CHINESE LITERATURE

Monthly 1 1966

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No. 1, 1966

CHINESE LITERATURE

monthly

EDITOR: Mao Tun
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Yeh Chun-chien

Published by Foreign Languages Press
Pai Wan Chuang, Peking (37), China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

Chao Shu-jen

Taking Goods to the Countryside

CHARACTERS

Tu Chuan, a twenty-year-old salesgirl in the district supply and marketing co-operative
Yao San-yuan, a fifty-three-year-old commissioned agent*
Sister Wang, thirty-year-old member of a people's commune

Time: The present
Place: A mountain region

Chao Shu-jen is an amateur writer, now teaching at a primary school in Honan. See the article on p. 106 of this issue.

*Commissioned agents buy goods from state shops or supply and marketing co-operatives and sell them at prices fixed by the state. They are mostly former pedlars and small merchants who worked on their own.

(Enter Tu Chuan with two boxes suspended from a carrying pole.)

Tu Chuan: *I speed along with my load,**
Hurrying from village to village;
Three years ago I finished middle school,
Now I sell goods for our co-operative.
No mountain path is too remote for me,
No climb too steep for me;
To help agriculture forge ahead
Uphill and down I journey cheerfully.
On the east slope the sorghum has reddened in the sun,
On the west slope dense grows the paddy;
The good harvest coming speeds my steps
And here I am at Wang Village.
(She puts down her load, picks up her megaphone and cries)
Hey! Commune members! Our co-op has sent you goods. Come and buy!

(Enter Sister Wang with an insecticide sprayer on her back. She beams at the sight of Tu Chuan.)

Sister Wang: So you're up here again, Tu Chuan. Come home with me quick and rest.

Tu Chuan: I'm not tired, thanks. It's some days since I last came, sister. What can I sell you?

Sister Wang: *Just now I bought a comb,*
Strong, pretty and cheap.
My niece fancies another like it;
I'll buy her one of the same.

Tu Chuan: *We've several kinds of plastic combs,*
I wonder which you want?
See if there's one you fancy;
If not, I'll bring more next time.
(Tu Chuan displays her combs and Sister Wang picks one out.)

*The lines in italics are sung or declaimed.

Sister Wang: Ah, this is exactly the same.
This comb is a lovely red,
Smooth, clear and bright.
I'll take this.
Here's fifty cents.
Here you are.

Tu Chuan: Fifty cents.

Sister Wang: Have you change?

Tu Chuan: *I must give thirty-three cents change.*
(She hands it over.) Here's thirty-three cents.

Sister Wang *(counting the money)*: Haven't you made a mistake, Tu Chuan?

Tu Chuan: Not I.

Sister Wang: Yes, you have.
The comb costs thirty-three cents,
You should give seventeen cents change;
Work it out again, Tu Chuan;
You've got it the wrong way round.

Tu Chuan: *It's you, not I,*
Who've got it the wrong way round.
This comb costs seventeen cents —
That means thirty-three cents change.

Sister Wang: Oh? Wait a second.
(She hurries off and reappears directly.)
The pedlar who was here just now
Charged thirty-three cents for this comb.
The two are exactly alike,
Why are they two different prices?
See. *(She shows the comb.)*

Tu Chuan *(Comparing the two, with surprise)*: Sister Wang!
Industry is going ahead so fast,
Prices keep coming down.
He sold you that comb at the old price —
That's sharp practice.

Sister Wang: *Are there still crooked pedlars about?*
Thank goodness you've shown him up.
Such double-dealing is rare,
Charging the old price when the price has dropped.

Tu Chuan: There are still a few swindlers about. Tell me quickly, Sister Wang, what this fellow looked like.

Sister Wang: What he looked like?
He's in his fifties,
With thick eyebrows, deep-set eyes.

Tu Chuan: Ah!
Has he a long thin face, two wisps of moustache?

Sister Wang: That's it.
A tall, round-shouldered fellow.

Tu Chuan: *In a sleeveless jacket?*

Sister Wang: Yes!

Tu Chuan: *And a girdle?*

Sister Wang: Right.
You've hit the nail on the head.

Tu Chuan: *When was he here?*

Sister Wang: Just a few minutes ago.

Tu Chuan: *Did he head for the north cliff or the south slope?*

Sister Wang: Due north he went.

Tu Chuan: *I'll go and overtake him.*

Sister Wang: It's not worth it.
Why make such a fuss
Over just a few cents?
It's midday, the sun is blazing;
You may tire yourself out and not find him.

Tu Chuan: Since he's in one of our trading departments, sister, I know I can track him down. I tell you what. You take this sixteen cents he overcharged you. (*She gives her the money.*)

Sister Wang: That won't do.
The two of you are different as wood and water,
One crooked, the other straight;
He swindled me,

Why should you pay for him?
You're not responsible for him, Tu Chuan.

Tu Chuan: There's more at stake than a few cents.
He and I are travelling two different paths,
Our ways can't be reconciled.
If this swindler is not exposed,
He'll cheat other people too.

Sister Wang: *What you say is right,*
I won't hold you up.
Go on, then. (*Tu Chuan prepares to leave.*)
But it's already noon.
Let me fetch you something to eat.

Tu Chuan: No, thanks, I'm not hungry.

Sister Wang: Wait a bit. It won't take a second.

(*Exit Sister Wang with her sprayer.*)

Tu Chuan (*picking up her load*): The fellow sounds like Old Yao, that commissioned agent. Just now in Chao Village they said someone selling ribbons had given short measure. That may have been the same man. I must catch up with him, quick. (*She hurries off.*)

(*Enter Sister Wang with some food.*)

Sister Wang: Tu Chuan! Tu Chuan! (*She sees Tu Chuan is some distance away.*) What a girl!
This girl has a good name, and no wonder;
She's close as close can be to us commune members;
She brings goods here in all four seasons,
Regardless of wind and rain.
And makes mental notes
Of everything we want.
If a girl is getting married
She knows what material will please her;
If someone has a baby,
Brown sugar is sent to her door;
At busy seasons when we're short of tools
She delivers hoes and sickles;

When that old pedlar charged too much,
She paid the difference for him.
No wonder she's been cited a model salesgirl.
She's a grand girl. (*She starts home but pulls up abruptly.*)
If Tu Chuan overtakes that rogue
She'll need some proof against him;
I'd better go too
With this comb as evidence. (*She makes up her mind to it.*)
Yes, I must hurry. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Yao San-yuan with his pedlar's load, very pleased with himself.*)

Yao: *Fifty-three I am this year,*
Yao San-yuan by name;
Man and boy I've worked at a pedlar's trade,
Now I'm a commissioned agent.
No mountain path is too remote for me,
No climb too steep for me;
Not that I like hardships, mind you,
But it's easy to make money in the hills.
The choice of goods takes gumption,
I know which bring most profit;
My wares mayn't be much to look at,
But they cost little and the profit's big;
They won't cause me trouble either.
Yesterday I stocked up in town
With cut-price goods;
I sell cut-price goods at the old price,
And the money comes pouring in.
Twenty combs at three dollars forty cents;
Talcum powder, one thirty for ten boxes;
Three forty, one thirty,
Three sixes make eighteen;
Work it out on the abacus:
Five sevens, thirty-five;
And seven nines, sixty-three;
Once this lot is off my hands

I'll make seven dollars ninety.
I've just been to Wang Village,
Now I'll try Li Village.
I shake my rattle before the village and cry:
(*He shakes his rattle and shouts*) Who wants needles? Who wants thread?
Fine steel needles in exchange for hair;
Talcum powder for cash down;
Glass mirrors to see your face in,
Bright plastic combs;
Coloured sugared beans, three a cent,
Pretty to look at and sweet to eat;
Whistles that blow clear and loud,
Buy one to please the kiddies;
Pipes with the bowl, stem and mouthpiece,
Cheap cigarettes from Chengchow.
(*He shouts*) Walk up, walk up and buy!

Tu Chuan (*off*): Hey! Have you seen a pedlar?

(*Voice: Yes, he was crying his wares just now.*)

Tu Chuan (*off*): Ah.

Yao (*in dismay*): Why, it's Tu Chuan. What does she want with me? She's from the co-op, I'm a commissioned agent; she's no call to interfere with me. Can she have found out about my overcharging? This looks like trouble. Even if she doesn't know, by tagging after me she'll spoil my sales. (*He hears Tu Chuan call out again.*) Well, I'll give her the slip.
When I hear Tu Chuan call,
My heart sinks like lead;
Of thirty-six stratagems the best is flight;
I'll nip off before she comes.
(*He walks round the stage.*)

Tu Chuan (*off*): Wait for me!

Yao: Bother! She's following me.
Why is she so keen to catch up?
She must have smelt something fishy.
Well, I'm a fast walker,

I'll leave you behind.
I'll turn off here and cross this one-plank bridge.
(*He crosses the bridge.*)
You won't dare come after me.
I'll cross the brook here by the stepping-stones.
(*He slips while crossing, wets his feet and has to wade.*)
That's muddied both my feet.

(*Exit Yao. Enter Tu Chuan. Seeing Yao ahead, she boldly steps on to the bridge.*)

Tu Chuan: *No plank bridge can hold me back;*
No high hills can stop a brave bird's flight.
(*She crosses the bridge and comes to the brook.*)
Courage and perseverance
Fear neither torrents nor few stepping-stones.
(*Tu Chuan succeeds in keeping her balance as she crosses the brook. Exit.*)

(*Enter Yao. He climbs a slope.*)

Yao: *Up another steep hill I climb.*

(*Enter Tu Chuan. She follows him.*)

Tu Chuan: *What care I though the hill is steep as a ladder to heaven?* Hey! Wait a bit.

Yao (*flustered to find Tu Chuan catching up*): *I must give her the slip.*

(*He steps into a wood to hide. She fails to see him.*)

Tu Chuan: *The trees are dense, I must look carefully.* (*Exit.*)

Yao (*peers out from the wood and, seeing that she has gone, comes out. He heaves a sigh of relief*): What a narrow escape!
Tu Chuan has gone on;
My trick worked.
I'll catch my breath under this persimmon tree
And smoke a cigarette.
What a good riddance! (*He takes out his wallet and puts in his money.*)
Yao San-yuan is out of luck,
My plan's miscarried.
This last cut in prices
Seemed a good chance to make money;
I was just getting started
When I ran into this girl;
I couldn't shake her off,
Couldn't outdistance her;
If I hadn't outwitted her
She would have caught me.
Well, I've weathered that storm
But this money was hard to earn.

Sister Wang (*off*): Tu Chuan!

Tu Chuan (*off*): Here!

Yao (*taken aback*): Who's that calling her now of all times? (*He looks round.*) Supposing she comes back? Well, I'd better clear off quick. (*Dropping his wallet in his haste he picks up his load and hurries off.*)

(*Enter Sister Wang.*)

Sister Wang: *Tu Chuan is trying to overtake the pedlar*
And I am trying to overtake Tu Chuan.

Here I come to a tree. Let me have a look round.
(*She sees the wallet and picks it up.*)
Who's left this wallet by the road?
(*She opens it.*) There's money inside. (*She sees a photograph.*) And a photograph. Well! This is that pedlar who sold me the comb just now. Fine. (*She calls out*) Tu Chuan! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Yao.*)

Yao: *I take not the highway but byways,* (*He stumbles and falls.*)
Down I fall by the road,
My goods strewn all over the ground
Like an old crock stall.
How my back and legs ache,
And I've grazed my nose on the stones.
(*He picks up a mirror to examine his face but can see nothing.*)
This mirror is broken and useless.
(*It upsets him to find that the glass has gone.*) *Aiya!*
Nothing but the frame is left.

(*Enter Tu Chuan. She puts down her load.*)

Tu Chuan: Old Yao!
Yao (*trying to keep cool*): So it's you, Tu Chuan.
Tu Chuan: Yes, Old Yao.
Why didn't you stop when I called?
Yao: That's my weak point.
I'm hard of hearing.
Tu Chuan: *Really?*
Yao: *Yes.*
Tu Chuan (*aside*): *He's trying to fool me.*
Yao (*aside*): *I must try to fool her.*
Tu Chuan: *Why are your goods scattered on the ground?*
(*She prepares to pick them up.*)
Yao: *I've spread them out to sun them.*

(*Tu Chuan smiles and lets them lie.*)

Tu Chuan: *To sun them, eh?*
Yao: *That's right, to sun them.*

Tu Chuan (*aside*): *He keeps heading me off.*
Yao (*aside*): *I must head her off.*
(*To Tu Chuan*) What were you calling me for?
Tu Chuan: Well, the fact is —
There's something I want to ask you.
Yao: What is it?
Tu Chuan: *I've run out of some goods*
And hoped you'd help out with a loan.
Yao (*pleased*): Oh?
(*Aside*) *So that's all she wanted,*
I got worked up for nothing.
(*Cheerfully to Tu Chuan*)
I was in town yesterday
And stocked up well;
Just tell me what you need,
It's my duty to help you.
Tu Chuan: *Can I borrow some plastic combs and talcum powder?*
That is, if you've any to spare.
Yao: *Yes, plenty, plenty.*
I've got new stocks of both.
I'll lend you ten boxes of talcum powder, one thirty;
And ten combs, one seventy.
Tu Chuan: *Ten combs, one seventy?*
Yao: *Seventeen cents each.*
Tu Chuan: *How clearly you remember the new prices.*
Yao: *When the higher-ups announce a price reduction*
We have to fix it clearly in our heads;
If we made a slip and overcharged
The people would suffer and that would never do!
Tu Chuan (*aside*): *What a hypocrite he is,*
Covering up his sharp practices bold as brass.
Old Yao!
It seems someone's selling goods at the old prices,
Taking advantage of the customers.
Yao (*trying to hide his dismay*): Hasn't he heard about the price reductions?

