Music introduced at that time from India, Persia, Burma and other countries, thus had an indirect influence on our literature. Some *tzu* tunes, indeed, had names which appear to have been of foreign origin.*

The prose writer and poet Han Yu (768-824) was the leader of the "classical prose movement" which was an important factor in the reform of prose. Its aim was to substitute for the ornate and superficial style and parallelisms then popular the simple, straightforward style used by the ancients. However, Han Yu did not simply copy the ancient style, but laid emphasis on doing away with stereotyped phraseology, and declared that prose must be eloquent and fluent. Moreover, he deliberately introduced the natural cadence of everyday speech into written prose; thus he was developing and not merely imitating the ancient style, for his prose was, in fact, a new type of prose, although it was known as "classical." It became the main prose style in China.

In the Tang dynasty many good stories were also written, rather in the manner of modern short stories, although they were in classical Chinese. These were called *chuan chi* (romantic tales). The form of some of these early tales shows traces of the influence of Buddhist sutras in the use of both prose and verse and the way in which one story leads to another.**

Another new literary form called *pien wen* (chantefables)*** in the Tang dynasty bears an even closer affinity to Buddhist literature. Here

*According to some scholars, *pu-sa-man*, the name of one tune, is a transliteration of the Iranian word "Mussulman," and *su-mo-cha*, the name of another tune, is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word "Sumaja."

**Chang Tsu's *Fairies' Cave* is an example of a tale in which prose and verse alternate. Wang Tu's *An Old Mirror* is an example of a story within a story.

****Pien wen* has the same meaning as the Sanskrit "Vicitra," and such works bear certain similarities to the "Campu" form in Sanskrit literature.

verse alternates with prose. The earliest of these chantefables were based on Buddhist legends, later they dealt with other topics too. And this prepared the way for the rise of short stories in the vernacular in the Sung dynasty (960-1279). Told by professional story-tellers in public amusement parks, these were known as *hua pen* (story-tellers' scripts). The majority of these excellent tales from the Sung and Yuan dynasties (1279-1368) dealt with popular heroes and folk legends, and many of them are extant today. Written largely in prose, with a small admixture of verse, the vivid freshness of their language far surpasses that of the *pien wen* of the Tang dynasty. From this time onwards the vernacular continued to be used for certain forms of literature, and the classical language ceased to be the only literary language. This was a most important development in the history of Chinese literature.

By the time of Su Tung-po (1036-1101) of the Sung dynasty, further changes had occurred in Chinese poetry. Using the traditional form of verse and the new *tzu* style, Su Tung-po wrote many poems outstanding for their passionate force and straightforward mode of expression. His prose, in the same tradition as that of Han Yu, was the highest achievement of prose writing in the Sung dynasty. After North China was invaded and occupied by the Nuchen Tartars, many expressions of patriotism appeared in Chinese literature. Hsin Chi-chi (1140-1207) was a poet who fought against the invaders and wrote many patriotic poems to arouse the people. Lu Yiu (1125-1210) was another poet who never ceased to look forward to the day when his countrymen should recover their lost territory. He wrote nearly ten thousand poems, in which he displayed his great love for his motherland and its people.

Chinese drama matured comparatively late. Arising in the Tang dynasty, it became widespread and reached its zenith in the Yuan dynasty. The works of more than forty dramatists of the Yuan dynasty remain to us, the most famous of these writers being Kuan Han-ching and Wang Shih-fu. Today we possess about one hundred and seventy complete Yuan dramas, a fraction only of the original number.* Kuan Han-ching's *Snow in Midsummer* and Wang Shih-fu's *The Western Chamber* are two masterpieces of the Yuan drama. *Snow in Midsummer* is the story of a girl who suffered at the hands of usurers, scoundrels and corrupt officials, until finally she was decapitated on a false charge of poisoning. This drama forcefully exposes the corruption and horror of that society, and arouses the readers' indignation. *The Western Chamber* is even better known in China, and indeed throughout the world. It describes a typical love affair between two young people of the feudal landlord class in ancient times, and both its language and plot are excellent. These dramatists just mentioned belonged to North China. In the south another type of drama

*Chung Shih-cheng of the Yuan dynasty records the titles of 458 Yuan dramas. In another early Ming record, 535 Yuan dramas are listed; but most of these have been lost.

existed, the singing in which was set to southern tunes, and this became very popular at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). A famous drama of this type was *The Lute* by Kao Tseh-cheng, in which the heroine suffered greatly under feudal oppression, but showed tremendous courage and determination.

Full length novels written in the vernacular did not reach maturity till after the Yuan dynasty. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin* are the two most famous of our early novels which, originating as story-tellers' tales, were repeatedly polished and rewritten until they became great masterpieces. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* describes the political and military struggles of the period from 184 to 280 A.D., and presents such typical characters as Chuko Liang, Tsao Tsao, Kuan Yu and Chang Fei, who are well known to all Chinese. *Water Margin* describes the failure of the peasant revolt led by Sung Chiang during the time of Emperor Hui Tsung (1101-1125) of the Sung dynasty. It gives a most moving portrayal of the cruelty and corruption of the feudal rulers and the courage and wisdom of the leaders of the peasant revolt, who had popular support. *Pilgrimage to the West*, a novel based on various legends, is also very popular. The author of this novel, Wu Cheng-en (1500-1582), collected many different legends about the Tang dynasty monk Yuan Chuang who went to India in search of Buddhist sutras. Monkey, or Sun Wu-kung, is a well-known character, much loved by the Chinese people. Monkey is brave, cunning, optimistic and dauntless. He plays havoc in Heaven where he fights against the gods, and overcomes countless difficulties to subdue devils and monsters; so it is easy for readers to associate him with the rebellious heroes of real life. Thus although Monkey is an imaginary character, he holds deep realistic significance.

During the sharp clashes between the Chinese and the Manchus at the beginning of the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), the poet and scholar Ku Yen-wu (1613-1682) raised the slogan "Each should feel responsible for the welfare and decline of our land," and tried through his poems to arouse the patriotism and legitimate national pride of his compatriots. The most important work of this period was the historical tragedy of Kung Shang-jen (1648-1718), *Peach Blossom Fan*, which expressed the people's grief and deep longing for another Chinese dynasty like the previous one. This drama did not have the conventional happy ending, but demanded in conclusion how, once the country was conquered, men could enjoy their homes. Pu Sung-ling (1640-1715) wrote many short stories about fox spirits and ghosts, which, published as the *Tales of Liao-chai*, comprise a Chinese "Ocean of Stories" (Kathasaritsagara). Taking existing stories of the miraculous, most of which were folk legends, Pu Sung-ling drew on his own experience and vivid imagination to create these beautiful tales. The *Tales of Liao-chai* is a classic not only because of its excellent plots but, which is more important, because many of the characters depicted are

extremely lifelike and beautiful; and here we find expressions of sympathy for the oppressed and praise for brave and just men. *The Scholars*, a long novel by Wu Ching-tzu (1701-1754), is an exceedingly well-written satire. It pokes fun at the intellectuals who grew stupid and hypocritical through their longing for rank and wealth, when the way to officialdom was through the government examinations. Another great novel, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Tsao Hsueh-chin (1719-1764), is the most mature piece of writing in old China. Its plot centres round the love story of a boy and a girl from the feudal landlord class who sought to realize their ideal of freedom through revolt, and the fortunes of two families are described. There are two hundred and thirty-five men and two hundred and thirteen women characters in this book, which runs to one hundred and twenty chapters; but the last forty chapters were added by a later writer, since Tsao Hsueh-chin did not live to complete the novel. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* gives a most penetrating exposure of the corruption of the feudal landlord class, its hypocrisy and inevitable doom. Although the story deals with two families only, a panorama of a whole society is unfolded before the reader, and the life of a whole age.

After the middle of the nineteenth century, conditions in China changed. With the rise of the people's movement to resist the invasion of Western capitalism and the forces of feudalism, some works were written which reflected the Chinese people's just demands. The poems of Huang Tsun-hsien (1848-1905) are permeated with anti-imperialist sentiments, patriotic feeling and democratic ideas. His poems are extremely forceful, for he broke away from old conventions, and made no attempt to use classical terminology. He thus started a new school of poetry. The famous reformer Liang Chi-chao (1873-1928) advocated a reform of prose. His language is simple, fluent, expressive and deeply moving.

Although the 1911 Revolution overthrew the feudal monarchy, the Chinese people continued to suffer grievous oppression from foreign imperialism and feudalism, and the opposition to these grew ceaselessly. The patriotic May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the new literature of that time, which developed as one front of the people's revolution, were thoroughly anti-feudal and anti-imperialist. Lu Hsun (1881-1936) is our greatest writer since the May Fourth Movement. He inherited the best traditions of ancient Chinese literature, and absorbed many good features of modern European literature. Using literature as a weapon against all reactionary forces and all enemies of the people, he was a national hero on the cultural front. His stories and essays propagate progressive, revolutionary ideas, and show high artistic skill; thus the ideological content and literary form are perfectly integrated.

From this very brief account, in which it has been possible to name only a few of our most important men of letters and their works, we can see that the most outstanding writers of ancient China looked reality in the face, and were concerned with the sufferings of their people and the

destiny of their country. They were fearless in exposing evil, passionate in their search for good; and all their works, to a greater or lesser extent, give a true picture of the age in which they lived, and a faithful expression of the people's demands. We treasure these traditions of Chinese literature. Above all, we prize the great love for their motherland and people, for truth and freedom, which is shown in the works of these brilliant writers.

A traditional love of peace and hatred of war is prominent in Chinese culture. Evidence of this can be found in Chinese literature of all ages, whether it is the work of folk artists or of scholars. Almost all the writers mentioned earlier wrote of the misery caused by war, and condemned the ambitious rulers who gloried in conquest and wished to attack other lands. (The Tang dynasty was a period of wars of conquest, and also a period when there was a great deal of anti-war literature.) Only when China was threatened by foreign invaders, did our writers urge the people to fight against aggression; at no other time did they praise military might. As for the people's love of a peaceful life, this runs through our literature throughout the ages. In addition, we find many descriptions of natural scenery, and few poets indeed failed to write about their love and enjoyment of natural beauty. This is another expression of their love of peace.

Moreover, since our Chinese classical literature was deeply rooted in the lives, feelings and thoughts of our people, it has always reflected our national spirit. The high artistic attainments of our classical literature are often due to the fact that the writers drew nourishment from folk literature. They were inspired by the people's creative spirit; they used folk forms, adapted folk stories, and learned from the language of the people, then perfected these to produce great masterpieces. Many different literary forms and modes of expression in Chinese literature originally came from the people, were adapted and improved upon by writers, and so became standardized. This is almost a general rule.

Chinese literature has also been enriched by what it has absorbed from foreign cultures. Changes have been made in form as well as in content through the introduction of foreign forms and ideas, as we pointed out earlier. Thus the ability to absorb the best of other cultures is also a part of our tradition.

Since China came into contact with Western civilization, Western literature has exercised a considerable influence on our own. Those writers who had a deep understanding of our own culture and could differentiate between what is good and bad in Western literature, such as Lu Hsun, Kuo Mo-jo, Mao Tun and others, all learned much that was useful from the West to enrich their own works. There were also some shallow-minded intellectuals who blindly worshipped Western ideas, to the extent of despising our own culture and considering it inferior. Some even declared that China's cultural heritage was completely worthless and advo-

cated "Total Westernization" and "Complete cosmopolitanism." Actually this would simply have meant out and out colonialism. On the other hand, there were some die-hard champions of all that is Chinese, who opposed every reform and stubbornly refused to accept any ideas from outside, treasuring everything Chinese. This conservative, die-hard attitude was also very harmful to the development of Chinese culture. Lu Hsun attacked both these types of people. Lu Hsun prized our civilization, but what he loved was what was democratic and good in it — he was utterly opposed to the feudal dregs which obstructed the growth and development of our nation. He also respected and loved the fine traditions of other nations, and did much to promote the interchange of culture. At the same time, he was against idolizing everything Western. He was in favour of absorbing what was useful from abroad on the basis of our own traditions, in order to enrich our culture. This is in accordance with the traditional Chinese spirit.

Today in China, all that is good in our cultural heritage has been taken over by the people, and we are going to develop it further. As a part of our culture, our fine old classics are being studied, edited, and introduced to the masses. Many ancient classics have recently been reprinted; and in our universities and middle schools we are systematically teaching classical literature. We have criticized the formerly widespread contempt for our literary heritage, as well as the indiscriminate praise of all that is old.

While considering the cultural achievements of the whole of humanity as our own heritage, we nevertheless stress the fact that we should study from our own national heritage. This is because we believe that it is necessary to develop our national cultural traditions before building up a new culture. Only when this work is well done can we give our new literature national characteristics, which cannot be replaced by anything learned from abroad. We believe that only when each country retains its own national characteristics in the cultural field can all flowers bloom in their full glory in humanity's great garden of literature and art.