We're always holding meetings, studying,
All keen to remould our ideas.
We must change with the times,
There's no room now for swindlers and sharpers.

Tu Chuan: *If people don't make a good job of thought reform*
They may still be blinded by greed.

Yao: Impossible!

Tu Chuan: *I've proof of what I say.*

Yao: *You really mean it?*

Tu Chuan: *I do indeed.*

Yao: *Who did this?*

Tu Chuan: *He must have a guilty conscience, whoever he is.*

Yao: *We're not that sort,*
We do business honestly.
If that fellow runs into me....

Tu Chuan: What then?

Yao: *I'd.... I'd....*
I'd show him up;
I'd give him a dressing-down.

(*Tu Chuan laughs.*)

Yao: Just leave this to me, Tu Chuan. Don't tell anyone yet. We don't want to make a bad impression. I know these parts better than you. Don't worry, I guarantee....

Tu Chuan: What do you guarantee?

Yao: I guarantee... to track the fellow down.

Sister Wang (*off*): Tu Chuan!

Tu Chuan: I'm here, Sister Wang. Come on.

(*Yao is staggered to see Sister Wang approaching. He hastily picks up his things, meaning to leave.*)

Tu Chuan: Old Yao, you....

Yao: I'll just go to the village in front.

Tu Chuan: Do you see who's coming?

(*Enter Sister Wang.*)

Sister Wang: Well, Tu Chuan, so you caught up with him at last.

(*Like a deflated ball, Yao squats down limply and buries his head in his arms.*)

Tu Chuan: You've come just at the right time, Sister Wang. Our old comrade here wanted to find out from you who overcharged you just now.

Sister Wang: What! Trying to shift the blame, is he? (*She pulls out the comb.*) Tell the truth now. This comb?

Yao: I sold it.

Sister Wang: How much should it cost?

Yao: Seventeen cents.

Sister Wang: *How much did you charge for it?*

(*Yao hangs his head in silence.*)

Tu Chuan: *Why hang your head? Can't you answer?*

Yao (*punctuating his remarks with punches at his own head*): I've been a fool. Blinded by greed.

Tu Chuan: *You're no fool,*
But blinded by greed you certainly were.
Did you go to Chao Village just now?

Yao (*lying instinctively*): No, not I.

Tu Chuan: No?

Yao (*changing his tune*): I mean, I did.

Tu Chuan: Did you give short measure for the ribbons you sold?

Yao: Well....

Tu Chuan: Yes or no?

Yao: Yes, I did.

Tu Chuan: All right.
It's no use trying to fool us.
Weed must be pulled up by the root.
If you don't get rid of your bad capitalist outlook,
You'll slip up again next time you have a chance.
Think well, Old Yao;
Do cut clean through this tangle,
Turn over a new leaf,
Make a fresh start.

Yao: I will, I will. You're absolutely right.

Sister Wang: Of course she's right.

You bring goods to the villages
And the commune members treat you as a friend;
Yet today you play a dirty trick like this,
Don't you think you should be ashamed?

Yao: I've let the commune members down, sister. I'll pay you back that sixteen cents I overcharged you. No, no, I'll pay back everyone I overcharged. (*He gropes for his wallet and is horrified to find it missing.*) What's become of my wallet? Where's my money gone?

Sister Wang (*smiling*): Don't hunt for it, I've got it here. (*She produces the wallet.*) Here you are.

Yao (*taking it eagerly*): Did you pick it up on the road, sister?

Sister Wang: It's yours. Hurry up and count your money.

Tu Chuan: Good for you, sister.

Yao (*even more pleased as he counts the money*): Aha, not a single cent missing, not one cent. Sister.... (*Not knowing how to thank her, he offers her fifty cents.*) Take this fifty cents to buy your kiddies some sweets.

Sister Wang: Come off it. What do you take me for?

Tu Chuan (*smiling*): Sister Wang isn't like you. She can pick up money without being blinded by it.

Yao: Quite right, quite right. Sister Wang, let me repay you the sixteen cents I overcharged you, that's only fair. (*He offers her the money.*)

Sister Wang: Tu Chuan's already returned that sixteen cents for you.

Yao: Oh? (*He gives Tu Chuan the money.*) Tu Chuan, I ... I .... (*He searches for the right thing to say.*) I really must learn from you.

Sister Wang: High time too.

Yao: Yes, quite right.

Tu Chuan: Hurry up and pick up your things. (*She helps him.*) Do they still need sunning?

Yao: No, not any longer.

Tu Chuan: Don't just sun your things. Your ideas need sunning too.

Yao: That's true. Otherwise they'll turn mouldy.

Sister Wang: It's noon, Tu Chuan. Come on home with me for a meal.

Tu Chuan: I won't, sister. Thanks all the same.

Sister Wang: Just this once, you really must come. (*She grabs Tu Chuan's load and goes off.*)

Tu Chuan: Sister Wang! (*She turns back to Yao.*) Old Yao, you....

Yao: I'm going back to pay those people I overcharged.

Tu Chuan: Let me carry your load a while.

Yao (*overwhelmed*): Oh, no, no. You go on ahead, I'll catch you up later.

A carrying pole sways to and fro,
Hurrying from village to village;
We must learn from Tu Chuan, the good salesgirl,
To work wholeheartedly for the commune members.

(*Exit Tu Chuan followed by Yao.*)

Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustrated by Tung Chen-sheng

Sun Li

Country Song

The story takes place in an area in central Hopei Province liberated from the Japanese occupation by the Communist-led Eighth Route Army. In 1946 and 1947, shortly after the victory of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the country was again torn by civil war launched by Chiang Kai-shek against the people's forces. In central Hopei, as in many other regions where the people's rule prevailed, land reform was carried out. As our story opens, mutual-aid teams — a first step towards collectivization — are being formed among the peasants. A "land reform check-up" is also going on. This was conducted in all places where there had been land reform to make sure that no landlord property which should have been divided among the peasants had been omitted and to correct possible mistakes in defining class status.

Sun Li, the author of this novel, was born in 1913 in Anping Village of Hopei Province. He started writing while working in the liberated area with the revolutionary forces during the War of Resistance Against Japan. A well-known novelist, he has written many works including *Records of Paiyangtien*, a collection of short stories, and the novels *The Blacksmith and the Carpenter* and *Stormy Years*. Some of his works have appeared in this magazine.

When Comrade Ping, head of the district, and Comrade Wang, of the county women's association, went to Changkang to organize rural production, they stayed at the home of Chrysanthemum, who was the leader of the village women's production department. Comrade Wang was away at meetings all day, but Comrade Ping was kept so busy solving village problems he didn't get a chance to leave the house. The villagers came to him with the minutest disputes, some of long standing.

Ping felt it was only his duty to help. Besides, he was of peasant origin himself, and he dreaded having to address a meeting. It took him hours to prepare and then, when he actually got up before an audience, he finished what he had to say in two or three sentences. Ping was also rather short-tempered. So he was glad to let Comrade Wang handle the summoning of big meetings and the organization of literacy classes, and such.

The village production committee had already formed eight women's mutual-aid teams. They were having another meeting today, and Comrade Wang and Chrysanthemum left right after breakfast. Chrysanthemum asked Ping to keep an eye on the house for her.

Ping sat alone on the front step, reading some documents.

Chrysanthemum's courtyard was bare except for a date tree. There had been little rain, and dry weather is good for dates. The fruit hung thick and red on the branches. Some were splitting with ripeness. A couple of straggly string-bean vines climbed beneath the window, but they had few blossoms.

Ping felt right at home here. Chrysanthemum was a poor peasant, like himself. He at least had an old mother, living alone in the southern part of the province. But Chrysanthemum had lost both her parents when she was still a child. Yet she had managed to survive and bring up a little sister. It must have been very hard.

He heard a giggle and turned around. A girl, carrying a little boy, was poking the dates with a long stalk, making him laugh. The girl was tall and slim, and her glossy black hair hung to her shoulders. She wore a tunic of red, white and purple checks, and a pair of knee-length shorts. Her stockingless feet were clad in new red cloth shoes.

She was looking up at the tree, apparently seeking some particularly succulent dates. But when she took a stance with the raised stalk she turned her head, and her eyes fell directly on the district chief's face, as though she had been planning to steal a look at him. She laughed and tossed the stalk away. Jollying the child, she strolled out of the courtyard.

Ping was impressed by the extreme fairness of her complexion and the liveliness of her eyes in the sunlight. "How is it I haven't seen her before?" he wondered. "Why isn't she at the meeting?"

The girl walked east down the lane and pushed open an unpainted compound gate. Then she turned her head and looked back.

Curious, Ping followed her through the gateway. A one-storey building of three rooms faced south on the far side of the yard. It was built of tamped earth walls and had fresh oil-paper windows with small glass panes in the middle. The girl was in the house, watching Ping through one of the glass panes.

Ping halted in the centre of the yard.

"So this is where you live."

"Yes," the girl retorted with a smile.

He couldn't think of anything else to say, and turned to go. The girl got off the platform bed and came to the door. She pulled out a stool and placed it on the ground in front of Ping.

"Sit down, district chief," she urged, smiling. "You've never been to our house before. I've got a problem I want to discuss with you."

"What is it?" Ping was a bit impatient, but he sat down anyway. "What's your name?"

"I'm called Fair Brows."

"Are you related to Chrysanthemum?"

"No. Our family name is Kuo, hers is Li."

"Do you work together a lot?"

"No. That's just what I want to talk to you about. What right have they to keep me out?"

"Out of what?"

"A mutual-aid team." The girl's lips paled with anger. "It's production we're after, isn't it? Well, let's compare. They average

a bolt and a half a day each. I can weave three. But they don't want me. Take a look at this." She pointed to her colourful tunic. "Can they weave this kind of cloth? When I go to market, people are always asking me for a sample. And they won't let me join!"

"Who won't?"

"Those women!" There were tears in the girl's eyes.

"What do they say?"

"They say I'm in the theatrical troupe, that I fool around with boys." Her voice was low. Then she said in a louder tone: "But it's not true. Tell me, district chief," she asked suddenly, "what's frivolous?"

Ping smiled.

"It says here very clearly." Fair Brows ran into the room and came out with a newspaper. She handed it to Ping. In the Questions and Answers column there was an explanation of the term.

"I ought to show them this. They've no right to be pinning labels on me." She snatched back the paper before Ping had a chance to finish reading.

"I ask you, district chief, is a person who acts on the stage frivolous?"

"Of course not. You're doing propaganda work."

"What if our plays are at night?"

"That doesn't make any difference."

"Suppose we perform in other villages?"

"There's nothing wrong with that."

"Nothing wrong? But it's only for doing those things they call me frivolous. I ask you: Does liking to talk and laugh make me frivolous? Does going to markets and temple fairs make me frivolous? Does wearing clothes that are clean and neat make me frivolous?"

"The newspaper says it plainly," Ping responded seriously. "A frivolous person is one who doesn't do any productive work."

"There you have it," the girl exclaimed with a smile. "I weave three bolts of cloth a day. It's my temperament to talk and laugh. I go to market to buy thread and sell cloth. My coloured tunic I've woven myself. What else can they say against me?"

"What status is your family?"

The girl entered the house, calling back over her shoulder: "Come in and see for yourself, chief."

Ping went inside. In the outer room was a long table. On it was a stack of large bowls with a flowery pattern, a board for kneading dough, a rolling pin, and jugs of oil, vinegar and salt. A large strainer ladle hung on the wall.

Fair Brows raised the door curtain of the west room. It was empty except for a huge platform bed covered by a new mat. She led Ping to the east room. In it was a loom with a half completed bolt of cloth of checked pattern. Otherwise, the room contained little furniture. But it was spotlessly clean.

"How many of you are there in the family?" asked Ping.

"Four."

"How much land do you have?"

"Five and a half *mou*."

"Draught animals?"

"We share a donkey with another family." Fair Brows smiled. "What would you say our status is, district chief?"

"If we just compare the land to the number of people, you ought to be rated poor peasants. But you seem to live quite well. That's a big kneading board you've got. You probably use a lot of white flour."

Fair Brows laughed. "We run a small inn here. Didn't you see that big platform bed? That's how we earn our food. Clothing I make with my own two hands. I weave it myself."

"I'll talk it over with Comrade Wang," Ping said as he left.

The girl escorted him as far as the compound steps. She stood outside the gate a long time before returning to the house.

Comrade Wang and Chrysanthemum were already at home when Ping got back. They were waiting for him for the noonday meal.

An unpainted table was placed in the middle of the room. Chrysanthemum's younger sister washed it clean, then filled a large black bowl each for Comrade Wang and Ping.

Comrade Wang was well educated. She had attended an anti-Japanese college. Though she didn't have a big appetite, she liked

good fresh country food. Chrysanthemum today gave her large green beans, undergrown sweet potatoes, and tender corn — Comrade Wang called it maize, which made the little girl laugh. Some of these vegetables came from Chrysanthemum's own garden. Some, the sister borrowed from a neighbour's plot.

Ping, Wang and the girl ate at the table. Chrysanthemum sat with her bowl on the threshold.

"I visited a family that runs a small inn this morning," Ping said to Chrysanthemum. "Do you know them?"

"Whereabouts are they? We have three small inns in this village," Chrysanthemum raised her head to answer.

"East of here, on the south side of the lane. They've an unpainted compound gate."

"That's Kuo Chung's place," said Chrysanthemum.

"You shouldn't go there, district chief." Comrade Wang was splitting open a bean pod. "That's a dissolute place."

"I'm asking Chrysanthemum. That daughter of theirs — Fair Brows. What actually is she like?"

"Very bad," Comrade Wang inserted. She was nibbling on an ear of corn. "Wild."

"Tell me about her background, Chrysanthemum."

"It's a long story," said Chrysanthemum slowly.

"You needn't go back too far." Ping smiled at the literal way she took things.

"Fair Brows' grandparents on her mother's side ran a gambling den. Her mother grew up there. They say when she was young she was as pretty as Fair Brows. A lot of men were after her. Fair Brows' grandfather was a real sharpster. He saw that Kuo Chung wasn't doing badly with his small inn, so he married his daughter to him. Kuo Chung is a simple honest fellow. All kinds of shoddy characters were always hanging around his inn. And since Fair Brows' mother was a free and easy type, people said bad things about her. Of course you can't run an inn the same way you'd run a home."

"What about Fair Brows?"

"Some say she's bad too, but I think not."

"There's no question in my mind," Comrade Wang asserted. "Like mother like daughter."

"When she was leader of our women's militia, we all found her hard to take. But every time we competed with other villages, we always came out first. Fair Brows likes to win. She was in our theatrical troupe, too. Sometimes they rehearsed at night, and she came home quite late. She also likes to joke and fool around, and she dresses well. So there's idle talk about her. When we re-organized the women's mutual-aid teams this year, we left her out. Comrade Wang was here, then."

"And absolutely right it was, too. Fair Brows is really cheeky." Comrade Wang had finished eating. She got up and went into the next room for a nap.

"Whose idea was it that Fair Brows should be excluded?" asked Ping.

"It was brought up in the committee. I hear that Ta-chi, from the west end of the village, was the main supporter."

"But Ta-chi really is dissolute, isn't she?"

"She certainly is." Chrysanthemum laughed. "Lately I heard that it was Kuo Huan who put her up to it. He's the nephew of the big landlord, Old Master Kuo. Kuo Huan frittered all his property away, so last year we didn't take any action against him. He used to be running to the inn all the time. They say that shortly before we re-organized the women's teams, Fair Brows called him every name under the sun and drove him out."

"So those are the kind of people who label Fair Brows frivolous. How can you believe them?"

"Fair Brows has her faults. She's bossy, she looks down on anyone who isn't as competent as she, and she's got a sharp tongue. That's turned a lot of people against her. It only needed one puff of rumour to blow up a gale." Smiling, Chrysanthemum began clearing the table.

"Why did you women keep her out of the mutual-aid teams?"

"I've told you. No one wanted to be on the same team with her. Comrade Wang and I were afraid the effect would be bad if we insisted,

so we left her out. What's your opinion? Do you think she should be asked to join?"

"I think she should. At the same time, you can criticize and educate her. We mustn't take the word of rascals and exclude one of our own people." Ping stood up. "Talk it over among yourselves."

"Comrade Wang," Chrysanthemum called. But Comrade Wang was already asleep in the other room. There was no response. "I'm afraid she won't agree. Fair Brows argued with her in front of everybody."

"That's not serious. Tomorrow, arrange for me to eat with Fair Brows' family. I want to get to know them better."

"Right," Chrysanthemum smilingly assented.

The next day Fair Brows summoned Ping early for breakfast. A small table had been laid on the platform bed. Fair Brows' mother and her little brother sat around the table with Ping. The girl served the food. Her father, who wasn't much of a talker, greeted the district chief pleasantly, then went out with his bowl and ate in the lane.

By eating with the family for three days, Ping learned quite a lot about their history and ways.

The village was on the main road between the towns of Hochien and Paoting. Before the Japanese invaded that part of China in 1937, the local landlords had five or six silk goods shops and two money lending establishments. This increase in commercial activity stimulated the opening of a dozen or so gambling houses and opium parlours. The village drew rascals from all over. While the poverty of the poor increased, an atmosphere of superficial prosperity was created, and a disregard for legitimate productive activity resulted.

The streets were noisy and bustling, but the peasants suffered twelve months out of the year. Aside from what they paid the landlords directly, the remainder of their income also ended up in the landlords' hands through various forms of extortion. All the pawnbrokers, the usurers, the robbers, the gambling dens proprietors were in league with the landlords. With thick tubes and thin, straight tubes and crooked, the landlords siphoned blood from every phase of the peasants' existence and fattened themselves.

After the War of Resistance Against Japan began, the Eighth Route Army, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, came to this region and set up an anti-Japanese revolutionary base. A cleansing storm swept the murky evil from the streets of Changkang. With exploitation eliminated, the powers behind the opium traffickers, the gamblers, the brothel operators and the robbers were smashed. The silk goods shops and money lending establishments closed their doors. Weavers of homespun again displayed their wares. The idlers diminished. People understood that productive labour was honourable.

Kuo Chung's small inn had been started by his grandfather. For three generations it had been serving generous portions of tasty food, and it had many customers. Although it displayed no boastful advertising outside its door, three times a month, when the market fairs were held, pedlars with their wheelbarrows, artisans with their carrying poles, flocked to the inn as if returning to their own home.

Kuo Chung was an honest fellow, and most of the customers had been patronizing his place for years. Often, on arrival, they would set down their burdens and, without further ado, help fetch water and cook the meals.

Ping and Comrade Wang had several arguments on the question of Fair Brows joining a production team. Wang insisted that it would have a bad effect. She said that Ping didn't understand the situation, that he didn't really know what Fair Brows was like. Ping said that Wang judged only by impressions instead of analysing things on a class basis. In the end, Comrade Wang agreed to letting Fair Brows form a team of her own. The team would also include the girl's mother, a match-maker from the east end of the village named Big Propriety, and a woman from the west end of the village who was very fond of card playing called Little Yellow Pear.

Fair Brows went to see Ping about it when she was informed. The district chief said:

"When a person is given a job, she can't pick her work partners. If they're backward, it's up to us to help them. What counts is to do the job well."

"Right. We'll show those other women a thing or two."

"But we shouldn't do our work out of spite," Ping smiled.

"It's no use explaining only to me." Fair Brows also smiled. "I'll bet I won't even be able to get those women of mine to come to a meeting."

"How can you be so sure? You call them together. I'll come too."

"Ah." Fair Brows gave a sigh of relief. "If the district chief will be there, they won't dare stay away."

"You must learn to talk things over with them nicely. You're too bossy. You've got to get over that habit."

Fair Brows departed. That night, as Ping left for the meeting, Comrade Wang laughed.

"I thought you didn't like running meetings. What's given you such an interest in this model team?"

"You still can joke. That team is actually one of your women's affairs. You say they're backward. Well, what are we supposed to do — lead only the hard core and the activists?" He looked at their hostess. "If everyone were like Chrysanthemum, there'd be no need for us cadres."

"You're flattering me again, district chief." Chrysanthemum had lit the lamp and was getting ready to weave.

The team meeting was held in the home of Big Propriety. When the district chief arrived, he found the women already seated in a circle on the platform bed. Fair Brows sat on the edge, obviously very happy.

"I see you've taken your places. All that's lacking is a deck of cards," Ping quipped.

"So you know our old failing, district chief?" Big Propriety laughed.

Ping sat down on a stool beside a cabinet that faced the door. "You see, they're all here," he said to Fair Brows. "People shouldn't be subjective in their work."

Fair Brows laughed.

"We backward stubborn females have all been put on one team," said Big Propriety. "It's up to us to prove ourselves. We can't let our Fair Brows lose out to those other women."

"It's not a question of anyone losing out to anybody," Ping said. "We're all on the same side. If we do our job well, everybody benefits. If we do it badly, everybody's responsible. Don't treat yourself like an outsider."

"The district chief is right," said Fair Brows' mother. "We hope he'll give us a speech."

All the women applauded. Ping's face reddened. He rose to his feet.

"I'm not much of a speech-maker, but there is something I can say. I know a little about Changkang. In the old society, there were a lot of bad people here. They used to say if you started counting from that end of the main street, you'd find a loose woman in every other house; and that if you then started counting from the other end, you'd find a loose woman in every house in between. That was a dirty lie. People were forced to go bad by the feudal landlords. They exploited the poor. They made the poor go bad. They had money. They enjoyed themselves. The filthy bastards. Now we have a new society. How is it those bad places and people are gone? It's honourable to work now, gambling is shameful. If I catch anybody gambling again, I'll arrest him. Those rotters. The drought's so bad, but instead of going out and watering the fields, they still want to gamble...."

Ping was shouting. He pulled off the towel kerchief that bound his head and mopped his sweating brow. The women on the platform bed were frightened stiff. Ping realized that he had lost his temper again. He sat down and said with a laugh:

"I get excited when I make speeches. You women talk it over among yourselves. Fair Brows, chair the meeting."

He got up and walked out.

"That's some temper our district chief has," said Big Propriety.

Fair Brows disagreed. "He's very calm and reasonable when he chats with anybody. It's only when he has to make a speech —"

"But he shouted at us, for no reason at all," Little Yellow Pear remarked.

"He's just frank and outspoken. Everything he said was true, wasn't it?" Big Propriety responded. "But let's get down to business. Fair Brows, tell us. How do you think we ought to go about this?"

"How?" The girl turned towards her. "Why, we've got to organize."

"Isn't that what we've done?" Big Propriety asked with a smile. She was sitting very erect. "Aren't we all here together? But organizing can't mean just calling us middle-aged women to sit around on a platform bed. There must be more to follow." She set her mouth in a firm line.

"A fine thing it would be if all we had to do was sit," Little Yellow Pear guffawed, smacking her thigh. Even Little Yellow Pear's teeth were yellow.

"Organizing means working together — a kind of partnership. You help me with my work, I help you with yours," said Fair Brows.

"That's what we call lending a hand in the busy season," said her mother.

"If that's what it is, why make such a fuss?" queried Little Yellow Pear. "Are we supposed to do it all year round?"

"All year round," said Fair Brows firmly. "We mustn't slacken."

"Absolutely not," Big Propriety agreed. "We'll challenge other teams to compete." She sat up straighter.

"Right," Fair Brows said softly. "We've got to show what we can do, let people know who we are."

And so the team was formed. The next day there was a meeting of team leaders. Chrysanthemum notified Fair Brows to attend.

Comrade Wang had sarcastically referred to them as a "model team." What she actually meant was an "idlers team." Fair Brows was aware of this attitude towards her team. Her long curved brows dancing, she challenged Li the Third's mutual-aid team, generally considered the best in the village. Everyone at the meeting was astonished.

Li was Big Propriety's husband. A carpenter, he was good at many other things as well. He could build a house, fire a kiln, set up a mill, make wooden pails, repair crockery, and paper a ceiling. The handiest man in the village, Li was good-tempered, steady.

The members of his team were: Ta-yin, a young fellow who tamped earthen walls; Hsiao-liang, a powerful man who enjoyed weight-lifting contests with the stone roller after a hard day's work in the fields; and Hsing, a primary school graduate. Hsing liked to sing tunes from the operas and play the harmonica, but his field work was poor. He had gone off for a stint in the army, but returned home again after only a few days. The production committee had felt that Li's team was too strong. That was why they had given him this young "headache."

Li's team felt that the challenge by Fair Brows was something of an insult. Those women would be too easy to beat. But Li, straightforward and serious, accepted. One of the men said:

"Big Propriety's on her team, Li. Better be careful."

Rapping the ashes out of his pipe, Li laughed. "Quit your kidding. This is a meeting."

His team set the following conditions: Both sides must draw up a production plan, operate as teams all year, also engage in sidelines, and strive for a status of "model."

The sidelines of Li's team were to be house-building in spring and carpentry in winter. The sidelines of Fair Brows' team were to be spinning and weaving patterned cloth.

Hsing was to write out the production plans for both teams. He did his own team's during the rest period after the noonday meal,

then strolled to a big willow by a pond in the west end of the village and lay down on a large stone slab.

When it rained, water flowed across this slab into the pond. But this year the weather had been rather dry. The water in the pond was shallow and muddy. There were a few ducks paddling about.

The young man had something on his mind. Originally he and Fair Brows had been sweethearts. They had attended the same school, both were in the theatrical troupe. In the operettas they performed, they were always cast as lovers, or husband and wife. When they were on stage together, their singing and acting seemed to be particularly inspired. The day Hsing went off to the army was the day Fair Brows was excluded from the production team. She trailed at the end of the crowd seeing him off to the edge of the village. When he returned from the city the next day for a brief visit to his family, he ran into Fair Brows on the road. She had just sold a bolt of cloth in the market, and surreptitiously slipped him two yuan.

"Now," Hsing thought, "everything is over." He had run away from the army not long after and come home. People despised him, Fair Brows ignored him. Now, she was challenging his team. It was just his luck to have to be the one to write out her production plan!

Just before supper, Hsing adjusted the white towel kerchief on his head and tightened his leather belt. He knew that Fair Brows usually stood in her gateway at this hour. While still a good distance away he saw her there, looking in his direction. She turned her gaze elsewhere. He walked up to her slowly.

"Have you worked out your plan yet?" he asked.

"Yes." She wouldn't face him.

"Where do you want me to write it? Have you got paper?"

"We've everything we need." She started walking east.

"Where are you going?"

"To Big Propriety's house."

A bit angry, he trailed behind her. Big Propriety lived in the outskirts. When they had left the village, Fair Brows slowed her pace.

"What's wrong with you? Why did you come home?" she demanded.

The boy didn't reply.

She laughed scornfully.

He was tempted to go back to the village. Without turning her head, the girl said: "Come along."

Again he caught up. Fair Brows asked: "Why did you come home? Have you no shame? Are you afraid to die?"

They were skirting a pond of reeds. "If I were you," she said, "I'd jump into this pond and drown myself."