THE CHINESE LITERATURE OF TODAY

MAO TUN

The literature which is now developing vigorously in New China is a continuation of the "new literature" which sprang up during the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

After World War I and the October Revolution, the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people advanced to a new stage: the revolutionary movement of the broad masses of the people against imperialist aggression and the rule of feudal warlords became ever more extensive and powerful. Great numbers of intellectuals called for a new cultural movement—better known as the May Fourth Cultural Movement. Inspired by World War I and the October Revolution, these intellectuals did their utmost to propagate democracy and socialism and arouse revolutionary fervour among the people. Writers of that time called for a literary revolution, maintaining that literature should reflect the contemporary life of society. They exposed what was wrong in China's social and political systems, and the root of her poverty and weakness. They pointed out that feudal ideology and imperialist cultural aggression served as means to deceive and hoodwink the people. In this way they helped educate the people in patriotism, spread democratic ideas, promoted individuality, and devoted themselves to the work of social reform. They held that the "literary language" of China could be mastered and written only by a few, and was therefore unfit to be the medium of propagating new thoughts and awakening the masses. To meet these requirements, a vernacular language close to the colloquial must be used, and the "new literature" written at that time in the vernacular was an integral part of the new culture.

It was Lu Hsun (the 20th anniversary of whose death was commemorated this October) who laid the foundation for the new literature. From 1918 onward, he published a great number of short stories. The first was "A Madman's Diary," which, for the first time in the history of Chinese literature, made a sharp and profound disclosure of the "cannibalistic" nature of China's feudal morality. Lu Hsun's best known story is "The True Story of Ah Q," which describes a typical Chinese peasant of the old society, victimized by exploitation and persecution; exposes the deep-rooted contradiction of the old Chinese society, and criticizes the 1911 Revolution. As soon as this story appeared on the newspaper, it won wide popularity. Even to this day it gives the reader a fresh inspiration, makes him think, and touches him whenever he reads it again. Undoubtedly "The True Story of Ah Q" is one of China's classics.

Alongside the movement for a new literature, there emerged many literary groups, the longest-lived and most influential of which were the Literature Society and the Creation Society. Many of our elder authors, who have been writing for the last forty years, have been directly or indirectly associated with these two societies or with the literary journals which they edited. Many members of the Literature Society, inspired by the realist literature of Europe, called for truthful reflection of reality, exposure of the evils of society, and propagation of humanitarianism and democracy. Two such authors were Mao Tun and Yeh Sheng-tao. The

most accomplished writer of the Creation Society was Kuo Mo-jo, whose *Goddess*, a collection of poems of a new type, gained fame during the May Fourth Movement. Breaking through the rules and conventions of the old poetry, he introduced the blank verse written in vernacular language. In addition, his poems were marked by democratic ideas, opposition to evil, romantic sentiments, and an unrestrained, virile style—all this paved the way for the new poetry of that time. Kuo Mo-jo is also a playwright who has written many excellent historical plays, among them *Chu Yuan*.

Writers of the new literature during the May Fourth Movement stood, in general, for “art for life’s sake.” Through literature, they attempted to combat the feudal outlook and spread democratic views. They advocated political and social reforms. As to how China should be reformed and what road she should take, however, the writers had no common understanding or clear-cut standpoint. Nevertheless, their works were imbued with hope for the future and overflowed with patriotic fervour. It was these characteristics that aroused the keen concern of the younger generations of intellectuals, particularly the students, for the destiny of the Chinese people and for social problems. Not long after the May Fourth Movement the Communist Party of China came into being, and put forward a clear-cut democratic-revolutionary programme of opposition to feudalism and imperialism, which had a great influence upon the writers of new literature. After that, a great many writers, while attacking the evils of the old society, expressed their admiration for socialism. These were the features of the development of the new literature during its second phase since the May Fourth Movement.

Only by dint of a vigorous struggle did the May Fourth Movement hold its ground and develop further. From the very start, the oppositionists launched an arrogant attack from all sides, in the hope that they might nip the movement in the bud. Representing the feudal class and comprador-bourgeoisie—the rulers of China at that time—these oppositionists opposed the new literature’s content (democracy and socialism) as well as its form (the replacement of the “literary language” by the vernacular). They condemned the leaders of the new literature movement for knowing nothing of the Chinese classical literature, recklessly destroying the characteristics of their own literature, indiscriminately copying the literary movements of 19th century Europe, and importing theories of writing from abroad. But facts disproved these slanders. It was precisely the new literature that inherited and developed, according to the needs of the time, the best traditions of Chinese literature over the last three thousand years. And these traditions—close ties with the people, humanitarianism and realism—were exactly the things that had been wholly discarded by those opposed to the new movement. This has been eloquently proved by the works of Lu Hsun. Precisely because the new literature inherited and developed the best traditions of the national

culture and expressed the determination of the great majority of the people to oppose imperialism and feudalism, it won the final victory in a matter of four or five years although it had fought against heavy odds in the beginning.

After the May Fourth Movement came the Revolution of 1924-27. The new literature made a great contribution in mobilizing young intellectuals to take an active part in the revolution against imperialism and feudalism. But this revolution failed because of the treachery of the Kuomintang reactionaries. After 1927 China came under Chiang Kai-shek's fascist rule while the Chinese Communist Party continued to lead the people's revolution. Meanwhile, new changes took place in literary circles. After the setback of the revolution, progressive writers who accepted the principle "art for life's sake" established since the May Fourth Movement, and who aspired after socialism, realized that they must wage an ideological struggle and make vigorous efforts to advance the people's cause through literature, in order to help the Chinese revolution. In 1930 the Left-Wing League of Chinese Writers was organized in Shanghai, with Lu Hsun at its head. It put forward the principle of writing for workers and peasants, calling upon all progressive writers to unite in the struggle against the colonialists and the fascist rule at home. During this period Lu Hsun wrote many essays. These were brief, terse political essays, of a very high literary order, which dealt prompt and sharp attacks upon all that was reactionary and backward in society. Lu Hsun started writing such essays at the beginning of the May Fourth Movement, but the bulk of his essays and the best of them were written after 1931. The essay was a classical form of writing in China, but Lu Hsun improved upon it and made it a new type of literary writing.

Shortly after the founding of the Left-Wing League of Chinese Writers, Japanese imperialism occupied Northeast China. But while Japan was, step by step, intensifying her aggression against China and Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary government was making successive concessions, an armed anti-Japanese resistance campaign spread among the people in various parts of the country. The Communist Party of China issued a declaration urging the organization of an anti-Japanese national united front, calling upon all parties and people of all walks of life to unite in a common struggle against Japanese imperialism. In 1936, a year before the all-out invasion of China by Japan, the Left-Wing League of Chinese Writers declared itself disbanded, and called upon writers throughout China, in conformity with the spirit of the Anti-Japanese National United Front initiated by the Communist Party, to organize a union of Chinese writers on a broader scale, including "all those who opposed Japanese imperialism, regardless of political convictions or literary schools." In the following year the Anti-Japanese Association of Chinese Writers and Artists was set up in Hankow, enrolling all writers of dif-

ferent strata and parties, Right Wing as well as Left Wing, who supported the anti-Japanese struggle. The call was issued: "Write for the soldiers and peasants!" As a result, a great number of short, popular works were written which suited the broad masses of the people and which propagated patriotism and resistance to aggression. It was during this period that the principle that literature should work for the people's revolution was advanced a step further. After 1937, the writers who lived in the democratic anti-Japanese bases led by the Chinese Communist Party began to go deep into the midst of the working people, while the writers in the extensive area under Kuomintang control, not long after the issue of the call "Write for the soldiers and peasants!" were granted less and less freedom to visit either the countryside or the army until they lost all freedom of movement. Later, the Kuomintang reactionary government flagrantly relaxed its resistance to Japanese invasion but tightened up its suppression of the democratic campaign at home. Thus progressive, patriotic art and literature were subject to ruthless attack. Instead of being crushed, however, the democratic, patriotic literature developed. It was in a period of repression like this that Kuo Mo-jo expressed the views of the people clearly in his play *Chu Yuan*. Through the story of Chu Yuan, an ancient poet who was persecuted for his patriotism, the author attacked the reactionaries who had bowed before Japanese imperialism but were treating the people so cruelly. He inspired the broad masses with patriotic feeling to fight doggedly on for national independence and freedom.

In the more than twenty years between the May Fourth Movement and the Anti-Japanese War, China's new literature made certain progress, but, both as regarded theory and practice, further elucidation was needed on many questions as well as a practical policy suited to the Chinese revolution. For instance, most of the writers were ready and willing to serve the people, but who were the "people"? How should the new literature serve them? How could the new writers bring about a situation in which their wishes might conform to their practice? These and other questions were not clear to everyone. But these fundamental problems were unequivocally solved at the forum on art and literature held in Yen-an in 1942. At that forum Chairman Mao Tse-tung made a speech to sum up the discussion, known as "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature." In these talks, many fundamental questions which had not been satisfactorily dealt with since the May Fourth Movement were solved, thus opening up a broad perspective for the further growth of the new literature.

It was pointed out in the talks that art and literature should serve the broad masses of the people. But "who, then, are the broad masses of the people? The broad masses of the people who constitute more than 90 per cent of the total population are the workers, peasants, soldiers and

urban petty bourgeoisie." These were the four kinds of people that writers should serve. And serving them meant writing about their life and struggles, expressing their thoughts and emotion, and, in addition, writing to educate and inspire them, so that they could live and fight better. First and foremost, it was necessary to satisfy the demands of the workers, peasants and soldiers. The prolonged existence of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial social system had denied them cultural and educational opportunities. Now that they were standing up to fight against feudalism and colonialism, they were in urgent need of a large-scale "enlightenment" campaign, which would give them the general knowledge and literature they needed in a form that appealed to them. Therefore, the primary task for writers who wished to serve the people was to be the spokesmen of workers, peasants and soldiers, and to write for them. This is what was meant by "Turn towards the workers, peasants and soldiers."

Chairman Mao Tse-tung also touched upon the question of creative writing in his talk. He held that the people's life constituted the source of all art and literature. "In the life of the people itself lies a mine of raw material for art and literature . . . which provides for them a unique and inexhaustible source." Therefore, "all artists and writers of high promise must, for long periods of time, unreservedly and wholeheartedly go into the midst of the masses, the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers; they must go into fiery struggles, go to the only, the broadest, the richest source to observe, learn, study and analyse all men, all classes, all kinds of people, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle and all raw material of art and literature, before you can proceed to creation." Only when writers have gone deep into actual life can they free themselves from the defects of formalism and stereotyped generalization.

It is essential that our writers of new literature dedicate themselves to the service of the people. If everybody has such an outlook and strives for this common goal, many difficult questions, such as sectarianism in art and literature, can be solved. If every writer puts serving the people before everything else, sectarianism will cease to exist.

The Yen-an forum for art and literature brought about an enormous change in the literary trend in the liberated areas. The writers began to devote their attention to learning from life, learning the people's language, and analysing social life in a practical and scientific way. Not long afterwards a number of relatively good works were written.

Chao Shu-li was the first successful writer after the Yen-an forum. His *Hsiao Erh Hei's Marriage* and *The Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai* have won him wide popularity. In these works he portrays the great changes taking place in the countryside amid all the complexities of village life, and depicts the honest and brave peasants who have liberated themselves. The language he uses is the plain, highly expressive language of the people and his style is distinctively Chinese. Other outstanding works of this period include Ting Ling's novel *The Sun Shines over the Sangkan River*

and Chou Li-po's novel *Hurricane*, each of which presents a picture of the struggle of the peasants and their thoughts and emotions during the land reform. *The White-Haired Girl*, an opera by Ho Ching-chih and Ting Yi, which carries a significant message, was the first successful attempt at a new form of national opera.

The literature which has been written since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, is a further development of the literature of the last thirty years.

The programme outlined in the talk at Yen-an forum for art and literature has won the support of all writers in the country. This has been an important motive force for the development of literature in New China. The watchword "Serve the people" has enabled Chinese writers to achieve a greater unity than ever before. This was manifested in the National Congress of Writers and Artists held in the autumn of 1949.

The convocation of this congress resulted in the founding of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, which is composed of organizations instead of individuals. It has been the broadest organization of the united front of writers and artists throughout the country. To this federation are affiliated five national unions, among them the Union of Chinese Writers. Individuals may apply for membership of these unions. The Union of Chinese Writers is an organization set up by writers themselves. Its tasks are as follows: to help to provide writers with facilities for writing, study and research work; to help them solve any problems they may meet in the course of writing and learning from life; to train young writers; and to exchange experience with literary circles abroad.