"Quit provoking me," Hsing cried.

"Is that possible? Do you have any feelings at all?" the girl retorted softly. "You had the gall to deck yourself out in a new white head kerchief when you left, and you had the gall to still be wearing it when you came back. As for that leather belt, it might be some use at the front. There it would look good. But seeing you all dressed up at your own door only makes people furious."

This was more than Hsing could bear. He wanted to find a quiet spot where he could weep. He turned and started for home. Fair Brows ran after him and grabbed his arm.

"Where do you think you're going? Come along and write up our plan."

The boy had no choice but to accompany her. It was quite dark by then, and the sky was overcast. Big Propriety was shouting for her husband to come in for supper.

It rained during the night, though not very heavily. Nevertheless, the peasants were happy. The next day everybody got up early and went to the fields. Particularly energetic were the members of mutual-aid teams. They said the rain would help them make a showing. Stripped to the waist, hoes on their shoulders, they marched in a line. The crops had brightened up after the rain. Roads and paths were filled with talking, laughing men and women.

Fair Brows was out of bed before dawn. She called her team members together and they set out for Big Propriety's field. Fair Brows was wearing a new tunic. She rolled up her trouser legs because the dew was heavy on the ground. Little Yellow Pear caught up with her and said:

"My sweet potato vines need turning. Why not work a day at my place first?"

"You mustn't do that," said Big Propriety. "I've already prepared food and drink for you all."

"It'll be bad if I don't turn those vines after the rain," said Little Yellow Pear.

"But my cotton will go wild if we don't prune it," countered Big Propriety, breathing hard.

"You mean you won't help me?"

"Who says we won't? What did we agree at our meeting? You were so concerned about the rest of us. You insisted that our work be done first. Now, it rains and you change your mind. We're going to work together a long time. How will we manage if you don't stick to your word?"

"Don't you lecture me." Little Yellow Pear's face turned absolutely golden. "If that's the way you feel about it, then each person can look after herself. I'm going to turn my sweet potato vines." She marched off.

"Go on," Big Propriety shouted after her. "We can get along without you."

Fair Brows was frantic. "Come back," she cried. "What's the idea? Are you trying to shame me?"

After much urging by Fair Brows' mother, Little Yellow Pear was persuaded to go to Big Propriety's field.

The women started pruning the cotton plants. Little Yellow Pear was down to the end of her row in no time. She seated herself beneath a small willow. Big Propriety glared. When she reached the end of the row she said:

"If you help someone, you ought to be fair about it. You should be as careful as if you were doing your own work, and not just kid around."

"Who's kidding around?" Little Yellow Pear demanded.

"What do you call this?" She stepped over into the row Little Yellow Pear had just worked on and parted a few of the cotton plants. "See here," she called to the others. "She didn't prune any of these.

She's purposely trying to make me do it all over. If this team can't work together, let's break up."

"Who needs a team? I've done all right without one for years." Little Yellow Pear patted the dust from her clothes and walked away. Fair Brows tried to call her back in vain.

Men working in a nearby field grinned. A red flush spread from Fair Brows' face to her neck. "You're just making monkeys of us," she yelled at Little Yellow Pear's retreating figure.

Little Yellow Pear walked quickly to her own field and began turning vines. Fair Brows started towards her at a run.

"Don't you raise a row," Fair Brows' mother shouted.

The girl halted in her tracks. She remembered what the district chief had said: "You're too bossy. You've got to get over that habit."

Fair Brows felt very badly. "Surely we're not going to break up on the very first day?" she thought. Fair Brows called a couple of times, but Little Yellow Pear pretended not to hear. She squatted in her field, turning sweet potato vines.

"Let's leave her alone for now," Fair Brows said to the others. "We'll finish this cotton first."

She did her work carefully and quickly. Though she didn't say a word, she was thinking hard:

"You're bound to run into trouble on a job, the trick is to figure out why.... What else could it be, except pure selfishness.... But our aim is to organize selfish people together and get them so that they gradually become unselfish.... Where can I learn to do that? In the newspaper? The newspaper has a lot of methods, but some of them won't work in this bad village of ours." She wrinkled her brow. "I've got to try. What caused the trouble today, for instance? The rain. Everyone wanted to finish the work on her own field and harvest a good crop. If we work fast and well, we can do everybody's field. No one will be delayed."

Fair Brows made up her mind. Chatting pleasantly, she remarked: "We don't need all day to finish this little bit of cotton."

The other women, observing her energetic manner, smiled and worked faster. Fair Brows said:

"We're still backward. When the whole country is liberated, we'll be able to plough and harvest with machinery."

"They say we'll even have machinery to turn millstones," said the girl's mother. "Then I won't have to keep walking around that old mill. I'll just turn on the machine and let it grind out flour. For that small inn of ours, we have to mill flour all day long."

"Who knows when that will be?" said Big Propriety. "I hear there's a machine for sawing planks. My husband's back aches after pulling and pushing a saw from morning till night."

"It will be wonderful then," said Fair Brows. "Our village will have movies. I've never seen one."

"Do you think it will happen in my lifetime?" asked her mother.

"Why not?" the girl replied. "It'll be very soon. Let me ask you: Do you know why Chairman Mao is calling on us to organize?"

"If we organize we become a team," said her mother, with an excited smile. "Gradually we can become part of a big partnership."

"Right. When you study what Chairman Mao says, you don't want to just look at the words. You've got to see the whole picture, take a long range view. Then you'll see his full meaning. He's leading us forward step by step, but we ought to take bigger strides, speed up a bit."

Stirred, the women worked with a will. They forgot whose plot of land they were working on. They felt they were labouring for the prosperity of all, as Chairman Mao recommended.

Before noon, they completed pruning the cotton field.

"Let's help Little Yellow Pear turn her sweet potato vines," Fair Brows proposed.

"Why should we?" said Big Propriety. "She doesn't help others."

"She'll never finish, all by herself. Let's give her a hand."

Fair Brows' mutual-aid team didn't disintegrate. That evening, the women met and criticized themselves. A few days later, two more families, both with men in the army, joined the team. The women worked enthusiastically, especially Fair Brows. Every day she read about the experience of other teams in the newspaper. She passed this information on to her team-mates.

One night a big meeting was called in the village to discuss production. A theatrical troupe from a neighbouring village was invited to perform afterwards.

District Chief Ping spoke about Fair Brows' team. He said mutual-aid teams had to be formed on a voluntary basis. They needed good leaders, self-criticism and education, proper calculation and recording of work done. They must be effective, and improve farming technique.

Fair Brows stood in the audience looking up at the speaker, suppressing the smile that played around the corners of her mouth.

It was a hot sultry night. But the play the visiting theatrical troupe was performing took place in winter. One of the actors was clad in heavy clothes and wore a big fur hat. He sang with vigour, perspiration streaming down his face. Suddenly, he stopped and withdrew. The leader of the troupe hurried on stage, bowed, and said to the audience:

"Our singer is over-dressed, neighbours. He's too hot. He's gone backstage to cool off a little. How about us all singing a tune together while we wait?" He applauded his suggestion and the audience clapped with him.

Fair Brows left. There was a moon that night. She walked towards home along a path in the village outskirts. As she was passing the big pond, someone hailed her. She turned around. It was Hsing.

He caught up with her in a few strides.

"I'm going back to the army tomorrow, Fair Brows."

"Have you got the courage?" The girl halted.

"I've made up my mind."

"Go ahead, then."

"I want to ask you something. Are we still friends?"

"Will you come running home again?"

"No. When I get back to the army, I'm going to study and work hard."

"Then we're still friends. You go ahead."

Laughing, Hsing trotted off. He ran a few paces, then halted.

"Did you see those actors?" he demanded. "What kind of play do you call that? Terrible. I could see you didn't think much of them. After I leave, you get our troupe together again."

After that one night of rain, the weather went dry again. The sky cleared, there wasn't even any dew at night. Leaves on the lower portions of the sorghum stalks turned yellow. The leaves higher up drooped as soon as the sunlight hit them. The millet put out half a head of grain, then stopped, like a baby having difficulty in being born.

People scanned the heavens till their eyes ached. Li rose every day in the wee hours of the morning and summoned his team to carry water to the fields from the well.

The well was an old one and, due to the lack of rain, the water in it was low. By breakfast time it was so shallow they had to wait for it to fill up again. Just as the crops before them seemed to be doing, they watched and waited. If only the crops could have a little rain to trickle down from their heads to their feet. Crops can't talk. They can only long for water avidly.

Every day the peasants rose and gazed at the sky. There was never a wisp of cloud. Sometimes, when they were irrigating, they would spot a few dark clouds far off on the horizon, and they would pray that they would come their way. They waited for thunder, for raindrops to fall on their heads.

But only their perspiration dripped. The dark clouds slowly dissipated, and the peasants, mopping their red faces with the sweat-soaked towels they had hung on the windlass, sat down listlessly on the edge of the well platform.

When Big Propriety got home that day, she found Li shaping a piece of wood with an adze.

"Not asleep yet?" she asked. "What's that for?"

Li looked up. Sweat was running sideways along the deep horizontal lines in his cheeks. He wiped his face with his hand and smiled.

"Our team has only one small windlass. The man at the well has to wait while someone else is pouring the water from the bucket. All the rest of us have to stand around too. We've got this bit of timber at home. I thought I'd rig up a pulley that could haul two buckets on the opposite sides of a rope loop."

"Give that to me," his wife exclaimed. She snatched up the piece of locust timber. "I've been saving that so you could make me a spinning wheel. And you want to use it for a pulley!"

"Just listen to you," said Li. "The weather is so dry it's scorching. What's more important — a spinning wheel or a pulley for the well?"

"I won't let you have it." His wife plumped herself down and shoved Li aside. "How many things do you want to give them? You're the only one who's so big-hearted. You make all the presents, you do all the work, but they get all the benefits."

"What have I given them?"

"What? I'm so mad I can't remember. Let me think a minute. Ah, right. You gave them a hoe handle, didn't you?"

"I put it on my own hoe."

"But sooner or later all tools will belong to the team, won't they? And that day you mended the stand for the well windlass. I won't say anything about your labour, but did they even pay for those five big-headed nails you used? And when you repaired the bucket, you used our wood and our own hemp rope."

"After it was repaired didn't you use it? Didn't you water our plot with it?"

"But I always have to water someone else's plot first," Big Propriety said coldly. "We're the first to do the work and last to get the benefit."

"I'm a cadre," shouted Li.

"You're a model." She was shouting too. "But can you eat a model? How are we going to get through the winter months?"

"We got through hard winters before." Li sat down on a stool and lit his pipe.

"I'm not saying you shouldn't help them." Big Propriety suddenly became very reasonable. "But let me ask you: With the weather

so dry and the water in the well so low that even a small windlass can't raise any, what's the point in making a big pulley?"

"That well needs dredging. Once you dredge it, there'll be plenty of water."

"Do you want to kill yourself? I'm not going to let you dredge that well. You're always groaning about your back. Who's going to look after you if you get really sick?"

"You are," a voice behind her said. Big Propriety turned around. The district chief had come in.

"Not me," she laughed. "Today, men and women are equal. I've been looking after him for years. It's his turn now. Have you eaten, district chief?" She gave Li a sidelong glance and went into the next room for a nap.

Smiling, Li passed Ping a stool. Then he pulled over the piece of locust timber and squinted along it with one eye. Standing upon it, he raised his adze. "It's not easy being a cadre these days," he said. "You're attacked from inside and out. The peasants, your wife — everybody aggravates you."

The district chief laughed.

"Peasants are near-sighted," said Li. "They're willing enough to pick melons in summer, but they don't like planting seeds in spring. They hate to invest in anything. The last few days, we've been irrigating the fields. But my team is losing interest, say it's a waste of time. I said: Let's use a big pulley. They said: There's no water. I said: Let's dredge the well. They said: It's no use dredging a well with a sticky mud bottom. I said: Let's run a tube through the mud to the mouth of the spring. They said: We can't afford to. I said: Send someone to Tuan Village and buy a length of bamboo. That can be our tube. I'll figure out how to do it and lay it myself. We'll save lots of money.... Even so, some of them weren't too happy about the idea." Li laughed. "Step by step. I know pushing too hard doesn't solve anything. But the drought is so bad. How can you help being anxious?"

"By the time you've finished your pulley, dredged the well and set in the pipe, the crops will have withered in the field," his wife called from the next room. She had been listening all the while.

"We're not doing it just for this year. Every year we have drought, every year we wear out our eyes looking for rain. Even if we can't finish in time for this year, we still have next year," said Li.

"Who's going to wait that long?" Big Propriety retorted. "If we don't get results now, next year you won't have anybody on your mutual-aid team."

Li did not reply. He stood on the piece of timber with his head lowered, the adze in his hands. "She's right," he thought. "If we don't get results, it will be very hard to keep the team together."

"Don't lose heart, Li," Ping encouraged.

"I won't." Li looked up. He again raised his adze. "But I'm afraid that others might."

"Keep on with your plan, step by step. I'll help you," said the district chief. "The main thing is not to give up. The tougher it is, the harder we've got to fight. Let me know when you dredge that well."

Li and his team started dredging in the afternoon. Fair Brows heard about it and came with her team to help.

"We'll give you a hand with yours," she said to Li, "and then you must help us with ours. When you've set up your big pulley, let us have your small windlass."

Eight men and women gathered around the well. "I know this well. It's an old one," said Li. "I'll go down and take a look. If there's danger, you others needn't come down."

"You're getting on in years," said his wife, "and your back aches. Let the younger men do it."

"What's there to be afraid of?" Li laughed. He sat on the bucket and grasped the rope. They lowered him into the well.

Fair Brows and Big Propriety worked at the windlass pulling out buckets of mud till their faces were streaming with perspiration. Big Propriety was longing to get it over with.

"Let's work a little harder," she urged Fair Brows, "and dispose of this mud. Your uncle has a bad back."

"Didn't you just quarrel with him?" teased the girl. "How can you love him so?"

"It's because I love him that I quarrel and fight," Big Propriety laughed. She leaned over the well shaft and called: "Having any trouble?"

"No," Li shouted back. "Keep hauling up that mud."

People on the well platform, talking and laughing, disposed of the mud sent up. They worked in shifts. The dredging was finished

before dark, and the water rose nicely. Li suggested that they irrigate the land of the person who owned the well. Everyone cheerfully agreed.

Big Propriety went home first and made Li some hot noodle soup. After supper, she urged him to go to bed early. She lay by his side, keeping the mosquitoes off with a battered plantain fan.

"You must be worn out," she said. Li didn't reply. His eyes were closed. "That dredging really did the trick," she went on. "The well filled quickly. Tomorrow, you'll be setting up the pulley and watering with the double buckets. That will be fine for our late millet."

"I've still got to put in a tube," Li said sleepily.

"Ask our women's team to help. We can do a lot of work."

"Don't worry, I will. It takes plenty of push to get a tube in."

"I heard that other teams are talking about dredging their wells too, now that they know how much better ours is. They say they hope you'll put tubes in for them also. Have you got enough time?"

"Why not? All I've got to do is cut down a little on my rest. If the production of every team in the village picks up and we pull through this drought, I won't ask for anything better," smiled Li.

"When all this is over, you've got to make me a spinning wheel."

"I will, I will. Who says I won't?"

"And after the autumn harvest, you've got to make my team a loom. Fair Brows and the others said I should find a chance to ask you." She laughed and snuggled her head against his arm-pit.

"Come to bed," Li mumbled drowsily. "We've got to get up early tomorrow."

"You sleep. I won't bother you." She covered him with a light quilt, then she too went to sleep.

Snoring peacefully, she dreamed that Li was dredging all sorts of useful things out of the well — a saw, a plane, a loom, a spinning wheel. She sat on the well platform and tried out the wheel. It fairly flew, spewing out fine, even thread. Fair Brows and the others jumped for joy. They smiled and praised the spinning wheel. Whirling, whirling, it was transformed into a great water wheel. Water gushed from it like a fountain and flowed into Big Propriety's plot of late

millet. Immediately, the millet raised its heads and danced in the breeze, then some of the millet turned into children, wearing beautiful clothing of many hues. The children danced gaily around her and Li. She took a little boy in her arms. Li picked up a little girl. She whispered to him: "We're both over forty and we've never had any kids. Let's keep these two."

Sleeping, she slipped a plump arm across Li's chest.

II

The announcement that the land reform was to be checked over, and any omissions rectified, reached Changkang. After a mass meeting at which the peasants poured out their grievances against the landlords, the peasants took action. It was the fifteenth of the seventh lunar month. The sorghum had gone completely red in the sun. There were fields and fields of it. Beating drums and cymbals, peasants marched out of the village, circled round the big pond, and went first to the forty *mou* of millet, irrigated by a water wheel, which was owned by Old Master Kuo.

Their red lacquered oxhide drum had been gathering dust in the Kuo family temple for years. The peasants had not been allowed to touch it. All during the anti-Japanese war the village theatrical troupe had used only the small drum. But today, after the mass meeting, a peasant had proposed: "Open the door of the Kuo family temple and get the big drum and we'll beat it." A dozen men had dragged forth all the musical instruments and laid them out in the sun for an airing. The boom of the big drum was thunderous.

"Let Fair Brows conduct," people shouted.

The girl was still red and sweating from her participation in the mass rally. In her hand was a thick grain stalk.

She ran over and waved the stalk to give the cadence. "We'll do the *March of the Generals.* One, two...."

The big drum boomed triumphantly.

With the big drum leading the way, Fair Brows swung her stalk vigorously. Her flowery patterned tunic was soon soaked with sweat.

The tassels of the sorghum on either side of the road brushed people's faces as they passed. Grains like beads of crimson coral were brought showering down by the pounding of the drum, landing on the ground, on the marchers' heads and necks.

Men removed their tunics, rolled them up, and carried them slung across one shoulder.

News had spread quickly across the plain that a more thoroughgoing land reform had already started in the mountain region. The landlords stopped their water wheels, although their fields were parched. They knew that most of their land would be divided up among the peasants and they wanted to ruin the crops. There was a good rain in the middle of the month, but the landlords didn't hoe the weeds which subsequently sprouted. In Old Master Kuo's field, the weeds were as high as the millet. But the millet was good and heavy with grain. The ears glistened golden in the sunlight.

A peasant drove a marker into the earth at the end of the field. On it was written: "Forty *mou* grain field, confiscated by the poor peasants association...." The peasant shouted: "This land is ours." The others echoed his cry. Louder beat the big drum. The sound seemed to come from the earth itself.

The procession surged east. A marker was placed in every field scheduled for confiscation. Daylight began to fade. The sun rolled through a mass of fiery clouds.

It's only on the great plain that you can see the ripe crops in their full glory. Red sorghum, yellow millet, bursting white cotton, all lit up by a huge scarlet sun, its reddish glow spreading far to the east.

Walking backwards, Fair Brows conducted the beat of the big drum with her stalk. The band returned to the village along the road in the eastern outskirts. At the village entrance the big drum beat with an increased frenzy. The peasants ran to the gates of the landlords' residences. Frightened, the landlords hurried out. "You're not to move any of your things," the peasants warned them.

This feverish activity of the peasants extended through the seventh and eighth lunar months. Li was chosen representative of the village's poor peasants in the township council. Fair Brows was elected leader of the village women. Crops on five hundred *mou* of confiscated

landlord and rich peasant land were ready for harvest. Autumn harvest brigades were formed, with Fair Brows at the head of the women's brigade.

Every day, Fair Brows got up before dawn and called her women to the fields. They worked until very late. After they all went home for a bite to eat, Fair Brows again blew her whistle in the moonlight, summoning them to a meeting.

The landlords began sabotaging their crops, destroying the sorghum and millet whose ears had not yet filled out, stealing the grain that was ripe. They dug up undeveloped potatoes, uprooted and removed peanuts, trampled cotton plants.

Militiamen, rifles slung across their backs, patrolled the fields at night.

Fair Brows had a small fowling piece. One night, she was guarding a confiscated plot formerly belonging to Old Master Kuo. She walked quietly through the millet, separating it with her hands so that it wouldn't rustle. Before her, she saw the dark figure of a man. He was wielding a curved gleaming object. Fair Brows heard the sound of falling grain.

She ran towards him, shouting: "Who's there?"

The man immediately squatted down. But when she reached him, he rose. It was Old Master Kuo. He looked around and asked:

"That you, Fair Brows? Are you alone?"

"What if I am?"

"I'm not afraid if you're alone." He gave a sinister laugh.

"Why are you cutting our millet?"

"Your millet? Yours?" the old man grated viciously. "This millet is mine. I'm going to cut it all."

"Let's see you try. If you cut so much as one more stalk, I'll send you to the military affairs committee."

"Don't threaten me, Fair Brows. No matter what you say, we're still members of the same clan. I'm your collateral grandfather."

"Grandfather, nothing," the girl replied sharply. "You're a landlord. I'm a poor peasant. We're not the same family. Don't pretend there's any connection between us."

The old man sat down dejectedly. "Maybe we're not the same family. I don't dare to aspire so high. But I beg you — let me harvest this crop of millet. Will you?"

"What right have you to harvest it? This land you sweated out of us. In my eighteen years I've never seen you touch a farm implement. But now, to ruin our crop, you take up a sickle."

"You people had better not press me too hard." The landlord suddenly stood up, the sickle quivering in his hand like a wounded fish. "I'll fight you to the death." He turned and slashed frenziedly at the millet.

"Stop." Fair Brows pulled the gun around from behind her back and levelled it at the old scoundrel. "If you don't stop cutting, I'll shoot."

She fired a shot into the air.

At the sound, peasants came running. They took the landlord off to the military affairs committee.

On the way back to the village, Fair Brows and Li walked together. The moon was climbing in the sky. They were laved by waves of heat, exuding from the soil.

"We've had quite a day," said the girl. "Even this late at night, we've had another show."

"Neither of us have fought at the front," said Li, "but today we've seen battle. How our people beat that big drum. What energy. Even if there'd been a mountain in their way, they'd have blasted it over."

"It would be wonderful if we could be like that way all year round. Today, my heart has been blazing, Brother Li."

"Who can be calm at such a time?" Li laughed.

"There's something I want to ask you," the girl said in a low voice.

"What is it? Speak up."

"I want to join the Party. I want to work hard, fight. Will you be my sponsor?" She raised her hands as though she wanted to pluck something down from the sky. Fair Brows sang:

In the seventh month
Red grows the sorghum,

Women together
At a mass meeting
Hurl accusations
At the landlord.

Sisters, weeping,
Tell their story:
We dared not glean
A bit of grain
Fallen in your field,
The poor had to take
Their children with them
Working out in the foulest weather,
But your children
Never had to leave
Their comfortable beds.

In the seventh month
The cotton bolls burst
Your family wore cool silks,
If we gleaned a bit
Of fallen cotton
You didn't say then
That we were members
Of the same clan.

At last the crops were brought to the threshing field and the division began. Just as some of the landlords' surplus clothing, farm implements and furniture were being distributed among the peasants, the county administration ordered a halt. Ping and Comrade Wang went back to the county seat. The township council registered the confiscated property and stored it away, appointing a small committee headed by Li to be responsible for its safe-keeping.

All the things were locked up in a large manor formerly belonging to one of the landlords just south of the village. The manor had contained three compounds, side by side, with expensive well-made residences in each. The Japanese had torn down the residences in

the two easternmost compounds and used the material to build gun-towers. They let the courtyards, the mill-shed and the hired-hands' shanties fall into disrepair.

Only one compound remained in fairly good condition. Two rooms of the main building and one of the wings were filled with the confiscated goods. In a third room some timbers and farm tools were stored. Another wing was used as an office and kitchen. Besides Li, the safe-keeping committee consisted of Mr. Hou, who had kept a landlord's accounts; Shuang-chin was responsible for the clothes and clothing material; Old Kai, an old bachelor who had been a hired hand all his life, was in charge of the confiscated animals and carts; Young Blacky, who did the cooking, had also worked for a landlord in the past.

When the peasants had started dividing up the landlords' surplus property, Fair Brows had received a small red lacquered stool and a purple velvet gown. She was extremely pleased with both. "They're not much," she thought, "but they'll be good mementoes." She scrubbed the little stool till it shone. The gown she loaned to girls who were getting married.

"Wear it at your wedding," she would say. "It will bring you luck. We wrested it from a landlord family."

She revived the theatrical troupe and wrote an operetta about their land reform check-up, casting herself in one of the leading roles. Every night she and the other actors rehearsed in the parlour of the compound where the landlords' confiscated goods were stored.

The parlour could hold two or three hundred people. Li said it would be a good place to run a literacy class in the winter. Fair Brows had Young Blacky fill half a large bowl with confiscated peanut oil and put in a floating wick. She used this as a lamp for the rehearsing players. Villagers came after supper to watch.

Young Blacky remarked to some of them as he was lighting the lamp: "Fair Brows is good at everything. In our struggle against the landlords, she set a fine example. And in cultural things, she can write operettas and she can sing."

"There aren't many men her equal," Shuang-chin agreed. "The way she says her lines, the way she sings her arias — it's remarkable for a girl who's never had any professional training."

The players rehearsed until quite late. The oil in the bowl was used up, the wick was dry, but no one wanted to go.

"Give us another bowl of oil, Young Blacky," someone urged. "It belongs to all of us. We've won it from a landlord. No need to be petty."

Li sauntered in from the courtyard. "It's getting late, neighbours," he said. "Break it up."

"That's right. We ought to be going to sleep," they agreed. "There's work to do tomorrow." Everybody went home.

Li sat down by the square table and lit his pipe over the lamp. As Fair Brows was rolling up the play script, he said:

"Sit down a minute, Fair Brows. Let's talk."

The girl stood stiffly off at a distance, an irritated expression on her face. "I know you want to criticize me for something," she said hoarsely.

"That's right," Li smiled.

Fair Brows came over, adjusted the wick and added a little oil. "I don't understand," she said. "What's wrong with play acting and a bit of singing?"

"I only think you shouldn't do it here, and so late at night. We've got three hundred bundles in this room, with three thousand pieces of clothing. Our peasants won them from the landlords by struggle. That kind of struggle, as you know, isn't easy. You heard the stories people told. In those bundles there aren't just clothes, there are our sweat and blood. The bitterness of the older generation is in them, and the promising future of the younger. Do you think the landlords and rich peasants have given up? I sweat buckets every night, patrolling around this place. Our responsibility is very heavy. All they have to do is toss in a lighted match and everything will be destroyed. If anything goes wrong, we won't be able to face the peasants, to say nothing of our superiors."

Fair Brows stared at the sputtering lamp wick. "If you think I'm not good enough, then let's leave it at that, brother. But it seems to me I wasn't bad at all in our fight against the landlords."

"You're daring, much more so than I," Li admitted. "That's

one of the best things about you. But later, your old fault came out again."

"What fault? Is it a fault to struggle against landlords and rich peasants? To walk forward, to stand in the front — is that a fault?"

"I'm talking about the women. They have a small complaint against you."

"People are always complaining about me. And I know the reason. There's nothing wrong with me. It's just that they're backward."