The growth of Chinese literature over the last six or seven years since the founding of New China can be seen, in the main, from the following developments:

First, our writers have wider contacts with life than before, which has enabled them to give a truthful picture of the changes in our society. In the past, except in the liberated areas, writers had no chance to gain a real understanding of society, because the Kuomintang government prevented them as far as possible from visiting factories and villages to get in touch with workers and peasants. Furthermore, since most writers had a hard time to make ends meet, they could not afford on-the-spot investigations. Most of them had no experience of anything but city or town life where their circle of acquaintance was extremely restricted. Thus the subject-matter available to them was limited in scope, their main theme being the life of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. The founding of New China has made it possible for our writers to break out of this narrow confinement into a wider world. They have taken part in the land reform carried out by hundreds of millions of peasants, visited factories and mines in various parts of the country to observe the work of rehabilitation and construction there, and gone to the armed units—straight to the

companies—to see how the soldiers live. Some of them have taken part in the campaign to resist American aggression and aid Korea, and other political and cultural campaigns. This wealth of experience and the indelible impressions received from personal participation in world-shaking events have enabled our writers to produce a number of works which are directly concerned with the life of the people. Thus what was lacking in the subject-matter has been made good. Examples of this may be found in Hsia Yen's play *The Test* (on factory life), Chao Shu-li's novel *Sanliwan Village* (on rural life), Liu Pai-yu's novel *Flames Ahead* (on the War of Liberation), Yang Shuo's novel *A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land* (on the campaign to resist American aggression and aid Korea), Lao Sheh's play *Dragon Beard Ditch* (on urban life and city construction), Tsao Yu's play *The Bright Day* (on the life of intellectuals), to name but a few. Each of these works deals with important events in Chinese society and depicts the people's life.

Another special feature of the literature of New China is the fact that amateur writers have become more active than ever before.

The history of Chinese literature has no parallel for the number of young amateur writers who are beginning to emerge in various fields. The growth of these new forces gives promise of a prosperous future for our literature. Take Tu Peng-cheng's novel *Defend Yen-an!* for example. Dealing with the defence of Yen-an, a significant event in the history of the Chinese revolution, the novel presents a truthful and vivid picture of the nobility and courage of the men of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and shows us their heroism and revolutionary optimism. Most of the writing included in a series of works recently published by the Union of Chinese Writers were written by young writers during the last few years. The union has also edited *The Selected Works of Young Writers* containing works by 188 young writers. In May this year, a national conference of young writers convened in Peking was attended by more than four hundred delegates. The conference aimed at summing up past experience and, on the basis of this experience, improving the work of training new forces. Most of our young writers are not professional authors. They include farmhands, women spinners, trade unionists of workers' origin, and soldiers. The national minorities which were culturally backward now have writers of their own. Pensik's *The Golden Hsingan Mountains* and Malchinhu's *People of the Kholchin Steppe* are among the best works by young writers from national minorities. The Union of Chinese Writers called a special meeting this year to discuss how to recompile the literary heritage of the national minorities and how to develop minority literature. The emergence of writers from among workers, peasants, soldiers and national minorities is recognized as a great event in the history of Chinese literature, for it reflects the tremendous change that has taken place since they won freedom and liberation.

China's literature has a history of three thousand years old. The *Book of Songs*, a collection of beautiful poems, was compiled five hundred years before the Christian era. Over the past three thousand years, we have had many great poets and writers: Chu Yuan, Tao Yuan-ming, Tu Fu, Li Pai, Pai Chu-yi, Shih Nai-an, Wu Ching-tzu, Tsao Hsueh-chin, and others. Dealing with life in China in various periods, they have enriched our treasury of thought and art with their works. The precious heritage they left us, however, was never rightly prized or developed, but was for a long time distorted or overlooked. In China, in addition to the Han nationality, all the national minorities, whether they have written languages or not, possess a rich heritage of literature. Mongols, Uighurs and Tibetans, who have their own written languages, have literary traditions of long standing. Let us take the Mongols, for instance. As early as two centuries before Jenghiz Khan founded the Mongolian Empire, they had written records of folk-tales formerly handed down orally, and original works based on such tales. In these works one is struck by the artistic portrayal of nature and social life and the vivid characterization. Those nationalities which have as yet no written language of their own (these languages are now being created) also possess a wealth of folk-tales, songs and poems passed down orally, which, however, never received due attention in the past. Since 1949, some of our literary publishing houses have undertaken the work of editing and publishing Chinese classics and translating national minority works into Chinese. In addition two special organizations have been set up: the Classical Works Publishing House and the Nationalities Publishing House. Discussions have been held on the approach and method we should adopt in studying classical works. We have tried in various ways to popularize the classics among the people as a whole, and to promote the study of classical literature in schools and literary research institutes. As examples of what has been done to edit and record the folk literature handed down orally among the national minorities, we may mention *Ashma*, a long narrative poem of the Shani nationality and *The Coat of a Hundred Feathers*, a poem of the Chuang nationality. One of our fundamental principles is to treasure our national tradition, including the cultural tradition of our national minorities.

The Chinese people also enjoy and respect the literature of other countries. One of our most important tasks since the May Fourth Movement has been to learn from the excellent literary traditions of other countries. Over the last six or seven years, new translations have been made of many literary works from India, Japan and other countries in Asia and Europe. Translations of many other works will follow.

There are 120 million children in China, but before the May Fourth Movement there were no writers who devoted themselves to the writing of books for children. Since then, some writers began to write for children; Yeh Sheng-taō and Chang Tien-yi, for example, have both produced a great many stories for children. But we are still far from meeting the

demand. We must take immediate steps to improve both the quality and quantity of these books. Under the joint sponsorship of the Union of Chinese Writers and the Chinese People's National Committee in Defence of Children, a contest has been held for children's literature. Part of the regular work of the Union of Chinese Writers is to encourage more writers to write for children and provide them with every facility and aid they need. Stories for children are published not only in ordinary periodicals, but also in those printed exclusively for children, such as *Literature for the Young* and *The Children's Epoch*. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of books published by the Children's Publishing House. In spite of all this, we are still far from satisfying the needs of our young readers.

Generally speaking, the standard of our new literature still leaves much to be desired. Although we have had some new works, their themes are limited and their style monotonous. Most of them deal with war, agricultural or industrial construction, while many other aspects of our people's life have been ignored. A great number of works lack originality, fresh modes of expression and ideas, and a distinctive style. In the field of literary criticism, too much attention has been paid to the message and subject-matter of different works, but little has been done to analyse them from the artistic point of view. All this is caused to a large extent by the dogmatism in our literary criticism and method of writing. To remedy these shortcomings, in June this year we put forward the call "Let flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend!" This means briefly that we must pay more attention to the artistic features of literature and to the individual characteristics of different writers; we must encourage writers to deal with a wider range of subjects and create new forms of expression, and let each school have its own say in literary criticism. Since this call was issued, writers throughout the country have become more active, and a number of works dealing with new themes, written in a variety of styles and forms, have recently appeared.

"Let flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend!" This call will undoubtedly help our new literature to advance.

CHRONICLE

Asian Writers' Conference

"The general consensus of opinion among the writers of Asia has been that we should go together, to analyse the sources of disruption and confusion in our midst, to evaluate our respective literary and cultural heritage and to inaugurate an atmosphere of tolerance and friendship in which new creative work can be provided and shared among the various nations which are struggling towards a new future of peace and freedom."

This is a quotation from the Appeal issued by the preliminary meeting for the Asian Writers' Conference, which was held in New Delhi from July 28 to 30 last year. There were writers from Burma, China, India, Korea, Nepal and Viet-Nam at this preliminary meeting. Writers throughout the Asian countries speedily responded to the Appeal and on the basis of its proposals preparatory committees were set up in many Asian countries and active preparations made to send delegates to the conference, the first of its kind in the history of Asia, and a conference which would symbolize the great unity of writers of emergent Asia. Largely thanks to the enthusiasm of the Indian writers, among whom special mention must be made of Mulk Raj Anand and Jainendra Kumar, the Asian Writers' Conference was held in New Delhi on December 23, 1956.

It was a great occasion. Over a hundred Indian writers from all over the country assembled at the capital, and delegations from foreign countries poured in one after another. Colleagues who knew one another by name very well but had never met were now meeting as friends, and welcomed the opportunity to talk about their work, their lives and their writing, and to exchange ideas about many problems in literature. Among the delegates were Tarashankar Banerjee, the Bengali novelist of India; Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Pakistani poet; Ma Ma Lay, the Burmese novelist; Lakshmi Prasad Devkota, the Nepalese poet; Dr. Nafisi, the Iranian poet

and critic; Deshdendiv, the poet and novelist from the People's Republic of Mongolia; Nguyen Cong Hoan, the novelist from the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam; Han Sul Yak, the novelist from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; R. Sarath Chandra, the playwright and critic of Ceylon; Mirza Tursun Zade, the poet of Tadzhikistan; Mme. Zulfa, the Uzbek poet; the novelists Mao Tun and Lao Sheh, and critic Chou Yang, from China. Among the observers from the non-Asian countries were C. B. Christensen, the Australian critic and poet and editor of the magazine *Meanjin*; Ira Morris, an American novelist; Carlo Levi, the Italian novelist; Bodo Uhse, the novelist, and the poet Stefan Hermlin, from Democratic Germany; Edita Morris, the Swedish novelist; M. Zaharia Stancu, the Rumanian novelist and poet; Philippa Burrell and Monica Felton, from Britain; Simonov, the Soviet novelist; A. Tamas, the Hungarian novelist; Miguel Angel Asturias, the novelist and poet from Guatemala; and Jorge Zalamea, the Columbian poet and playwright.

At the opening session of the conference, over three hundred writers from all over the world were present, and innumerable telegrams were received from others who were unable to appear personally. Among them were the French writer Vercors, President of the Comité National des Ecrivains; Andre Chamson, the Secretary of the International P.E.N. Club; the American writer John Dos Passos and the Soviet novelist Sholokhov. A writers' conference of such magnitude has not only never been seen before in Asia; it has not been seen anywhere in the world.

As the Appeal issued by the preliminary meeting said so rightly: "For hundreds of years Asia has been subjected to foreign domination and many strands of our traditional civilizations were disrupted, our integral way of life disturbed or broken, our educational systems perverted and our whole culture sought to be de-

based. Surviving amalgam of civilizations and culture patterns in Asia shows confusion in spite of the deep ferment in our midst. But our ties with each other and our relations with our brother intellectuals in such countries have just begun to be revived after having been severed under foreign intervention." The Asian writers today are not satisfied merely to restore their cultural ties; they want to understand the current trends of literature in each other's countries and evaluate their old cultural traditions so that they may, in the circumstances of the new world, create a new culture for the benefit of Asia as well as the world. The writers also naturally concerned themselves with other questions such as their living and working conditions, and freedom of publishing and writing, and found that discussion on these matters was most rewarding.

All these matters were included in the agenda, and the six-day conference was devoted to the following five items:

1. A general report on the present situation of literature in the individual Asian countries
2. The traditions of Asia, with special reference to the problems of emergent Asia
3. Freedom and the writer
4. The writer and his trade
5. Cultural exchange

The procedure of discussion varied. For item 1 the conference had reports from the various individual countries; the other items were discussed in commissions.

It was the first time that Asian writers as a body were able to hear such comprehensive reports on the current situation of literature in each country in Asia, and they found them of enormous help towards the understanding of Asian literature as a whole and its problems. For instance, it was most interesting to realize that there was literature in fourteen different languages in India, which yet were characterized by a common "Indian-ness," and that the national groups of the Asian part of the Soviet Union, with their literature in nine different languages, also shared common Soviet characteristics. Some of the nations which had given birth to a new literature did not even possess written languages of their own in the past. These were little known to many, because a free exchange of information and experiences among the literary circles of Asian countries was prevented by artificial obstacles. The very existence of such

diverse literature in Asia is a proof that the literary world of Asia is a garden in which grow many luxuriant flowers. A "competition" in beauty will open up an immensely rich future for the literatures of emergent Asia.

In the commissions, the writers enthusiastically exchanged opinions as regards the remaining four items on the agenda. Coming as they did from different countries, different regions and different circumstances it was to be expected that there would be varying political opinions and convictions expressed, and varying practices and experiences in art. The fact that there were these differing views led to a lively and fruitful discussion. The commissions on the writer and his trade, and on cultural exchange were of course of general interest, and the discussions were free and frank, but the greatest controversy took place in the discussion on the correct approach to the Asian tradition and on the correct definition of freedom of writing. On the first question, some maintained that the whole of the ancient Asian tradition was of absolute good, pointing out that the emphasis it gave, and the value it paid to the spiritual life, was in opposition to the material civilization of the West. This school of thought maintained that Asian writers should carry on and develop this tradition, and not be carried away by the meretricious dazzle of the West. But some people thought this way of thinking was a mark of those who want to revive old customs, good or bad, and in fact, was to detach oneself from reality. They held that one could not talk about tradition without taking into account actual historical conditions. The Asian tradition had its desirable, as well as its undesirable elements, and the writers' job today was to sift out the desirable from the undesirable and in this way carry on and develop Asia's fine traditions. After two days' discussion, at times heated, a general consensus of opinion was gradually reached. The report to the plenary session says that the traditions of the several Asian countries, which evolved under different circumstances and conditions, naturally differ in many respects. But they have many factors in common, which find constant expression in Asian literature generally. These constants, the report goes on, are: (a) the recognition of the supreme value of man and the humanism which results from this recognition; (b) a

love of freedom, of one's own country and people, and of justice; (c) a love of life and the emphasis on the spiritual values of life; (d) a love of peace and universal brotherhood. Western civilization, the report says, also has much to contribute to mankind's progress: the two civilizations are not irreconcilable. Asian writers should take what is good from Western civilization and should further develop their own for the benefit of mankind. The plenary session unanimously adopted the report as the true expression of the common view shared by all Asian writers.

The question of "freedom and the writer" was discussed for three days in commission, and such was the interest shown in the subject that nearly all the delegates were present at its last meeting. There were many opinions held as to the meaning of "freedom." At times, diametrically opposite definitions were given. But one thing was held in common, that all writers had a responsibility to the society in which they lived, and that great writing was only possible when the writer was firmly rooted in the community. Many of the delegates felt strongly that writers should consciously write for the benefit, elevation and betterment of society. Others maintained that a writer's responsibility to society was a question for "his own conscience" and that the writer should be free from the influence of the state, politicians or changing governments. Another argument was that a work of art is essentially an expression of an æsthetic experience, and that the artists should not be unnecessarily burdened by extraneous obligations. Another point of view put forward was that there is no problem of freedom or otherwise for the writer who supports the existing social order of his surroundings, but there is a problem for the writer who disagrees with it. If, in the latter case, he is denied freedom, the society he lives in cannot progress. These are not all the views expressed: there was a wide divergence of opinions on this question. But as the report points out, the deliberations took place in an "extremely friendly and informal atmosphere." Indeed, this friendly atmosphere, where

people sought for common grounds while retaining their own differences, was a striking feature of the conference, and an important factor in its great success.

A conference of such proportions, with representative writers from seventeen countries in Asia, was something inconceivable in the past. It was only after so many countries in Asia had gained their independence that such a conference became possible. The fact itself was symbolic of the new spirit of emergent Asia, of the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man. It also spoke for the new consciousness of Asia, of pride in its glorious cultural heritage, and also of the new determination to build a full life of spiritual and material plenty. Without exception all Asian writers looked forward to rebinding their ancient cultural ties, which had been cut by colonialism, and wanted to broaden these ties in the context of the world today, and restore the spirit of friendship, peace and understanding which had existed throughout the centuries, and thus lay a foundation of peace and friendship between the peoples of Asian countries as well as the rest of the world. It was this common desire that brought the conference to a successful end, notwithstanding the divergent opinions on many questions.

The Asian Writers' Conference is but a beginning. It is hoped to hold frequent gatherings of this sort in future. On the last day of the conference, Mme. Zulfia, the Uzbek poet, invited the writers to hold their second conference at Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. The invitation was hailed with warm applause.

Directly the conference was over, a small-scale round table world writers' conference was held. The chairman of the conference was the Italian novelist Carlo Levi who expressed the wish that a full-scale world writers' conference should be held this year in Rome. He would exert his efforts for its convocation, he said. If such a conference is held it will be a telling indication that the spirit of the Asian Writers' Conference has asserted itself on a world-wide scale.

Discussion on Realism in Chinese Classical Literature

Since the publication of certain articles by Professor Liu Ta-chieh and the writer Yao Hsueh-yin, in the August and November numbers of the *Wen Yi Pao* (Literary Gazette)—articles on the realistic tradition in Chinese classical literature—much attention has been aroused among those working in the field of literary research, and recently the editors working on the school textbook of the History of Chinese Literature and the teachers on the faculty of literature at Peking Normal University have joined in the discussion.

The first problem raised was when realism in Chinese literature really started. Engels, in his letter to Miss M. Harkness, commenting on her novel, *The City Girl*, gives a definition of realism, as implying "... besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." Yao Hsueh-yin's argument was based on this definition, and he also based the beginning of realism in literature with the rise of the urban middle class. This view won some support. Quite a number of dissidents, however, felt that it was not historically correct to ignore certain special characteristics in the development of Chinese literature, and arbitrarily to attempt to link the appearance of realism in China with the Renaissance in Europe and the early signs of capitalism in China. They felt too that Engels' definition of "typical characters under typical circumstances" as being the chief characteristic of realism as we use the word today could not be applied to all developments in Chinese literature. The vice-chairman of the Literary Research Institute, Ho Chifang, for instance, pointed out that the history of Chinese literature had its own national characteristics and no correct conclusion could be reached if these characteristics were ignored. There were others who felt that if we say that realism only appeared in China after capitalism showed its early signs, there could therefore not be any realist works before the latter part of the fourteenth century. Until that time conditions would not have allowed it.

There was another school of thought which, while it disagreed with Yao Hsueh-yin's attempt to link realism closely to the rise of the urban middle class, felt that "truth of detail" and the

portrayal of "typical characters under typical circumstances" remained the criterion by which to gauge the existence or absence of realism. However, this group could not reach agreement as to what period and under what conditions realism did actually emerge in Chinese literature. Professor Liu Ta-chieh, for example, suggested that realism in China started in the Tang dynasty (618-907) since literature in that time did reflect faithfully the spirit of the age, with faithfulness of detail, and did, in fact, show typical characters under typical circumstances. This view was accepted by some, who maintained that realism started with the poet Tu Fu,* for in his works—not only in his narrative poems but in his lyrics—there is truthfulness of detail. If comparisons are to be made, he was more so than the poet Pai Chu-yi (772-846), they claimed. On the other hand, some said that while Tu Fu's poetry shows certain elements of realism, as witness his poems *The Hsin-an Official*, *The Officer at Tungkwan*, *The Shihhao Official*, *Lament of the Newly-wed Wife*, *The Old Man Returns to War*, *The Homeless*** and others, he falls short of the requirement of realism in his portrayal of character. Only in Pai Chu-yi's narrative poem *The Lute*, they suggested, and in the prose romances of Chiang Fang and Yuan Chen (*Prince Huo's Daughter* and *The Story of Tsui Ying-ying*) are the real characteristics to be found. Another view was that while realism may be said to have started in the Tang dynasty, it only reached maturity in the Yuan dynasty with the dramatists Kuan Han-ching*** and Wang Shih-fu.

Some scholars insist that realism should be seen only in the historical context and that it will always show national characteristics; it can never be right, therefore, to attempt to apply Engels' definition mechanically, or to apply it to all forms of art and literature. Professors Ho Chifang, Yang Hwei and Wang Yao all maintain that Engels' definition applies to novels and plays in the main. Others who agree with them reinforce their argument by pointing out that lyric poetry, by its

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1955.

**Ibid.

***See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1957.

very nature, cannot contain detailed description, and neither it, nor such works as the travel essays of the Tang dynasty writer Liu Tsung-yuan,* can portray "typical characters under typical circumstances." To attempt to apply Engels' definition dogmatically would be to exclude many poems from the realm of realist literature. Many scholars have raised this point.

There is yet another view, that the definition of realism in literature is that it should truthfully reflect reality. Holders of this view do not agree that realism in literature must be tied to the rise of the bourgeois class, nor that the criterion must be the delineation of typical characters in typical circumstances. In line with this argument, Ho Chi-fang points out that all works which truthfully reflect reality are works of realism; that there has been realism since the beginning of literature. If the *Book of Songs*** is not considered to be a realist work, and if Chu Yuan's poems*** are to be classed as romanticism, then romanticism emerged before realism. This early literature, it is maintained, may be primitive, but it does reflect life in the early stage, simply though it may do it, and it should be considered realist. Realism, therefore, can be said to have existed since the very beginning of literature.

Apart from the above differing views, there is a view which might be termed the compromise view. Starting from Engels' premise, the interpretation is different from any of the views so far expressed. Professor Li Chang-chih, for instance, feels that to be realist a work should include three things: truth of detail, truth of typical characters, and truth of typical circumstances. Full realism should contain all three, but if only one is there, the work can be considered as realist, though not fully so. According to this view, there is realism in the strict, full sense, as well as in a looser sense. We should look for it in the strict sense, but on looking at works historically, we can include as realist those which are so in the looser sense of the term. Professor Tan Pi-mo agrees with Professor Li Chang-chih on this, but does not think that these three requirements are of parallel importance. He pro-

poses that realism should also imply three aspects: the essence, the law governing it, and the standpoint of the author. He maintains that both realism and naturalism depict reality, but that naturalism does not give the essence and a naturalist writer does not always write from the people's standpoint; this is the main point of difference between the two. Many scholars agree that Professor Li's theory has its points as far as the history of Chinese literature is concerned, though they cannot go all the way with him. From this attitude, they feel realism in the broad sense may be said to include the *Book of Songs*, but in the strict sense, it may be said to begin with the Ming dynasty novel, *Chin Ping Mei*. There are reservations on this theory, however. Since a work may be called realist when viewed in the broad sense, but not so in the strict, this can hardly serve as a scientific criterion, they argue.

There has been some criticism of the view, held in the past, that the history of Chinese literature is the history of the struggle between realist and anti-realist tendencies. This is a point of view which arouses much discussion. Professor Li Chang-chih, for instance, thinks this is a misleading interpretation. Ssuma Chien* (Han dynasty) is recognized as a realist writer, he says, but who was the anti-realist writer against whom he struggled? Professor Li feels that interpreting literary history in terms of struggle between realism and anti-realism may lead one to overlook the real struggles, the persecution of the people's literature by the ruling class, as when books were banned, or burnt, and when writers were murdered. This view meets with opposition, on the grounds that Professor Li has himself confused struggle in literature with the class struggle, though they agree that to view the whole of literary history as if it were only a struggle between realism and anti-realism is an over-simplification. These struggles do exist, though, and should not be ignored; on the contrary, literature develops through struggles which may take the form of clashes of ideas or styles of the writers, and not necessarily in the form of criticism as we have it today. The struggle that goes on inside the literary world is a reflection of social conflict and it is wrong, they maintain, not to deal with it for fear of being accused of mechanically applying sociological theories.

*See pp. 105-125.

**A collection of the earliest Chinese folk songs and poems during 1122-221 B.C.

***See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1953.

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1955.

The question of how to characterize the major trends of development of Chinese literature will undoubtedly continue to be debated. The various contending views about realism in ancient writings, as men-

tioned above, are considered to be helpful not only to the work of assimilating our literary heritage, but also closely linked to the question of how to build a socialist-realist literature in China.

Kai Chiao-tien—Peking Opera Star

Kai Chiao-tien is one of China's most popular actors of warrior roles, who has lived through the peak of Peking opera. He is now a veteran of seventy. So much has he contributed to this traditional art and such is his example that a special meeting to express the thanks of the people was called by the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Chinese Dramatists in Shanghai last November. It was his sixtieth anniversary of continuous work on the stage. He was presented with a certificate of honour from the Ministry of Culture amidst the applause of the thousand-strong audience of writers and dramatists.

Kai Chiao-tien (this is his stage name. His real name is Chang Ying-chieh) was born in 1888 in a peasant family in Kaoyang, Hopei. The family was very poor, and he went to learn acting when he was a mere child and actually went on the stage at the tender age of nine. For most of his life he met with all the hardships and tyrannies of reaction. The gangster lords of the old theatre world bullied him continually for his refusal to be wax in their hands. He led a poverty-stricken life, heavily discriminated against and refused good bookings. When he went on tour, he never would accommodate the local big-wigs. As often as not they would send their hirelings to wreck his performances. But he was indomitable. Far from giving in, he used his fists himself on them.

His artistic integrity and courage is unbounded. He ignored the bidding of the abdicated Emperor Hsuan Tung of the Ching dynasty to perform at the "imperial" wedding. And many were the warlords who sought him in vain to celebrate their birthdays or victories. Throughout the Japanese occupation of Shanghai he was near starvation, but would not stoop to entertain a highly-placed collaborator who offered him ten thousand silver dollars for one performance.

He specializes in warrior roles, and is adept at bringing many a chivalrous fighter and legendary hero to life. His Wu Sung, the famous hero of *All Men Are Brothers*, is one of his favourite parts. His superb

acting has gained for him the title of "The Living Wu Sung."

His complete devotion to his audience and his part is well illustrated by an incident which occurred when he was playing in a scene in *Lion's Wineshop*. Wu Sung has to kill the notorious gangster Hsimen Ching. Kai Chiao-tien was well into middle age at the time—forty-eight—and at one point had to somersault off a 20-foot high balcony. One of his fellow actors was in the wrong place on the stage, so in mid air Kai Chiao-tien had to make a convulsive jerk. On landing he broke a bone in his right leg. Despite this he maintained his role until the curtain fell. When the audience was informed of this accident, they all stood up to show their deep respect.

He was sent for treatment at once, but unfortunately fell into the hands of an inefficient doctor, who failed to set the bone properly. Kai Chiao-tien asked what could be done to restore his movements



Kai Chiao-tien in the role of Wu Sung in *Kuai Huo Lin*



Kai Chiao-tien making up for the role of warrior Wu Sung

so that he could play Wu Sung. "Break it again" was the grim reply. Kai Chiao-tien set his teeth and did precisely that, breaking his leg again on the framework of his bed.