"Let me ask you something, Fair Brows. Don't get upset — I'm only kidding. But what do you want with that big stalk you've been carrying around the last few days?"

"What do I want with it? You tell me. At the mass meeting I wanted it to educate the landlords and rich peasants with."

"But you still had it in your hand when you were out with your women's team."

"I never hit a peasant with it."

"You waved it under Little Yellow Pear's nose. We have to draw a clear line between our own people and our enemies in everything we do."

"I only forgot myself for a moment." Fair Brows hung her head and smiled.

"The people have learned a lot in the mass accusation meetings. Most of them aren't any more backward than we are. If we push them around, they might decide to educate us."

"Is it just because of this that the thing we talked about hasn't been settled?"

"Not entirely. Everybody's been very busy. The Party branch hasn't had time to discuss it."

"To be perfectly frank, brother, so far as work is concerned I don't feel I do any worse than some of those already in the organization." The girl arched her fine eyebrows.

"You shouldn't judge people only on that basis. Some of them may not be very competent in their work, but they've had eight or nine years proving themselves and being educated. We should

recognize people's good points first. You're always looking to see where they don't measure up to you."

"I feel that in this land reform check-up I've shown that I'm qualified to join the Party."

"You don't join the Party wearing your accomplishments on your sleeve. If you've got any accomplishments, the Party will notice them. We'll be discussing your application soon. Now what about this operetta rehearsal?"

"All right. If you say we shouldn't, then we won't. I'll listen to you." Fair Brows stood up. "But if I have time, I'll practise by myself. Don't you interfere."

"As long as you don't draw a crowd," Li agreed. "Another thing — get your mutual-aid team operating."

"Which mutual-aid team?"

"The one that challenged ours. You were going to stick it out all year, don't you remember?"

"*Aiya*," Fair Brows laughed. "Now that we've got a big harvest brigade, what do we need that little mutual-aid team for?"

"The harvest brigade is only temporary."

"Why are we dilly-dallying around? Get everybody into one big organization. Our autumn harvest brigade is really sharp. You blow the whistle, and they assemble. They're easy to lead, they don't complain. But that mutual-aid team is a headache. Only four or five members, but no two of them think the same. And there always seems to be problems."

"The purpose of the autumn harvest brigade is to take in the confiscated crops so that they don't rot in the fields, and to prepare the ground for sowing the winter wheat. Of course when we're struggling against the landlords and rich peasants, the more people we have together the stronger we are. But later we're going to divide up the land and the grain. We'll still need mutual-aid teams next spring."

"Must we divide it up?" Fair Brows demanded impatiently. "I don't understand why we have to fall back a step every time we take one forward. We're already out of the village, do we have to return to our beds? It doesn't make sense. Sooner or later we're

going to farm collectively. We've got everything together, the people are together, the drums are beating, the cymbals clashing, and you want to go back to playing squeaky little tunes.... The oil in this lamp is finished. We'll talk some more tomorrow."

A few days later, after a meeting of the Party branch committee, Li was walking down the street when he saw a crowd in front of the temple. Little Yellow Pear stood in the middle, shouting and waving her hands.

Shouting back at her was Old Kai, who was in charge of the confiscated draught animals and carts. A large cart had overturned in the mud, and a cow in the traces lay beside it, pinned down by one of the shafts. Li came closer. He saw that the animal was the one that had calved the day before.

Old Kai was trembling with rage. "Come on," he insisted, trying to grab Little Yellow Pear. "We're going to the district government office about this."

"Keep your hands off me, you old pauper," the woman yelled. "Say what you want, but keep your distance."

"Neighbours, you've all seen it," cried the old man. "Even empty, this big cart needs two animals to pull it, and she hitched up this one small cow. For the past two months this cow was underfed but used every day. When her time came, she had a terrible time giving birth. If we hadn't helped her all night, both she and her calf would have died. But you," he turned to Little Yellow Pear, "you had to hitch her up. Are you trying to kill her? When you give birth, you stay in your bed ten days to half a month. A cow can't speak, but isn't it a living thing too?"

"Shut your stinking mouth, you dirty pauper. All your life you couldn't get married, so you've taken a cow for a relative," the woman fulminated.

"Yes, I'm poor. But it's better to be poor than rotten. Landlord!"

"You're a landlord," shrilled Little Yellow Pear. "Don't you spit manure on people."

"And this cart." Old Kai pointed at a hub cap that had dropped off. "Certain people use carts but never repair them. For two months they haven't added a drop of axle grease. They take it out in wind and rain. It's all dry and splitting. It's falling apart."

"That's right. Don't let anyone use it. Keep it at home and let it calve a little cart." Little Yellow Pear thought attack was the best defence.

"Quit squabbling," the onlookers advised. "Here comes Brother Li."

Li and some of the other men righted the toppled cart and unhitched the cow. They put the hub cap back on and pushed the cart into a nearby courtyard.

"If you rowed much longer that cow would have been squashed to death," said Li. "Neighbours, doesn't this cow and cart belong to us?"

After much straining and heaving, Old Kai managed to pull the cow to her feet. She staggered quite a bit before she could stand steady. Old Kai led her away in a silent fury.

He brought her back to the shed where the confiscated animals were being kept. None of them were at the long trough. All had been borrowed and were out working. The calf lay in a sunny corner. One end of a long red silk ribbon that had been tied round its neck trailed curling on the ground.

Old Kai was puzzled. Then he saw Fair Brows approaching with a pretty little bronze pot. She hadn't noticed him in the dim shed.

"Come and have some rice gruel," she said to the calf. "Who knows where Old Kai has taken your mother." She put an arm around the calf's neck and offered it the gruel.

The old man stood motionless.

"Are you sure you won't have any?" Fair Brows asked the calf. "This isn't a bad bowl. A landlord's son used to heat his swallow's nest soup in it. I don't have any swallow's nest, but at least I can give you some rice gruel."

Old Kai smiled to himself. The cow tugged towards her calf. Old Kai couldn't restrain her. Only then did Fair Brows become

aware of the old man. As he wiped the dried mud from the cow's coat, he pointed at the calf and asked:

"Who put that thing on its neck?"

"I did," Fair Brows laughed. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Where did you get it?"

"I asked the safe-keeping committee for it."

"It's pretty all right, but it seems a waste...."

"Don't be so niggardly. The cow is one of our fruit of victory, so the calf comes under the care of the safe-keeping committee too. It's another happy event."

Thanks to the old man's careful ministrations, the next morning the cow was again munching its feed. But Old Kai's anger hadn't abated. He sought out Li and asked that a meeting be called to criticize Little Yellow Pear.

Li discussed the matter with other village representatives. All agreed that the meeting should be held. They notified the various team leaders who, in turn, informed their members that there would be a meeting that night in the large parlour of the buildings occupied by the safe-keeping committee.

After supper, Li went to the meeting place. He was the first to arrive. He filled some oil lamps and lit them. An old woman limped in on a noisily rapping cane.

"You certainly are an activist, old mama," laughed Li.

"That I am, a real activist," the old woman agreed. "You ought to praise me on the bulletin board. Haven't been late to a single meeting or left one early in months. The minute I hear there's a get-together, I drop my spinning and hurry right over, rain or shine, day or night. Doesn't matter how busy I am at home, community problems come first, I always say. At meetings you hear the reasons, and you understand. Some folks don't like meetings, but they're all over the place when they hear some landlord's property is going to be divided up. Scared to death they'll miss out on something. Full of complaints, they are, in private, but in open meeting they never say what's on their minds. You ought to criticize them."

Li smiled.

"Is it true, what I'm saying?" the old woman demanded. "Is it correct or not?"

"It's true, and correct."

Gradually the room grew crowded. There weren't enough seats. Many people were standing. The girls were all in a bunch, chattering merrily. They called on Fair Brows for a song. Fair Brows looked hesitantly in Li's direction.

"Don't worry about Brother Li," the girls advised. "He's the easiest-going man in the world."

Li was standing before a square table. The secretary of the poor peasants association sat on one side of the table, calling the roll. When he didn't get a response to a name, he immediately sent someone to fetch the absentee.

"Let's start," said Li. "People on the same teams should sit together. Afterwards, we're going to have discussions. Who wants to speak first?" He looked at the village representatives.

"You lead off, brother," they urged.

"All right." Li faced the audience. "Today's meeting is to talk about our poor peasants association's animals and carts. We peasants won these things from the landlords. The landlords had no right to them. They were earned with our sweat and blood, and the sweat and blood of our ancestors. We've only taken back what belongs to us. Later, we'll divide these things up. For the time being, since we haven't divided the land we've just confiscated either, we're lending them to whoever wants to use them.

"The trouble is some people don't take very good care of them. They don't feed the draught animal, they work them too hard. They figure — who knows who'll get what? As a result, the animals are weak, the carts need repair. If we go on like this, they'll all be ruined, and we peasants will suffer for it. The landlords will have a good laugh at our expense, and the people will be dissatisfied with us. We've all had to struggle for a living, we know how to take care of things, but we're a little backward. Only what we can touch, take home, we call our own. Actually, what isn't ours? The representative council is ours, the district and county government is ours, the

fighters at the front are ours. We should love and cherish them all. Right or wrong? What do you say?"

"Right," the people responded. From the back of the hall someone cried: "Couldn't be righter."

"Take the case of Little Yellow Pear," Li went on. "Without asking permission from the animal care-taker, she borrowed the cow that just calved. What's more, she hitched it up all wrong, so that the cart turned over and nearly killed it. And she's not the only one who should criticize herself. Last night my wife was up to her old tricks again. Instead of staying home and spinning thread, she was running around outside match-making for Old Kai. I scolded her, but I feel I should bring it up in open meeting too."

The peasants burst into laughter. All eyes sought Big Propriety. She had been taken completely by surprise. She shrank behind the table, very embarrassed.

Each of the village representatives spoke, then the teams sat around the lamps and held discussions, with a village representative chairing each group.

When everyone had expressed his or her opinions, the village representatives talked things over. Finally, Li summed up.

"The method that the teams have worked out is this: We'll re-form the teams according to where the land is located. The teams will be given draught animals and carts. This is temporary, but we don't think when formal ownership is handed out there'll be much change. So all of you feed your animals well and take good care of your carts. Each team will elect a leader. If anything goes wrong with the cart or animal, he'll be held responsible, and he won't get a share in its ownership. The village representatives will keep a constant check. Let's see which team can do this the best."

Li slept every night in the courtyard of the safe-keeping committee compound on a stone slab which he softened with an old mattress he had brought from home. His pillow was a block of wood.

Always before turning in Li went first to the military affairs committee and assigned sentry posts. This evening, dark clouds obscured the Milky Way. "It's time to plant the wheat," he thought. "A

ground-soaking rain would be good." He got up and covered some of the things in the courtyard.

Shuang-chin, who looked after the confiscated clothing, stood in the doorway of the western wing where he slept. He had been hanging a mosquito net.

"It's cold tonight, brother," he said to Li. "Let me get you a quilt. We've got plenty here — silk floss, faced with satin."

"I don't need any," said Li.

Someone rapped on the compound gate. Shuang-chin went to open it.

"Find out who it is, first," Li warned.

After inquiring, Shuang-chin let the caller in. She was a woman from the eastern end of the village, mother of an army man killed in the war.

"Sorry to be so late, brother," she said to Li, "but I know you're busy all day. I need your help."

Li invited her to sit down. "I've arranged for the welfare team to plough your land," he said.

"It's not about my land. It's about my house. The beams are all rotten, and it leaks badly when it rains. I'm an old woman, I can't repair it myself."

"I'll repair it for you in a day or so. I'll have more time then. I guarantee it won't leak."

The woman smiled. "I earned some extra money this spring spinning thread and asked you to buy me some bricks, remember? Now I'm thinking of propping the house up a bit. None of the timber inside is any good. Our poor peasants association has timber. Could they lend me some, I wonder, just a few thin sticks? Do you think it would be all right? If my son were alive I wouldn't have to be bothering you." The woman's eyes brimmed over with tears. She wiped them with the edge of her tunic.

Li thought a moment.

"We haven't decided yet how to divide that stuff," he said. "But we're sure to give preference to families of war dead. Your son gave his life at the front, and your family certainly is needy. I don't see why anybody should object if we gave you a little extra help. I'll

take it up with the village representatives at our next meeting and see if we can give you some timber. We don't want to have you worrying, while you're sitting on your platform bed, spinning, that your roof may collapse."

"Thank you, brother," the old woman said happily.

Li saw her to the gate, intending to lock up. Suddenly a dark figure appeared. Li whipped out his pistol.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

"It's me." The dark figure came forward. The voice was that of a young woman. Li didn't recognize her.

"You don't know her," the old woman said. "How could you? She never showed herself much in public before. She's the wife of Seventh Master's oldest son." Smiling, she departed.

"What are you sneaking around here for?" Li demanded.

"I've come to beg a favour from you," the woman said in a low voice.

"If you've anything to say, do it tomorrow. Aren't there any men in your family who can speak?"

"This is my own personal matter. Must we talk out here?"

"It's lighter here." Li stood in the gateway. "The courtyard is too dark."

"You people have taken things from my in-laws. I don't mind that. From the day I married and moved in with them, I've had nothing but abuse from my mother-in-law, from my sisters-in-law. I'm young. I've never exploited anybody. But you've taken a lot of my things as well. What have I done to deserve this? I'm against them too. You people shouldn't have taken anything from me."

"You're married to the oldest son of Seventh Master," said Li. "I remember you now. Your mother is the wife of Fourth Master in Changliu Village. Both your own family and your husband's are landlords. None of your things was earned by your own labour. Your kind grows up surrounded by nurse-maids and slaveys. You go on horseback or in sedan chairs when you marry, dressed in silks and satins, followed by retinues of servants. You've really had it soft. How can you talk about *your* things? You'd have had nothing if the poor hadn't sweated blood for you. You're a pack of parasites.

Who tilled your soil, anyway? Who drove your carts? Who carried you when you were small? Who danced attendance on you when you grew up? Who cooked your food and placed it down before you? Who made your clothes and helped you into them? The poor, always the poor. Your kind has had it far too easy. Yet you still claim you've had a hard time! What right have you to talk about being abused? We've acted strictly according to government policy."

The woman wept. Li said:

"Today you cry. Do you know how many people cried for hunger on the edge of your family's fields, at the walls outside your family's gate? Did your heart ache for them? Do you know how many people were pressed so hard by landlords that they hung themselves, jumped into wells, into rivers, sold their children? You'd better think of that, think of how your family got their things. You're still young. We're leaving you enough to eat and to wear, and to work the land. Go home and become a good producer. Don't be always thinking of yourself."

After the woman left, Li locked the gate and went to bed. As he closed his eyes, a rooster crowed.

Big Propriety arrived very early, and as soon as Li opened the gate for her they started quarrelling.

"Don't you want your home any more, you old devil?" she demanded. "Have you sold yourself to this place?"

"What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?"

"What do you think? I've come to invite you home for breakfast."

Li grinned. "Kind of early for breakfast, isn't it?"

"And after you've eaten, you can plough our plot. Everyone else's wheat has already sprouted, but you haven't even cleared out our sorghum stubble, though all we've got is two and a half *mou* of land. Fresh young sorghum is popping up everywhere. Do you want to let the whole place go to seed?"

"Where would I get the time?"

"You're a born trouble seeker. You bring it on yourself. With all these mules and horses we've taken from the landlords, with all

these temporary ploughing teams, why don't they plough our land for us? Aren't you spending every minute of the day working for the peasants? You've only to ask and they'll do it in half an hour. But you just won't speak up."

"*Hai*, to hear you talk, you'd think I was a big president."

"Big president? Little king, you mean. That's what people are calling you. You work and work but nobody's satisfied. The poor, the rich, none of them has a good word to say for you. You've offended everyone, and you still go on."

She flounced down on the edge of the bed so hard that Shuang-chin, who was sleeping there, was startled into wakefulness. He got up hastily and tried to restore peace.

Big Propriety stalked around the courtyard, with Li tailing behind her.

"Haven't you seen me before?" she snapped. "Why are you following me?"

Li didn't reply. She went into the western corridor. All sorts of odds and ends confiscated from landlord families were piled there — calligraphy scrolls, pillows, bonbon boxes, unmatched porcelain and bronze vases and urns....

Big Propriety rummaged through an old trunk and fished out a string of copper coins. "I think I'll take this and have them made into an amulet for my godson," she said to Shuang-chin.

"Put that down," Li shouted. "You're not to remove so much as a thread from this compound."

"So you think I'm a thief?" Big Propriety tossed the coins back. "So that's what you think of me — that I don't understand even that much? As if I would do anything to blacken your name. Can't you tell when I'm kidding?"

Big Propriety went home. Li felt irritated, worn out. Suddenly he thought of Chairman Mao. "He leads the revolution and commands the whole army. And he has so many Communists to educate, plus all the people," Li mused. "How does he do it? How come he doesn't get tired and annoyed?"

Li laughed, a trifle shamefaced. His courage and strength returned. He went off to his team's carpentry shop.

Another batch of army patients was sent to the field hospital at Takuanting. They had been wounded in a battle north of the Taching River. Among them were several Jaoyang County boys who had joined the army the previous spring. They wrote letters home saying where they were, and their mothers and wives came to see them. The Changkang poor peasants association sent a crate of pears and contributed a basket of eggs. Li and Fair Brows were deputed to present them on the association's behalf.

In the ward, Fair Brows saw Hsing, his arm in a sling. He told Li he was hit while charging with his machine-gun squad. Fair Brows couldn't say a word. She was smiling and blushing with pride. Hsing patted his wounded arm with his other hand, as if calling it to Fair Brows' attention. The girl understood. He was saying: "You see, I have the courage to fight."

The next day, a letter arrived from the district government. It said the wounded from the field hospital requested a performance by the Changkang theatrical troupe. Li handed the letter to Fair Brows.

"This is your job," he laughed.

The girl read the letter and asked: "Why did the wounded ask particularly for our troupe?"

"Our little theatrical troupe is known far and wide. Except for the 'Front Line' company, ours is probably the most famous in central Hopei. The army boys have all heard of us."

"What shall we give them? We don't do the old local operas, and there's no time to rehearse one of the new ones. It's all your fault," Fair Brows pouted. "You even criticized me that time we wanted to practise."

"I wasn't far-sighted enough," Li smiled. "I give the whole job to you, Fair Brows. Anything you need, any people you want — just tell me and I'll run around and round them up. Those boys have requested us by name. We've got to put a show on that'll do us credit."

Fair Brows thought a moment. "Suppose we do *Vying to Join the Army*? None of the other troupes have been able to do it, and our actors know it well. Just a few rehearsals will be enough. What do you say, brother?"

"Good. Do that one. Just the thing for army boys. I like it a lot. Those songs in the last part are very hard, but you do them without a bit of strain, in fact, you seem to get better as you go along. But who's going to play the head of the military affairs committee? Hsing isn't at home."

"San Cheng knows the role. He studied it with Hsing when we were rehearsing."

"Right. Take our pressure lamp and a good curtain. Don't forget I'm in this, too."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stand in the wing with a big megaphone," Li laughed, gesturing to show the size. He went out.

The day of the performance was the anniversary of the October Revolution. They set up the stage on the threshing ground off the main street in Takuanting. After supper, the streets were crowded with people who had come from all the surrounding villages to see the operetta.

"They're doing *Vying to Join the Army* tonight."

"Say, what's the name of their female lead?"

"You actually don't know? Why, Fair Brows."

"Ah, that's the one. Fine voice. Nice looking. Carries herself well, too. Never heard a better singer."

"She hasn't sung for a year, though. They say she was criticized for playing in operettas."

"Of all things. What's wrong with that?"

Even before the pressure lamp was hung up, the makeshift theatre was crowded. Pedlars of sweets, grilled dumplings and boiled bean-curd vended their wares.

The lamp was lit. On stage, scene shifters bustled, the orchestra filed into place. Old Chen, the drummer, sat with his legs crossed, a snowy white kerchief spread across his knees. In his mouth was a good cigarette, a kind he smoked only on special occasions.

Hsing, his arm in a sling, came backstage to chat with his old friends. Fair Brows was sitting on her red lacquered stool, making up before a mirror in the light of a large oil lamp.

"Where are you watching the show from?" she asked.

"Right up front."

"Have you got something to sit on?"

"No."

"I've brought you this." She stood up and handed him the red stool.

"Our troupe must be getting rich. We've even got furniture."

"It was my share of a landlord's property."

Hsing laughed. "You're taking part in the struggles?"

"You're taking part in the war, I'm taking part in the struggles at home," she replied in a low voice, smiling faintly in the mirror.

"Have you joined the Party?" Hsing's tone was serious.

"I expect to be approved very soon." Fair Brows reddened. "What about you?"

"My probationary period is up today."

"I'll give my best performance as congratulations," the girl smiled.

"Don't start with too big a voice or you'll have nothing left at the end. This place is right near the street. It sops up sound," Hsing advised as he was leaving.

When his mates saw him coming back with a red stool, two of them ran up to him and demanded: "Where did you get that?"

"It belongs to the troupe."

"Looking after their local boy, eh?"

"We can all sit on it if we squeeze together. Listen. They're starting."

There was no moon that night, and stars shone like happy eyes in a clear sky. A cymbal clashed. The curtain parted.

The audience edged closer. "*Vying to Join the Army*," people whispered.

"Don't push. You're liable to bump the wounded comrades," Li called through a big megaphone, leaning forward from a corner of the stage.

"Fair Brows." A stir of animation ran through the audience, which pressed forward even harder. The people at the fore set themselves like stakes to prevent any crowding of the wounded in the front row.

The girl halted beneath a pear tree. She sang:

Trees sway in the breeze,
We've good pears this year.

Who should get first taste of our delicious fruit?
I'm taking a basket of it to the front.

Oh, you pear carriers, hurry home,
The battle's raging furiously.

Fair Brows sang from the heart, her eyes fixed on the boy in the front row. The audience, motionless, listened enraptured to the clear rich voice.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Illustrated by Chiu Sha

Plum Blossom (traditional painting) ▶
by Chiang Yi-jan

Chiang Yi-jan, born in Tientsin in 1901, is good at bird-and-flower painting of a meticulous style. This painting was inspired by Chairman Mao Tse-tung's poem *Ode to the Plum Blossom*.

Lin Yu

Strike Down the Enemy Flag

The bugle sounded for assembly after lunch. This was unusual in the company because normally that time was set aside for a midday nap. When the men came to the parade ground, the regimental, battalion and company commanders were already there. The platoon leader on duty reported to the regimental commander that everyone was present.

"We are going to have a spot of action!" announced the company commander, his eyes sweeping the company. The fighters listened eagerly; some nudged their respective squad leaders, hinting that they should ask for a combat assignment. Pleased with the men's spirit, the company commander went on, "From the prisoner captured by Chen Sung and the others yesterday we have learnt that Chiang Kai-shek wants to make some political capital in connection with a certain international meeting. They have hoisted a Kuomintang flag

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Lin Yu, born in 1929 in Shantung Province, is a member of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and writes stories in his spare time. His story *A Brisk Encounter* was published in *Chinese Literature* No. 9, 1965.

on an uninhabited island — Small Rat Island — and early tomorrow morning some correspondents from Taiwan's reactionary newspapers will go to take photographs there. Then they will broadcast a big lie to the world: 'A great victory — another island recovered by the Kuomintang forces!' No. Don't laugh! Chiang Kai-shek lives on cheating and rumours. To smash this enemy scheme, we have been ordered to send a small detachment to haul down that Kuomintang flag tonight. The detachment will also deal with the Kuomintang post guarding the flag there. How this action will be fought we'll discuss later. Everybody can make suggestions as usual. Now I'm going to read out the names of those picked for this operation. Don't get excited. It's a small operation and not many are needed, so some of you will be left out. But don't worry; so long as there are imperialists and reactionaries, there will be no lack of fighting. Now, the comrades whose names I call please step forward." He raised his voice: "Chen Sung!"

"Here!" came a brisk response and squad leader Chen Sung stepped out of the ranks. Ruddy-cheeked and with broad, thick eyebrows, he stood at attention after taking five swift strides forward. He stood there so stockily firm that you would think even nine bulls and two tigers could not budge him.

"Yang Ching!"

A young soldier darted out of the ranks, his answer ringing out clearly. Fair-complexioned, he was tall and handsome. He walked lightly to stand by his squad leader.

"Liu Hu!"

The word "Hu" was hardly out of the company commander's mouth when a roar of "Here!" boomed from the ranks. Burly and swarthy, in three big strides Liu Hu was by Yang Ching's left.

Six more names were called. The men were all burning for action. The company commander further announced that Chen Sung was to command the group and lead Team One. Yang Ching and Liu Hu were to lead Teams Two and Three respectively. Finally, the regimental commander was asked to speak.

Walking up to Chen Sung, he asked, "Will this detachment be big enough to do the job?"

Chen Sung stood even more smartly at attention. "They are not eight soldiers," he said. "They are eight fine revolutionary fighters. I am confident we can accomplish our task. We'll work out the details together."

"That's right," approved the regimental commander. "Though this is not a big operation, it is important. You must treat it as a difficult battle. We have taken every possibility into consideration and will back you up as needed. But once the action starts the situation may change in a flash. You'll have to rely on your own courage and resourcefulness. If a landing is really impossible, you can return. We can work out some other way." Turning to Yang Ching, the regimental commander asked, "Is there anything you want to say?"

"I'm determined to carry out this task."

The regimental commander patted Liu Hu's shoulder. "What about you, Young Liu?"

"If I don't fulfil my task I won't return...." Liu Hu replied, standing even straighter at attention.

"Return you must," the regimental commander corrected him. "Remember, when you get there, you must be extra careful. Keep a sharp look-out and a cool head. Be brave but crafty too. Don't be impatient or do anything reckless."

Before dismissing the men, the regimental commander spoke to the other six one by one, giving advice suited to each individual.

The afternoon was spent in busy preparation for the attack.

At 18:40 hours came an order from the company commander: "The men told off to strike down the enemy flag are to turn in at once."

Chen Sung, who usually lay awake until he had thought over the next day's work, fell asleep immediately. Liu Hu, who was generally snoring as soon as his head touched the pillow, started tossing about in his bed like a fish being fried. He was not worrying about himself, though. He was worried on account of his squad leader. Chen Sung had so far been a faultless hero in his eyes, but this afternoon when they were discussing the plan of action Chen Sung had assigned his own team the task of keeping watch. To Liu Hu, it seemed that

the most important part of the action would be disposing of the Chiang soldiers guarding the flag, and then reaching the peak to haul it down. As to keeping watch, it surely made very little difference whether they did or did not. Yet Chen Sung had given himself this assignment. Could he really be trying to get an easy job? Liu Hu was too troubled by this idea to sleep.