To train himself as a realistic actor, he strives to base every action on actual life, but he does more than mimic life. He creates. He has studied natural movement closely, particularly that of animals, which accounts for his exquisite actions such as "the golden cock standing on one leg," "the cat's jump" and "the dog's dodging." Like all genuine artists, he sets great store by Chinese traditional art, regarding it as an ever-present source of inspiration. His house is filled with things of beauty—old masters of painting and sculpture: these too he studies and learns from. A flying dragon in ink and water colour and a statue of a Buddha's *lohan* subduing a tiger, he says, served as sources of inspiration to

play the warrior's roles with full strength and a hero's feeling.

His conception of the warrior role is unconventional and original. Mere virtuosity in acrobatics, he believes, is not enough, nor does a boisterous show of bravado or noisy vehemence fill the bill. The real criterion is to re-create each character as an integral whole. In fact, he is the innovator of the "graceful performance of warrior plays."

His distinguished colleague, Ouyang Yu-chien, President of the Central Academy of Drama, commented at the meeting: Kai Chiao-tien's "acting is indescribably fine. Whether lively and supple, hard and precise, his movements unfold like a dance. And it is through this acting that his heroic roles, all men of great determination and courage, come to life. He is an artist of great originality, and the audience can always expect some fresh approach from him in every performance. He can be as hard as steel, as flexible as a silk ribbon; swift as a swallow skimming over the water, gentle as the spring breeze in the willows. When he moves, he moves like a jewel rolling down a jade platter: his stillness is as immovable as a great rock."

He is never idle. He is still delighting audiences and carrying out his duties as chairman of the Chekiang branch of the Union of Chinese Dramatists. Yet he still finds the time and energy to pass on his rich experience to the young. With his great art to imitate and master, his three sons are all well-known actors. At present he is engaged in training his five grandsons.

Of course his teaching activities go beyond the confines of his own household. He is in great demand as a lecturer on stage art and, in spite of his age, often turns up with his false beards and horse whip to demonstrate to his listeners.

To celebrate his sixtieth stage anniversary, the *Dramatic Review* has been publishing his autobiography *Paint and Powder* in serial form. It is a mine of memories and knowledge of the art of Peking opera, a work which will live long as a guide and inspiration to our new generation of young actors.

A New Look at China's Operas

A number of significant changes have taken place in the production of China's operas which are rapidly introducing a new atmosphere into the theatre world of

the whole country. To mention a couple of examples, written libretti are adopted in place of the conventional way of passing down libretti by word of mouth only; the

system has been introduced to have a director in charge of each performance and a set of stage directions for all actors and actresses to go by, instead of individual coaching and interpretation of parts, words and actions on a purely personal basis. This not only obviates too frequent variations in performances of classical drama but considerably enhances the effect of the performance in general.

Another remarkable change can be witnessed since the call was issued by the Communist Party: Let flowers of many kinds blossom side by side. It derives from the changed social and political outlook and a higher artistic level of the theatrical workers as a whole. As they become more and more adept in sifting the fine elements from the dross of the classical dramas, they are making significant progress in carrying on the best tradition of our national operas. A good number of old dramas, after some editing, are reappearing on the stage, and some of them have been filmed and shown here and abroad. Our readers already know of the popularity Chinese opera groups enjoyed in Asia, Europe, Australia and South America.

What changes have been made, what modifications or cuts? Let us look at a very popular play and see. "The Tiger Hunters" is a Peking opera. The story comes from one of the episodes in the novel *All Men Are Brothers*. Two hunters, the Hsieh brothers, have caught a tiger, which was subsequently seized from them by a wicked landlord, who accused them of being thieves and threw them into jail where they lay under sentence of death. But one of their jailors got word out to a relation, who got in touch with the merry men of the forests of Tengyun, and with a brother-in-law who happened to be the garrison officer. He broke into the jail, killed the landlord and freed the prisoners. They all went off to join the insurgent peasants in Liangshanpo.

The story is a fine example of the revolt of the peasants against the officials and landlords in feudal times. There was no quarrel, of course, with this, but certain changes were made in some of the Peking opera conventions. Normally, as each character comes on for the first time, he is required to break into the action and give a recitative of his name and status. This has been changed, or modified. When the husband of the relative comes on in the new version, for example, he only has a couplet to chant: "I love boxing and enjoy company; you know who I am, Sun

Erh-lang." Also, when the magistrate comes on stage he no longer has a long speech, but shows clearly who he is with "Bring on the prisoners!" Such methods are new to our old opera, but serve to enable the characters to stand out more clearly and allow the plot to develop in a more realistic and logical way. Another change is of a slightly different character. There is a scene in "The Tiger Hunters" where the two brothers scale the cliffs looking for a tiger, and display impatience and disappointment when they cannot find one. Formerly this was done by pure acrobatic virtuosity. It has been modified slightly now by giving the rather "trick" acrobatics more of a rhythmical, dancing character.

As may be seen, there are obvious advantages in these particular reforms. But not all the well-meant efforts were as happy. There are quite a number of people who over-emphasized the importance of the propaganda effect of the stories and demanded a modern aspect in every case. In some cases it meant a tacit ban on some operas, or many old favourites were left to flourish or die on their own. Sometimes new versions or twists were added to the old stories; historical characters were made to fit into strict class differentiations, or given modern political slogans to mouth. Crude, though minor, changes were often made. In righteous disgust at feudal ethics, unhistorical changes were made, as when the marriageable age of a girl was altered from sixteen to eighteen, or the second wife was taken away from a man, because neither of these things conformed to the Marriage Law of China today.

Another wrong notion was about the clown. Since the traditional clown in Chinese opera usually portrays characters of humble birth, some people went so far as to wonder whether this was not an insult to the dignity of the working people. Where the plot hinged on such a character the play or scene tended to become excluded from repertoires. This was how a hearty farce, "Stealing Cherries," was no more seen. The other extreme was reached when a number of tragedies were also cut out, as they did not fit in with the present perfectly genuine mood of optimism and happiness. This meant that the very beautiful tragedy, for example, "Snow in Midsummer" by the Yuan dynasty playwright Kuan Han-ching, was off the stage for some time. A gentle, sweet woman is falsely accused of murder. The scene before the execution is admittedly very sad,

in fact, heart-rending. Her mother-in-law comes to bid her farewell. She dresses her for the last time, and brushes her hair. She tries to tempt her to eat. The heroine is not saved. On the day of execution the heavens revolt against such gross injustice and snow falls in midsummer. The play was not shown on two accounts—it was too tragic, and superstitious.

There is another favourite which was adjudged incorrect for various reasons—"The Third Lady Educates the Son." A certain merchant, who went abroad and failed to return, was thought to be dead and his first two wives found comfort elsewhere; the third lady was true to the old tradition and remained single. For thirteen years she brought up the son of one of the remarried wives through great difficulties, weaving day and night to maintain herself and him. There was a very moving scene when the third lady is heart-broken to see the boy always playing truant. She slashes through the warp of her loom to show her complete despair. The boy is at last brought to see his own mistakes and promises to study hard, whereupon she is overjoyed, but at the same time feels remorse for having been so stern to the son whom she deeply loves. This, however, has not been seen for some time as it was feared that it made too much of the old idea that widows must on no account remarry.

Such an erroneous approach to opera could not but entail over-sweeping cuts in traditional repertoires. The situation was taken in hand by the Communist Party, and such mistaken and narrow-minded attitudes were severely criticized; a new attitude was introduced, where the theatrical world was called upon to do all in its power to look for, foster and rediscover the traditional plays and operas.

Following this call, a number of old favourites began to reappear. The response from the theatre-goers was immediate, and there was an increasing demand for more such dramas. In answer to this, a conference was called by the Ministry of Culture last June. Since then a new vitality has made itself felt.

One after the other rediscovered treasures have appeared on our stages. They are put on to the public after previews, in which all opinions are carefully collated. It has now been sufficiently proved that little, if any, modification is needed before most of our traditional dramas can be highly appreciated by the present-day Chinese audience.

However, the work of digging up old repertoires is hampered by the fact that a great many old favourites have come down through veteran actors by word of mouth. This means that once this generation is gone, all is gone unless steps are taken promptly. The lack of a written libretto,



Chang Ku-tung Lends His Wife

for instance, has prevented a perfect satire-comedy from being performed for a long time. "Chang Ku-tung Lends His Wife," a Peking opera, has only recently been "resurrected" after it was taken down from the sixty-year-old actors Hsiao Tsui-hua and Ma Fu-lu. A poor scholar's betrothed dies before the marriage. Her father promises that her dowry shall go to the scholar when he does marry. His sworn brother suggests that a mock marriage could be held, with his wife as the bride, on condition that the sworn brother gets half the dowry. But he stipulates that there shall be no marriage night. However, when the mock wedding is held at the father's house, the father insists that the marriage night should be spent under his roof! The sworn brother, fuming with rage, turns up next morning and hales them off to court, only to find that the court rules against him, and his wife is now legally married to the poor scholar. It is a rapid-going comedy and met with immediate great popularity.

The work of rediscovering, recording and editing "lost" dramas has already extended from Peking opera to practically all provincial operas. The results are particularly happy in the work done in Szechuan opera, which is famous for its richness in historical themes, and for its music, dialogue, and dexterity of acting. The newly discovered Szechuan operas include the "Burning of Shangfanku," a story about Chuko Liang, famous statesman and strategist of the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), the "Meet of Golden Spears" about the heroes of the Yang family in the Sung

dynasty (960-1279) and the "Lantu Pass" about the Tang dynasty (618-907) poet and writer Han Yu (768-824), who was exiled for giving good but unwelcome advice to the emperor.

Then there are the innumerable riches of Shaohsing opera. Among those that have so far been compiled it is found that about a hundred items date back to the earliest days of the history of drama in China. All the old Shaohsing opera players are now joining in the work of editing and reporting on these works, and the provincial government is starting to make careful records of traditional performances. In Fukien, too, over 6,000 plays have been unearthed, some of which go back to the tenth century and many of which have not been played for decades.

As the search continues many an artist has brought out his treasured scripts and stage directions. Li Sheng-yin of the Peking Opera Company, for instance, has presented to the company his collection of 241 scripts, the fruits of long years of collection. They include secret scripts and handwritten copies made during the second half of the nineteenth century. Other veteran Peking opera actors like Chang Sheng-li and Ma Lien-liang also brought their collections of rare scripts into the common pool. Some of these have already been edited and will be put out in book form this year.

All over China, in fact, a great ferment is at work in the theatrical work, as actors, musicians and choreographers work together with the playwrights and producers to bring out the treasures of our heritage.

The Antiquarian Book Trade in Peking

Even to make a rough estimate of the number of books published in China from the time printing was invented in the eighth century to modern methods of publishing would be impossible. The Manchu rulers, who caused a great collection to be made in the eighteenth century, and intended to include as many as possible, succeeded in amassing 3,500 books—a mere drop in the ocean. Their great collection, the *Ssu Ku Chuan Shu*, running into 76,500 volumes of histories, philosophical works and other classics, omitted many books even of the types they were desirous of including, let alone those that did not come within the scope of their requirements. A great number of works have been written since, many still in handwritten copies.

Long after printing was invented, book publishing and selling as a trade was practically non-existent, and there were only the imperial libraries and very few rich scholar-officials interested in book collecting. Professional book dealers slowly grew in number in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), primarily in Peking, which was then made the capital and consequently the cultural centre of the empire. A glimpse of the time-honoured congregation of old Peking book-shops can still be seen in two narrow streets—the kilometre-long Liulichang, lying just outside the south wall of the Inner City, and the periodic markets in Lungfussu, inside the city. Despite the growth of modern book-shops and distributing methods, Liulichang remains

the recognized centre for rare editions and second-hand books.

As there is a vast number of ancient books for the book dealers to trade in, specialized knowledge is required about editions, catalogues and content. Indeed, no one could be engaged in this profession without a thorough knowledge of at least a thousand titles of the type of ancient books in which he was going to trade. Many of the dealers have, in fact, become experts in the course of long experience.

Sun Tien-chi, for instance, the manager of the Tung Hsueh Chai Book-shop has brought out a 20-volume classification of books produced in the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), *Some Notes on Book-selling*, which is highly spoken of by librarians, collectors and scholars. As Chao Won-li, the chief of the Rare Books Department of the Peking Library, says, it is a highly valuable work of reference and a great help to literary research. Another specialist is Chang Chun-chieh who is now working in the Peking Library. He was "apprenticed" as a lad to one of the Liulichang book-shops and has an unrivalled knowledge of the Ming and Ching dynasty books—the number of editions, their classification, the variations between editions, and so on.

Of course, books of such an age, which pass through so many hands, are going to get rather knocked about, and this too is a subject that the book dealers can cope with. It is part of their job to know all about re-binding and repairing. This they can do according to the particular book. A Sung dynasty production, for instance, they can have repaired, and if necessary rebound in the same way as it would have been done then—and this apart from the various "tricks of the trade" which they use to keep the books in good condition.

Another great asset is their knowledge of where to lay their hands on a rare book. This is of great use to the people who are working on a particular subject and want to get hold of material. Some while ago, for example, when reference books on the Ming and Ching dynasties were wanted, the dealers dug up quite a number which had been banned and in the ordinary way would not have been known about. Another time, when engravings and wood-blocks, novels and plays of the past were wanted, the dealers successfully hunted for them all over the country. Chang Chun-teh, another dealer, was able to buy a very rare early printed edition of *Chin Ping Mei Tzu Hua* (one of the most famous classical novels) in Shansi—a very valuable find.

Indeed, when Cheng Chen-to, one of our leading scholars and Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Culture, was compiling and editing his *Collection of Ancient Chinese Plays*, he depended on the dealers of old books in Peking and other cities to get copies he needed.

Of recent years there has been a marked expansion in the trade. Where before liberation only a handful of dilettante officials and *nouveaux riches* were in the market, apart from the big libraries and a few scholars, now there is an army of customers. The steady spread of culture and the value that is now placed on our literary heritage are two factors which account for the boom. Then there is the increased demand from the Peking Library (which supplies reference books all over the country), and hundreds of other libraries. All these are now very much in the market and are no longer starved of funds. And since the slogan "Forward to Science" was proclaimed, countless professors and scholars are wanting reference material. The book trade is flourishing as it has never before. A medium-sized store selling old books in Liulichang, for instance, sold 50,000 volumes in 1956, its sales during the last six months exceeding those in the two previous years put together.

Last year the trade had buyers out in over 80 places throughout the country, looking for classics and old books. They found over 180,000, including a thousand real rarities of exceptional value, as well as many documents and other reference material relating to modern times—the last hundred years. Li Tien-chen, of the Wen Yuan Keh Book-shop, found a manuscript copy of the *Collection of Ancient and Modern Works* (16th century) with coloured illustrations, in Fukien. Sun Chu-lien, of the Hsiu Keng Tang Book-shop, found a copy of the *Wu Chen Wen Hsuan* (Five Officials' Selected Works) printed from wood-blocks in the 12th century, in the early period of the Southern Sung dynasty, while the manager of one of the biggest and longest established book-shops, Chen Chichuan, found in Shanghai two copies of *Lu Kuei-meng's Essays* (Tang dynasty) in an edition which included comments of famous book collectors of the Manchu period. In general, the nation-wide search was of great value, and the books were greatly prized by the important libraries and the Academy of Sciences and other research institutes.

Book dealers, therefore, who used to be looked down upon as being merely com-

mercial, are now recognized as cultural workers, and respected as such. Many are true specialists in their own field and important adjuncts in research into the classics and literary-historical works. They themselves delight in their flourishing business, and in its new trends. Sun Tien-chi is now supplementing his *Some Notes on Book-*

selling for a new edition, and Wang Tselin, the manager of the Tsao Yu Tang Bookshop, now at the ripe age of 61, is making use of his retirement to compile *Discourses on the History of Books* so that he can pass on to the coming generation all the knowledge he has acquired in his forty years of book-selling.

Changes in Wen Yi Pao (Literary Gazette)

In 1949, the first national conference of writers and artists brought the magazine *Wen Yi Pao** into being. It has now been decided to change this fortnightly into a weekly, beginning in April this year. It is hoped thereby to deepen the magazine's influence as a reflector of, and commentator on, the new social life. Writers and artists will be able to express themselves freely on the events of the day, both inside and outside China, in whatever form they choose. Emphasis will be put on the diversity of media to be used in depicting the day-to-day struggle that is going on in China: prose, poetry, and prose poems, short stories, features, fables, satires, ballads and songs, cartoons, sketches and so forth. The growth of new things and a new morality will be stimulated while that which is backward will be exposed and combated.

As a weekly, *Wen Yi Pao* will broaden its scope of critical reports on all cultural activities in general, with particular emphasis on literature and art, and thus give an adequate picture of the new creations and new achievements. More than half its space is to be devoted to urgent questions that interest all the literary world. Discussion will centre on problems of motivation and of creative methods. Criticism will include not only comments

on present-day literary works, but also those on the study and discussion of classical literature and art, as well as works produced after the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Periodically, the magazine will publish exhaustive comments on aesthetic and philological questions, and on the history of literature. It will also attempt to familiarize young readers with the history and characteristics of the various art forms. Films, dramas and traditional forms of stage art will be included in the magazine's critical evaluations, together with a discussion of their specific methods and trends.

The weekly will also attach great importance to the introduction of and comments on the literature and art of foreign countries. It will reprint essays on literary and artistic subjects, introduce discussions carried on abroad on the problems of literature and art, acquaint the Chinese reader with the status of the literature and writers in other countries, comment on particular works, and report on the struggles of progressive writers in all countries.

Wen Yi Pao will have sixteen pages and be double its former size. Each issue will have more illustrations and reproductions of art works than were carried by the fortnightly.

National Musical and Dance Festival

In January this year, Peking enjoyed a three-week-long musical and dance festival at which there were 2,500 singers and dancers drawn from twenty-five nationalities, in over seventy troupes. The programmes they gave were mainly folk dances, and one of the features of the festival this year, as compared with the national musical festival of August 1956 (see *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1957), was

that most of the musical items were folk songs. Some of them were based on the folk songs and dances which have been in existence for a thousand years; others were new creations. The dances were of great variety and each nationality showed its own distinct style and traits—the Mongolian dances vigorous and unrestrained, the Uighur dances gentle and graceful, the Tibetan dances lyrical and moving. The dances of the other nationalities and the Han folk dances

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1955.

from various parts of the country were also highly varied, colourful and rich in their own way.

All the dances were fascinating, but there is only space here to pick out a few that especially appealed to the audience.

In the beautiful island of Hainan, off the southern coast of the mainland, there is a saying current which runs: "She who works the hardest makes the best skirt." *Half a Skirt*, a dance of the Li people of the island, jeers good-humouredly at a girl who won't bother to work hard. The dance starts with a scene of a bevy of girls energetically making their new skirts; only one girl is fooling round. They go off to meet their lovers, in their new skirts, but the lazy girl has to wear her skirt only half finished. The others can twist and peacock, assured of their beauty, but the girl with the unfinished skirt is nervous and perplexed, trying all the time not to show her clothes, very ashamed.

The Korean dance *Fetching Water* also gives a side light on girlish psychology, again with a strong local colour. Korean girls go to carry water in large jars on their heads. The dance is a beautiful mime of the graceful scene as a long line of girls, talking and dancing, their water-jars on their heads, bring before us an enrichment of this everyday event. Their joy in their work, their graceful long

skirts, flowing girdles and soft gestures make beautiful stage patterns.

Pulling Up the Turnip by the Root is based on a folk story particularly loved by Chinese children. A little girl sees a big turnip sticking up in the field; she tries to pull it out by herself, but fails. She gets three other children to help her, but they still cannot manage it. She goes and fetches more, and with their combined strength the turnip comes up. On the stage the turnip is played by a naughty, cheeky little girl, and the little discoverer is clever and energetic. The loveliness of our children is deeply impressed on the audience's minds by this short mime.

Drum Dance from Shantung expresses the Chinese people's joy and love of life. It is performed by four young girls and six robust young men. Each has a drum and two drum sticks with three-foot long silk tassels. As they flourish their hands, the tassels, like shooting stars, describe varied patterns in the air. The whole dance is illustrative of the drum beats, and the movements are elaboration of all the possible ways a drum can be beaten with both the sticks and the tassels from the front, the back, from the right, the left and so on. It gives full play to the dexterity, speed and humour that characterize many Chinese folk dances.

Flowers is a dance-song from the Chinghai grasslands, a love song for the



The Chinghai folk dance "Flowers and Youth"
performed by a Shensi troupe

young. It charmingly portrays the innocent love affairs of the young people in Chinghai. To a strongly marked rhythm, the girls, waving the fans in their hands, dance with their suitors, singing as they do so, so that the singing and dancing are one. At the end they go off in twos, whispering together, leaving nothing but a stretch of empty grasslands behind.

Classical ballet is still a young branch of Chinese dancing. Fourteen ballets, drawn from everyday life, fables or fairy tales, were staged in the festival. *Stealing the Fairy Grass* was based on an episode in the famous folk-tale, *Story of the White Snake*. The pretty and brave white snake fairy, to save the life of her beloved, goes to steal the fairy grass from Mount Kunlun at the risk of her life. She first

begs the two child fairies who are guarding the mountain to let her have some of the grass, but they refuse. She has to fight them for it. The strength of her love for her husband moves the god of the mountain and he gives her some of the grass. In its use and development of the background of classical Chinese dancing, this ballet made a fine piece of art, and went to the heart of the audience. Ballet in China, as a young art, is like a budding flower which will steadily blossom out in full glory.

A rich harvest of Chinese music and dance was garnered at the festival. It marked a great step forward, through the actual performances, as the performers learned from each other and exchanged their experience.

CHINA'S CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN 1956

Cultural interflow between China and other countries has been greatly extended in 1956. From 37 countries more than 1,100 writers and artists in 136 groups (including groups from ten countries which had not been to China before) visited China and received a warm welcome, and over 1,300 Chinese artists and cultural workers in 64 groups went to 39 countries, to twelve of them for the first time. As well, the year 1956 marks the beginning of cultural contact between China and eight countries—Syria, the Lebanon, Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Nepal, New Zealand and Greece.

Among the eighty or so writers from 25 countries who visited China were Han Sul Yak from Korea; Ivo Andric and Philip Kumbatovic from Yugoslavia; Mantaro Kubota, Suekichi Aono, and Koji Uno from Japan; Jainendra Kumar from India; C. Malaparte from Italy; Günther Weisenborn from West Germany and the Soviet writer Boris Polevoy.

Thirty delegates from twenty countries attended the solemn commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the death of Lu Hsun, paying tribute to the founder of China's new literature in the name of cultural circles in their countries, and their peoples. Lu Hsun had introduced many literary works from abroad to China. The journal *I Wen* (World Literature), created for that purpose, was edited by him. He collected and had published many reproductions of foreign art, particularly engravings. It is indeed gratifying to see, at his commemoration today, that our cultural interflow between China and other countries has developed as he would have wished.

From China over thirty Chinese writers visited thirteen countries, and a Chinese Writers' Delegation (headed by Mao Tun, Chou Yang and Lao Sheh) participated in the Asian Writers' Conference in New Delhi, and played their part in promoting friendship and co-operation. Pa Chin, Chou Li-po and others attended the

writers' congresses of the German Democratic Republic, Korea, Czechoslovakia and Rumania.

In the first six months of 1956, translations of 114 literary works from abroad were published in China—fifty-four from the socialist countries, and sixty from elsewhere.

The exchange of cultural and art ensembles has been steadily increasing, and 1956 was a great year. China sent eighteen ensembles with about a thousand artists to thirty-five countries—to all five continents—representative of many aspects of Chinese culture: Peking opera, acrobatics, puppet shows, shadow plays, *ping chu*, and dances from our national minorities. We had feared that Peking opera might not be to the liking of our foreign friends, but experience proved the contrary. *The Drunken Beauty* with Mei Lan-fang, and *Fifteen Strings of Cash* with Chou Hsin-fang, played to packed houses, the first in Japan and the other in Moscow. Our acrobats took part in the International Acrobatic Festival in Poland and won a third prize. Puppet shows and shadow plays, traditional arts in China, are not usual abroad—shadow plays are rarely seen elsewhere—and were well received. On our part, our troupes learned a lot from the other countries, and our puppet players particularly valued their experience in Czechoslovakia, famous for its puppet shows.

Art and cultural troupes from China toured the Middle and Near East, in the countries which are struggling for their independence and freedom—Egypt, Syria, the Lebanon, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Afghanistan—carrying with them the friendship and respect of the Chinese people. They too learned foreign songs and dances and have popularized them here in China, on the stage or over the radio. When feeling of support for the valiant struggle of Egyptian people was at its height, the *Song of Liberation* and

Egypt, Our Mother!—songs from Egypt—were heard everywhere in China.

The Peking Opera Troupe, led by our great opera actor, Mei Lan-fang, took six great cities of Japan by storm. They were seen by over 80,000 people and it is estimated that over ten million saw them on television. Takejiro Otani, the director of the Syochiku Company, said: "I have sixty years' experience in the theatre world but I have never seen such great interest and enthusiasm among any audiences before."

Two art and cultural troupes went as far as South America, Australia and New Zealand. They, too, met packed houses, and were seen by over 200,000 people. Through meetings and receptions they were able to talk to thousands of people in the fields of culture and art. In New Zealand, the Maoris, to show their friendship for the Chinese people, held a *haka*—a ceremonial dance festival—in welcome, coming many hundred miles to do so. Australia is sending a theatre group to China in 1957.

In the field of music, a delegation attended the Prague International Music Festival last spring. Our pianists, Liu Shih-kun and Chou Kuan-jen, played at the Liszt Festival in Hungary and the Schumann Festival in the German Democratic Republic respectively; both won prizes. Li Kuo-chuan, a conductor, took part in a concert in Warsaw.

To China came twelve art ensembles from nine countries. The Soviet Circus gave thirty-four performances in the Peking Stadium, to six thousand people each time. When President Sukarno of Indonesia was here, we enjoyed seeing the unique Indonesian dances performed by the Balinese Art Troupe. Audiences all over China enjoyed the Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, the Bulgarian Ballet Theatre, the Bulgarian Artists Delegation, the Czechoslovak Musicians Delegation, the Korean National Art Ensemble, the Hungarian Folk Orchestra, the Hungarian People's Army Ensemble, the Yugoslav Artists Delegation, the Dresden State Wind Orchestra and Soloists from the German Democratic Republic, and the Rumanian "Ciocirlia" Folk Song and Dance Ensemble. All these performances left a deep impression among the art circles and the people.

In the spring, when we held our First National Modern Drama Festival, twenty-two delegates from twelve countries attended, watching the performances and

taking part in discussions with Chinese dramatists and actors. They were delighted at what they saw, but among their valuable comments and criticisms they said that there was not enough traditional style in our plays.

More plays and operas from abroad, in translation, have been staged last year. *Evgeny Onegin* and *La Traviata* were both performed in Chinese, as was *Romeo and Juliet*. Under the direction of the Mongolian dramatist Gandan, the China Opera Theatre put on the famous Mongolian drama *The Three Mountains*. Mme. Gerda Ring, the Norwegian producer, came by invitation to help put on Ibsen's *Doll's House* and Mandadziev, a Bulgarian playwright, came to Shanghai to direct *Alarm*. And there have been constant programmes of Western and other foreign music either live or on the radio—some played by Chinese orchestras with visiting conductors from abroad.

Seventeen art exhibitions from fourteen countries have been held in Peking and other cities, among them exhibits from Viet-Nam, Egypt, and Mexico, as well as exhibitions by individual artists. There are now always exhibitions of foreign artists' works in the Lake Pavilion in Chungshan Park, which has become a favourite resort for art lovers. In all, over 600,000 people—about one-seventh of the population in Peking—have attended these exhibitions.

Sixty-five artists from fifteen countries came to China during the year, bringing their works with them for exhibition. They held discussions with our artists and got to know Chinese customs and ways of living and working. Ignacio Aguirre, for instance, the Mexican artist, made over a thousand studies of Chinese people and scenery, and is going to hold an exhibition in Mexico. A large portfolio of paintings from Dr. Sukarno's collection was produced in China—two volumes of it, with titles in four languages—by the Fine Arts Publishing House in Peking.

Twenty-one kinds of exhibitions of varying aspects of Chinese culture were shown in twenty-four countries in 1956—the arts and crafts exhibition, which was shown in Egypt, Sweden and Finland, the fine arts exhibition in Indonesia on the 200th anniversary of the founding of Jogja, and the Chi Pai-shih Exhibition in Italy. Chinese water-colour prints from wood-blocks and paper-cuts were shown in sixteen countries. Exhibitions of Chinese books, both ancient and modern, were

held in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, showing China's long tradition of paper-making and printing.

Thirty-seven artists from China visited eleven countries, and brought back their own paintings of life in foreign lands which have been widely exhibited or reproduced in papers and journals. In the past we seldom had any foreign landscapes painted in water colour, nor did many Chinese traditional style artists visit other countries.

Ninety films from fifteen countries were shown in China, among them five from Japan, one from India, three from Italy, one from Mexico, one from West Germany and three from France. Dozens of cities held Film Weeks of Soviet, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, Japanese, Bulgarian and French films, which were seen by a total audience of 15,000,000. By the end of November, over 210 Chinese films had been sent to more than forty countries. Chinese Film Weeks were held in the Soviet Union and Korea, and our films were also shown in the German Democratic Republic during the People's Democracies' Film Weeks. *The Magic Brush*, a children's film, won first prize in the children's feature films section of the International Children's Film

Festival in Venice, a prize at the First International Children's Film Exhibition in Yugoslavia and a silver prize at the Third International Film Exhibition of Damascus. The film *Landscapes of Kweilin* won prizes at the Ninth International Film Festival of Karlovy Vary, and at Damascus. *The Road to Lhasa*, a documentary, won a prize at the Ninth International Film Festival of Karlovy Vary.

In the last few years China has signed cultural co-operation agreements with ten People's Democracies, which include set plans for each year. In 1956 cultural co-operation agreements were signed with the Soviet Union, Syria and Egypt.

Commemoration meetings for ten great cultural figures were held in Peking, Tientsin, Shanghai and many other cities, and, in connection with their commemorations, exhibitions of paintings by Rembrandt, and Sesshu, the Japanese artist, were held, and Mozart concerts given in Peking. When Ibsen was being commemorated, his *Doll's House* was staged in Peking. With each commemoration translation and other materials were put out, and meetings and exhibitions held. In all, twenty delegates from twelve countries came to China to take part in these.

SOME FEATURES OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING

One of the most striking characteristics of traditional Chinese painting is seen in its composition.

Chinese painting is not strictly governed by the rules of perspective, nor restricted by the laws of time and space. The artist has the maximum freedom of expression, for he depicts everything he sees as his glance travels along a whole panorama, instead of drawing a scene in perspective as viewed from one particular point. This technique enables him to portray thousands of miles of mountain and river scenery in one painting, and brings the whole universe within his grasp.

The entire Yangtse River can be painted in one horizontal scroll (these scrolls vary from a few feet to several tens of feet in length), which shows the source of the river, its winding course to the sea and the landscape along its banks. Then there are the vertical scrolls, which show mountains rising fold upon fold, or depict in one painting the houses on a street as well as their interiors.

"The Night Banquet"* by Ku Hung-chung of the Five Dynasties period (907-960) illustrates another method of composition. This painting is divided into five sections, and depicts all that was going on during a banquet given by Han Hsi-tsai, master of the Grand Secretariat. The five sections are divided from each other by movable partitions, thus the whole scene is still confined to one room and appears quite harmonious, although the time of day and the action differ in each section. The same man is depicted several times without creating an impression of anything illogical or un-

natural. Ku Kai-chih of the East Tsin dynasty (317-420) painted a scroll in which he employed a similar technique, proving that this method of composition was in use at a very early time.

The composition of Chinese paintings may be either "simple" or "complex." Few pictorial compositions can be more intricate than the Tang dynasty wall painting "A Vision of the Buddhist Paradise" in one of the Tunhuang grottoes. This contains hundreds of bodhisattvas, and virtually every inch of the mural is filled with towers, pavilions, terraces, lakes and birds; yet the total effect is not one of overcrowding. The flying Apsaras with their graceful movements and floating streamers give the impression of soaring through infinite space. An artist dealing with such an intricate scene tries to make the complex appear simple and the densely crowded seem spacious.

In "simple" compositions, the objects depicted are simple, but the painting may be rich in artistic content. When a pot of flowers is painted without a table, the spectator does not feel that it is hanging in mid air. Flowers may be painted without twigs and branches or any other background, for these could be of only secondary interest. And by such bold elimination, the artist presents his main theme in a more concentrated, vivid and striking manner.

A Chinese artist often expresses complexity through simplicity by means of a highly evocative technique. He may paint a single morning-glory, with one leaf and one bud, yet create the illusion that beside it many morning-glories are blooming. Ma Yuan of the Southern Sung dynasty (1127-1279) painted a small picture entitled "Solitary Fisherman on a

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1954.

Freezing River," which, though it shows one raft and one fisherman only, conjures up a feeling of boundless water and infinite space. This illustrates the skilful use made of space by Chinese artists in their composition. Often the painter gives more thought and attention to the empty space in his composition than to the objects depicted. He can create an illusion of expanses of sky, water, mist or clouds, without actually painting a stroke of these.

The main tools used in Chinese painting are the same as those of Chinese calligraphy: the brush, the ink, and the ink-stone. Since ancient times, Chinese artists have considered that calligraphy and painting have one common source. There is great variety and feeling in the strokes and formation of each Chinese character, as well as in the composition of a whole scroll of calligraphy. This traditional art, peculiar to China, has exercised a profound influence on our painting. Indeed, the relationship between the two arts is so close that artists often describe painting as "writing." This illustrates the importance of the brush work, where every dot or stroke conveys a different degree of force or gentleness and a different mood. By means of lines a good artist can convey contours, light, surface, volume, solidity and rhythm—sometimes even the black ink seems superfluous. One type of painting called *pai miao* (linear sketch) consists entirely of lines.

A competent painter can through one simple line express nobility, strength, gentleness, grace or vigour. His brush work depicts light and shade, or the flow of drapery, and suggests the sounds of water and the three dimensions of rocks. He is able to achieve this by the use of simple lines because he has spent virtually his whole life in mastering them. These linear drawings reveal the artist's skill, as well as his character and mood while painting.

Colour and ink are used in a distinctive way in Chinese painting, for they help to emphasize the lines but are restricted by them. In old Chinese paintings very strong colours were used. We know of

a colour scheme devised by Ku Kai-chih for a landscape, for example, which is breathtaking in its boldness. He proposed to use green for the sky, water and reflected shadows, vermilion, white and purple for the rocks, and equally brilliant colours for the costumes. This particular painting has been lost, but the many frescoes in Tunhuang, dating from the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534) onwards, reveal a long tradition of strong colours. This tradition has been carried forward into modern Chinese landscape painting, and is also preserved in architectural designs and other decorative arts. Strong colouring is a marked feature of the work of our contemporary master Chi Pai-shih. In ancient times "vermilion-and-green" was synonymous for "painting."

After the Tang dynasty, ink painting developed and a new field was opened to Chinese artists. Our painters use ink just as if it were colour. "The ink provides every colour in the rainbow." This technique can also be clearly seen in the work of Chi Pai-shih, also a great ink-artist. His crabs and prawns, vegetables and fruits are often painted in ink alone without any pigments, yet they seem to possess rich colours. Chi Pai-shih paints so skilfully on absorbent Chinese paper with dark or light ink, a dry or wet brush, that all he paints is full of life.

It is the tradition for Chinese artists to "learn from Nature," and many of our greatest painters have depicted nature. In order to master the art of painting pine trees, Chin Hao of the Five Dynasties period made tens of thousands of drawings of pines from real life in the Taihang Mountains. This is one example of the emphasis on painting from life and the industry of ancient Chinese artists. However, Chinese painters aim at capturing both the form and the spirit, and more stress is laid on portraying the spirit than on presenting a photographic likeness. An artist who paints from life pays less attention to external aspects such as light and shade than to the thing itself, above all to its spirit, its inner nature and character. This is another feature of Chinese painting.

New Publications

Lu Hsun, a Great Writer of the People By Ping Hsin. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. A work which attempts to introduce systematically Lu Hsun's thought. It is divided into three sections; the first, "Lu Hsun, militant realist"—a study of Lu Hsun's realism, its root and chief content; the second, "Lu Hsun, pioneer of new culture and democrat"—Lu Hsun's position in the history of the democratic movements in China, together with a thorough analysis of his thought as a pioneer of new-democratic culture; the third, "Lu Hsun, patriot and internationalist"—how patriotism and internationalism were merged in the great writer's thought, together with an explanation of the way he advanced from the theory of evolution to that of class struggle.

Lu Hsun's Stories By Pa Jen. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. A brief introduction to Lu Hsun's life, and an analysis of his motives in writing his stories, the ideological content and their artistic characteristics.

On "Wild Grass" By Feng Hsueh-feng. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. In this short monograph Feng Hsueh-feng explains and analyses Lu Hsun's prose poems—*Wild Grass*.

Lu Hsun Before the 1911 Revolution By Wang Yeh-chiu. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. A biographical sketch of Lu Hsun's life and thought prior to the 1911 Revolution.

The Little City By Kao Yun-lan. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. A novel based on the famous storming of the prison in Amoy in 1930, led and organized by the Chinese Communist Party. Amoy at that time was a semi-colonial town under the control of foreign imperialists, Japanese *ronin* and Kuomintang henchmen and spies. There the fight started between the revolutionaries and those counter-revolutionary forces. Each one of the Communist heroes described in the book leaves an indelible image in the reader's mind.

The Cradle of Life A short novel by Liu Jen-tao. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. A successful portrayal of a young girl just graduated from college, trained as a midwife, and how she goes to work in a health centre in the mountains, full of enthusiasm and noble aspirations to protect life.

Selected Poems of Tu Fu With explanatory notes by Pu Chiang-ching and Wu Tien-wu. Writers' Publishing House, Peking. Tu Fu (712-770) is the most famous of the Tang dynasty poets, well known and loved by the Chinese people and, indeed, by people all over the world. More than one thousand four hundred of his poems are extant. This is a selection of two hundred and sixty poems, divided chronologically into eight sections; after each poem there are simple but adequate commentaries.

Selected Tales of Liao-chai Selected and annotated by Chang Yu-ho. Writers' Publishing House, Peking. From a well-known collection of short tales by Pu Sung-ling in the seventeenth century.* The tales are mostly about ghosts and fox fairies, but these are used to expose the darkness and corruption of feudal society, and to praise love and the right to love. The characterization in these tales is very vivid and the background is from real life. The writer's introduction of the supernatural allowed his imagery full play, and his mastery of language and plot has made him highly popular. The original edition contains 431 stories; in this selection sixty-six are chosen. The language is stylized and classical, so some notes are appended to this edition.

Selections from Ssuma Chien's "Historical Records" Selected by Chang Yu-luan and others. Writers' Publishing House, Peking. Ssuma Chien (145 B.C.-?) is a great prose writer and historian of the Han dynasty. His *Historical Records* is his life work, a work which took fourteen

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1956.

years to complete. It is a history of ancient China covering a period of three thousand years, from the legendary Five Emperors to Emperor Wu (144-86 B.C.) of the Han dynasty. It contains one hundred and thirty records. The work is an historical record, but at the same time ranks equally with the finest literature. In this selection there are twenty-five records, chosen for their literary merit, and his autobiography. All these selections have detailed explanatory notes.

"Pilgrimage to the West" in Chantefable Style By Lo Yang and Shen Peng-nien. Popular Literature Publishing House, Peking. Based on the popular Ming dynasty romance, rewritten in the chantefable style; about two-thirds of the original is put in verse form, so that folk artists could use this as a chantefable libretto.

The Eagles By Pai Hua. Youth Publishing House, Peking. A narrative poem of Tibetans in a frontier province in 1936-1949. It describes the deeds of heroism of Tibetan guerilla fighters led by the Communist Party in the mountains of Yunnan, how the national minorities there opposed reactionary rulers and fought for national liberation. The poet has created many vivid characters in this poem, showing their courage and passion and their individual characteristics.

Ancient Chinese Wit and Humour Compiled by Wang Li-chi. Classical Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. Over two thousand of the best jokes from the third century to the nineteenth century. It shows the Chinese people's sense of humour and their wit and sarcasm. The selection is made from seventy-five collections of ancient jokes.

Selected Works of Maxim Gorky In 20 volumes. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. Already published: *Mother*, *Childhood*, *In the World*, *My Universities*, *Russian Tales*, *Italian Tales*. Just published: *Short Stories*, a selection of twenty of his earliest short stories. Each volume in this uniform edition contains a photograph of the writer taken at a particular period, and many illustrations. In each volume there is also an editorial note by the editors of the publishing house explaining the content, the translation and the illustrations, etc.

Byron's **"Don Juan"** Translated by Chu Wei-chi. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. Many of Byron's poems have been translated into Chinese before, including *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and some of the shorter poems have had more than one translation. This is the first time that *Don Juan* has been translated into Chinese.

Beaumarchais' novel **"Le Barbier de Seville"** Translated by Wu Ta-yuan. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

Nagananda Translated from the original Sanskrit by Wu Hsiao-ling. People's Literature Publishing House. The well-known classical Indian drama is generally ascribed to the famous seventh-century Indian monarch King Harsha (Siladitya).

A Hungarian Nabob A novel by Jókai Mor (19th century) Translated by Mei Shao-wu. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. The story exposes and satirizes the luxurious living of Hungarian nobles at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Short Stories by Jurij Brezan Translated from the German by Chiang Kun. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

Quiet Hills A novel by Sunao Tokunaga Translated from the Japanese by Hsiao Hsiao. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

A Long Day in a Short Life A novel by Albert Maltz Translated from manuscript* by Wang Chih-huan, Huang Hsin-chi, and Huang Yu-shih. Writers' Publishing House, Peking. First publication here.

Burning Valley A novel by Philip Bonosky Translated by Ku Hua-wu and Huang Erh-chang. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai.

Chaplin, the Immortal Tramp A biography of this famous artist by R. J. Minney, recently translated by Liu Peng-ju. Popular Literature Publishing House, Peking. In order to help the reader to a better understanding of this great film artist and outstanding peace fighter, the translator has added certain other material from recent newspapers about Chaplin's activities in the last two years; from these we could see Chaplin's friendship towards China.

*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1956.

ERRATUM

On page 235, second column, line 10, for
Beaumarchais' novel "Le Barbier de Seville"
read
Beaumarchais' comedy "Le Barbier de Seville."

WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER



Tsui Teh-chih was born in 1927 in a small town north of Harbin in Northeast China. He started writing as a student in the university. In 1948, he joined the ranks of the revolution and began writing opera libretti and plays. He published a collection of one-act plays under the title *Love's Path Is Never Smooth*. He won a prize for the words he wrote for the song *All Peoples of the World, Unite!* He is now working for the Shenyang branch of the Union of Chinese Writers.



Ho Chiu, now 36, comes from Nanhai in Kwangtung Province. He studied painting, was for some time an actor and taught school for another while. He wrote several plays before *The Day the New Director Came*. This play was successfully staged in many cities and was also made into a film. Ho Chiu belongs to the Canton branch of the Union of Chinese Writers and of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists.



Lu Yen-chou, now 28 years old, comes from a peasant family in Anhwei Province. For some time, he was a propagandist in the People's Liberation Army; then he became a proof-reader and later an editor, of literary magazines. In his spare time he wrote opera libretti, plays and film scripts. He also wrote the script for the film *Spring Has Come* made by the Shanghai Film Studio. He is a member of the Anhwei

committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, of the Anhwei Provincial Association of Writers and Artists, and of the Union of Chinese Writers, Shanghai branch.



Sha Ting was born in Szechuan in 1905. At twenty, he was a student in the provincial normal school at Chengtu where he eagerly accepted the new ideas and revolutionary outlook in the cultural field. In the winter of 1926 he began to take part in actual revolutionary work. He started writing in 1931 and his *Beyond the Laws*, a collection of short stories, was published in 1932.

During the war against Japanese aggression he went to the liberated areas—Yenan, Shansi and Hopei—to take part in the fight against Japan. He has spent most of his time for the last ten years in the Szechuan countryside. He has written many books; among his main works are *The Gold Miners*, *The Sowers*, *Return to My Home Town* and *The Ordeal*.

He is at present chairman of the Chungking branch of the Union of Chinese Writers and vice-chairman of the Chungking branch of the Association of Literary and Art Workers.



Liu Ta-chieh was born in 1904 in Hunan Province into a poor-peasant family. At fourteen, he was able to attend a school for workers' children free of charge. Later, he studied Chinese literature at Wuchang Normal College. In 1926, he went to Japan to study. After his return, he taught Chinese classical literature and the theory of literature in the universities. Since libera-

tion, he has been teaching the history of Chinese literature in Fu Tan University in Shanghai. His works include, among others, *The Historical Development of Chinese Literature, A History of the Thinking During the Wei and Tsin Dynasties, The Characters and Thought-Content of the Dream of the Red Chamber*, and the autobiographical novel *The Hard School of Childhood*.



Anchihu was born in Inner Mongolia in 1929 into the family of a rather well-to-do peasant. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, he entered college. During the War of Liberation he travelled all over Inner Mongolia with a cultural group. Thereafter, he was editor of a newspaper and of a literary magazine, and spent some time in studying at the Central School of Literature in Peking. He is at present doing cultural work in the trade union organization of Inner Mongolia.



Born in 1914 in the Chahar League of Inner Mongolia, Sayntsoqt studied in Japan and in the Mongolian People's Republic. Since his return to China in 1947, he has been an editor of the *Inner Mongolian Daily* and of the Inner Mongolian People's Publishing House. At present, he is the editor of the magazine *Art and Literature of Inner Mongolia*. He is also a member of the Union of Chinese Writers, Inner Mongolian branch. He has published a novel, *Sunshine from Peking*, and a collection of poems, *Clarion Call*.



Bren Bik was born into a poor herdsman's family in Inner Mongolia in 1928 and joined the Chinese People's Liberation Army at the age of twenty-one. While in the army, he wrote lyrical poetry in the Mongolian language, the first collection appearing in 1956 under the title *Hail Spring*. He is also known across the border, in the Mongolian People's Republic. Bren Bik is at present on

the executive committee of the Inner Mongolian branch of the Union of Chinese Writers.



Malchinhu, born in 1930, hails from Inner Mongolia. Through his father, who is a teacher of the Mongolian language, and his mother who has a gift for singing and telling folk-tales, he acquired a taste for literature at a very early age. In 1946, he joined a cultural group, after some time with a cavalry unit of the People's Liberation Army. His first short story *On the Kholchin Grasslands* was published in 1951 and later made into a film. From 1952-54 he attended the Central School of Literature in Peking. A collection of short stories, *The Joy of Spring*, was published the following year. The first volume of his novel *On the Vast Grasslands* appeared in 1956. At present he is engaged in writing a sequel. Malchinhu is a member of the Union of Chinese Writers.



Fang Chi was born in 1919 into a landlord's family in decline in central Hopei Province. He loved books from his boyhood days. He joined the League of Left-Wing Cultural Workers in Peking and took part in the historic students' demonstration on December 9, 1935, against Japanese aggression. During the Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation, Fang Chi used his abilities as a writer to mobilize the masses, working as a newspaper reporter and editor of literary magazines. His first novel, *Stories Under an Old Mulberry Tree*, was finished in 1948. A collection of his short stories appeared in 1950. At present, he is the chairman of the Tientsin branch of the Union of Chinese Writers.



Yeh Sheng-tao was born in Soochow in 1894. In 1911, he graduated from a secondary school and thereafter taught in primary and secondary schools, then in universities. From 1923 to 1948 he was editor of the monthly magazine *Short Stories*, and also worked as editor for other publishing houses. His own writing he did in his spare time. His

published works include the novel *Ni Huan-chih*, the collections of fairy tales *Scarecrow* and *Statue of an Ancient Hero*, and the volumes of short stories *Conflagration* and *In the City*. The fairy tales *Statue of an Ancient Hero* and *The Emperor's New Clothes* were published in *Chinese Literature*, No. 3, 1954.

The novelist and critic **Mao Tun**, whose real name is Shen Yen-ping, is at present chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers. In 1956, a collection of his short stories, *Spring Silkworms*, was published in English by the Foreign Languages Press. An English translation of his novel *Midnight* is to appear shortly.



Huang Pin-hung was born in 1863 in the southern part of Anhwei Province, near the famous Huangshan Mountains. He began painting at the age of ten. Though the imitative style was very much in vogue at that time, he was more interested in travelling and sketching what he saw with his own eyes. He visited a great many of the famous mountains of China, and was particularly fond of the scenery around Kweilin and Yangshuo in Kwangsi.

Although he was over eighty years old at the time China was liberated, he felt strong enough to participate in the endeavours for art and culture in the People's Republic. At the age of ninety, he was awarded a prize by the People's Government. He died two years later, in 1955.

Corner of West Lake in this issue is one of more than a hundred of his paintings. Huang Pin-hung was especially good with his brush at depicting mountains, rocks and trees; here the mist gives the painting its peculiarly successful atmosphere. The calligraphy to the pictures says: "Viewed from Hsileng Bridge, the southern and northern peaks shrouded in mist are uniquely picturesque." China's landscape and rivers were worthy subjects in the eyes of Huang Pin-hung who was among China's best-known modern painters.



Hsieh Chih-liu was born in Changchow, Kiangsu, in 1910. Fond of drawing from his childhood, he has for more than twenty years been painting in the classical style and also doing research on classical art. These studies have taken him to the famous mountains of China which so often appear in her traditional art. For some time, he taught art in a university. In the Thousand-Buddha Grottoes of Tunhuang in China's northwestern Kansu Province he studied the murals, some of which date back 1,600 years. He has published monographs on the Tunhuang Grottoes, and the art treasures they contain, and two volumes of his collected paintings. He works as an expert for classical calligraphy and paintings on the Shanghai Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Relics and is also on the committee that is to set up the Chinese Art Academy in Shanghai.

Ma Lin was a native of Chientang in Chekiang Province, at the turn of the thirteenth century. He belonged to a group of famous painters in the Southern Sung dynasty, of which his father, Ma Yuan, was the leader. Both father and son created with their bold and free strokes a new style in scenery and figure painting. *Watching the Waterfall* is an example of this fresh, vigorous approach which sets it apart from works of the conventional artists in those days.

It has been said that the elder Ma was so fond of his son that he often put the latter's name on his own paintings. We know that Ma Yuan painted several waterfalls. There is no certainty that this painting was or was not done by the father. If it was done by his son, it must rank as one of his best, and shows that he had become adept in the style evolved by his father.



Mo Tse was born in Kiangsu Province in 1929. He loved art from his childhood. After graduating from secondary school, he worked as engraver, journalist and editor. He started writing in his spare time. He now works in the arts design section of the Huai River harnessing project, under the Ministry of Water Conservancy.

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