Yang Ching, too, was awake. But instead of fidgeting like Liu Hu he was trying to put himself to sleep by counting. As he reached 1001..., however, his mind was still mulling over the action to come. Yang Ching had been in the army for a year now and was very pleased to be chosen for this mission. He was thinking: "It suited me all right just to be a fighter. I had only to carry out orders. But this time I am a team leader and must give orders myself. That's not so easy." His thoughts were interrupted by Liu Hu turning violently in his bed. Nudging Liu Hu through the mosquito net he urged him to be quiet. But now that he knew Yang Ching was awake too, Liu Hu poked his head into the latter's net.

"What's the matter?" asked Yang Ching.

"I know you're awake. Why lie there in a stew? I've something on my mind. Come on outside and help me thrash it out."

"Now's not the time to thrash things out even if you have got something on your mind. Our task now is to sleep." Yang Ching closed his eyes.

"Putting on airs, eh, now you're a team leader?" fumed Liu Hu. "Would it be right to let me go into battle with something on my mind?"

"Don't get all worked up. It's discipline." Then Yang Ching gave way, not wanting Liu Hu to get angry. "What's troubling you? Out with it then. But talk quietly so as not to disturb the others."

"What's changed our squad leader?" Liu Hu whispered into Yang Ching's ear.

"Changed our squad leader?" Yang Ching was at a loss.

"Well, he always asked for the most difficult task for himself before. But today...." He stopped, not wanting to call his squad leader "a coward."

"You don't need a gold bullet to shoot a bird," explained Yang Ching, grasping what Liu Hu was driving at. "There's no need for big heroes just to wipe out five Kuomintang soldiers. As to hauling down that ragged flag, that's even easier and simpler. To my mind, the toughest job in this engagement is the one the squad leader has taken for himself — keeping watch. All sorts of unexpected things may happen, and his team will have to cope with them. They may have to help Team Two and Team Three; to guard the cutter for our journey back; to stop enemy reinforcements from coming up; and plenty more...."

Convinced, Liu Hu drew back before Yang Ching had finished.

"What's wrong?" asked Yang Ching.

"Nothing. I see it now. But what was keeping you awake, Yang Ching?"

"To be a team leader isn't easy."

"What's there to be afraid of?" said the straightforward Liu Hu, without a moment's thought. "The more difficult the task, the better we'll carry it out."

"Right." Yang Ching said no more.

Earlier on they had tried in vain to go to sleep; but now, strange to say, as soon as Liu Hu lay down he started snoring. And Yang Ching, cheered by Liu Hu's confident assertion, ceased to worry and fell asleep too.

At three a.m. a small cutter put out from Wild Cat Island.

A thin mist obscured the stars. A light wind rippled the sea. All was still. From the prow of the cutter the water purled sparkling and the wake rolled away from the stern. In the cutter eight armed fighters sat silently. Like a statue, Chen Sung stood forward, gazing intently ahead and directing the helmsman from time to time in a low voice. Yang Ching looked around quietly. Liu Hu, though seated, was fidgeting restlessly.

Big Rat Island and Small Rat Island loomed out of the mist. The engine stopped. The eight fighters took oars and rowed, four a side, until they neared Small Rat Island. At Chen Sung's order they shipped oars and dropped anchor behind a reef which lay back of

Small Rat Island and faced Big Rat Island. One fighter remained on board. The rest lowered themselves into the sea silently and started to swim towards the hiding places picked in their plan.

Small Rat Island, true to its name, resembled a rat. Two reefs stretching into the sea on either side looked like the rat's forelegs, while about fifty metres further rose a large rock, low and pointed in front but high and round in the back, like an ugly head. In this "rat head" was a half-open "mouth", the only cave on the island.

The fighters, hidden behind the rat's right "leg", watched the enemy's movements. About fifteen metres ahead a Kuomintang sentinel was nodding by a rock, hugging his rifle. Chen Sung looked over the terrain carefully. He was just about to give the order to advance when suddenly the chugging of an engine was heard coming from the direction of Big Rat Island. "Enemy craft!" The thought shot through every fighter's mind.

"Shall we attack?" was the problem confronting Chen Sung. The situation had suddenly changed. A quick decision was needed.

In battle a commander's will and wit are put to the test. To fight or withdraw? Chen Sung weighed the pros and cons with lightning speed. To fight? There was danger in that for his comrades. To withdraw? That would be playing safe, of course. But when the Taiwan press published that picture of the Kuomintang flag flying over Small Rat Island, what could they say to the people of the country? How would he ever make up to these eight fearless, loyal fighters for the loss of honour?

The chugging of the engine grew louder. It was certain now that the vessel was heading for Small Rat Island. The fighters watched their squad leader intently. Liu Hu gesticulated to request permission to charge. But Chen Sung made no sign.

Suddenly, Chen Sung thrust his right hand forward, the signal to charge. According to the original plan, they were to steal up to the sentry and get rid of him in silence. But now it was different; every second counted. So as soon as the squad leader gave the order, Liu Hu, leading Team Two, dashed from the right like a hungry tiger straight for the enemy soldier. Yang Ching leading Team Three darted from the left like an arrow towards the "rat head." They

had decided to overpower the enemy guarding the flag before dealing with the enemy boat now approaching.

When Liu Hu was about three metres from the sentry, the latter suddenly woke up, roused by the engine or the fighters dashing forward. "Who's there?" he called. But already Liu Hu was on him. Grasping his clothes he lifted him up and the next instant had dashed him to the ground. Before he could struggle back to his feet, he was a dead man.

The engine sounded louder, nearing Small Rat Island. They had to finish off the enemy here quickly. Liu Hu led his team to the "rat head." But a tongue of fire shot out from the "mouth" of the "rat."

The enemy had spotted them. Their silent assault had now to be an open attack.

"Charge!" roared Liu Hu, dashing forward.

"Team Three, blockade the cave mouth with your fire," shouted Yang Ching. Seeing that Liu Hu was spoiling for a hand-to-hand fight and knowing that nothing could stop him, Yang Ching decided to cover his team's charge.

Just as Team Two advanced, a hail of bullets from the sea whipped over the fighters' heads. Sparks burst from the rocks as bullets hit both sides of the "rat head." Apparently the firing on the island had been heard by the enemy at sea. However, they were not clear how things stood and had opened fire by way of reconnoitring as they neared the island. Teams Two and Three were thus being attacked both from behind and in front. They were forced to take cover in a hollow beneath the "rat head."

Chen Sung knew that the enemy were only shooting in order to draw answering fire. He did not want to shoot back yet because that would reveal that his team had only two men and two guns. Instead of halting the enemy, it would embolden them to land on the island and go into action. But as he saw that Teams Two and Three were pinned down by the enemy's fire he was worried lest Liu Hu make a reckless dash for the peak. He changed his mind and decided to draw their fire. Telling the fighter with him to go to aid his comrades, he took up his automatic and fired at the enemy.

"Da, da, da, da...." Chen Sung kept his finger on the trigger. As expected, it drew fire from the enemy ship on to him, as if he were a magnet.

As Chen Sung had anticipated, Liu Hu was infuriated by the enemy firing from behind. Impatient of inaction, he was just about to dash to the attack when Yang Ching caught hold of him.

"What's up?" Liu Hu asked angrily.

"Let the enemy help us capture their guns," said Yang Ching. As there was no time to explain, he simply held Liu Hu down while he shouted to the enemy in the cave:

"You soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek, surrender your guns! The Liberation Army treats prisoners leniently. Our ship is approaching the island. There are only four of you; if you resist it can only lead to your death!"

As if to back up his words, the soldiers in the enemy vessel directed another volley towards the cave.

"Listen to our fire," yelled Yang Ching to the cave. "Why should you risk your lives for Chiang Kai-shek? Your families on the mainland are longing for you to come home. Now is your chance. Just put down your guns, and you can be sure of a reunion with your family."

After a moment's silence the cowardly Kuomintang soldiers threw their guns outside the cave. "Brother soldiers of the Liberation Army, don't shoot. We surrender!" With this the four Kuomintang soldiers stepped out from the cave, holding their hands up over their heads and clapping. The last one carried a transmitter on his back.

"This is... a transmitter. We con ... contribute it to the Liberation Army ... to atone for our crimes," he stuttered.

"Good, I'll accept it on behalf of the Liberation Army," Liu Hu said. "You carry it, but mind you don't let it get damaged."

Liu Hu turned, ready to make for the peak to haul down the Kuomintang flag. "Wait!" cried Yang Ching again. He raised his automatic, took aim and fired. The flag pole was cut through the middle and the flag was blown into the sea.

"Well done, Yang Ching!" commended Liu Hu.

Down by the beach the firing was getting heavier. "Hurry! Let's go to help our squad leader," Yang Ching said.

That reminded Liu Hu. Though the team led by the squad leader also had three men, one of them was guarding the cutter, so there were only two on the beach where a hail of bullets was falling. It was just as Yang Ching had said: the squad leader had given himself the toughest task. "To cut down the flag is a glorious but comparatively easy job which he leaves to us. He is willing to do the hard, unseen work. I should learn from him!" Liu Hu now had only one thought: to regain the beach and be at the side of his squad leader. As they dashed downward they met the fighter sent by Chen Sung.

"What are you doing here?" called Liu Hu frantically. "Where's the squad leader?"

"He ordered me to come and help you."

The squad leader was now alone on the beach! "Order! He can order, but can't you protest?" shouted Liu Hu. "Get back quick!"

Chen Sung was indeed in a very tight corner. At first the enemy hesitated to advance as they could not make out how many men were really on the beach. Later, when they understood the situation, they started to rush the shore, shouting and cursing. Lest they discover the cutter anchored on the right, Chen Sung moved left as he fired. This drew away the enemy's attention. He took up a position behind a ridge of rock and returned their fire, not budging an inch.

The enemy concentrated their attack on him, shooting with rifles, carbines and machine-guns and hitting the rocks all round him. Chen Sung maintained his composure. He kept a keen watch on the enemy's movements in the moonlight, shooting deliberately left or right as he got the chance. He never shot a long burst, but just three shots at a time, sure sign of a veteran marksman. On the enemy side the experienced soldiers kept their heads low. But the ignorant rushed forward and met their deaths or got wounded.

With a single automatic Chen Sung held the enemy back as if with a solid wall. Furious, the enemy officer cursed loudly, forcing his platoon to make a concerted attack. Chen Sung shot down several

of them. But the rest pushed forward. Chen Sung threw two hand grenades. Just then he felt a paralysing shock in his left leg. As if pushed violently by somebody from behind, he was about to fall, his left leg badly hurt.

At this critical moment Liu Hu, Yang Ching and the others came up. They sent a hail of bullets at the enemy who, nonplussed, retreated like a tide.

"One shot and four captured, squad leader," Liu Hu reported. "And we've captured a machine-gun and a transmitter too."

"Any casualties?" asked Chen Sung.

"We were born lucky. The bullets have eyes and won't touch us," replied Yang Ching as exultantly as Liu Hu.

"And the flag? The prisoners?"

"The flag was sent to the Dragon King of the Sea by Yang Ching. The prisoners are already on their way to the cutter."

"Good." A ghost of a smile flickered over Chen Sung's serious face. Then he said in a low voice, "Pass the word on: Withdraw, one by one. But quietly. Mustn't let the enemy discover us. We'll muster by the cutter."

Yang Ching immediately passed on the order. Liu Hu, however, was reluctant to leave his squad leader. By then the enemy's shooting was picking up again. They were preparing a new attack.

"Retreat to the cutter quick, Liu Hu," said Chen Sung. "Start back home as soon as everybody's turned up. You and Yang Ching will be responsible for getting everybody safely home."

"What about you?" asked Liu Hu glaring.

"Somebody must stay here to halt the enemy. Otherwise they may get back to their boat and start to chase after us. Their boat is faster than ours," explained Chen Sung quietly.

"I'll stay here. You go home! You're leader of the whole squad."

"No, I can't move anyway. You must go right now!"

"What's wrong, squad leader?" asked Liu Hu in alarm. "Are you wounded?"

"Time is short. Leave at once!" the squad leader ordered.

"Do Liberation Army men ever leave their wounded behind?"

Just then Yang Ching returned after having seen to it that the fighters had retreated one by one. Liu Hu told him, "The squad leader is wounded. Carry him to the cutter and start for home."

"Do as you're ordered, Liu Hu...." But before Chen Sung could complete his sentence Yang Ching had put him on his back and carried him off.

The enemy had recovered. Shouting and cursing, they were advancing again. Seeing that his comrades had all withdrawn, Liu Hu shouted:

"Whoever has a tough skull, come on! I'll avenge all my comrades!"

Liu Hu had hit upon this trick on the spur of the moment. The enemy were taken in and focussed all their attention on him. They were unaware that the others were withdrawing, thinking that Liu Hu's comrades had all been shot dead.

Liu Hu chuckled to himself. Could such stupid commanders ever win? He shouted and fought, fought and retreated by turns, drawing the enemy after him.

"You dirty Communist," bellowed the Kuomintang soldiers. "Surrender! Or we'll make things hot for you."

"Surrender? Come and ask this gun of mine! See if he'll agree." Liu Hu raised his gun, firing a volley at the enemy.

For more than ten minutes he held them, shooting and taunting them as he slowly moved back from cover to cover. He calculated that the squad leader and the others had got away far enough now. So he retreated to the "rat rump", the further end of Small Rat Island. It ended in a sheer cliff. The enemy were overjoyed.

"Where can you go now, you dirty Communist?"

"Follow me. Your Lordship is going away by water." So saying, Liu Hu gave a final burst from his automatic and then, turning, leapt and disappeared into the sea. When the enemy reached the cliff, he was nowhere to be seen. They heard only the waves lapping the rocks. Furious, they could do nothing but fire into the sea, shooting at random at every likely shadow.

The cutter heading homeward had left Small Rat Island. But the men's hearts were still there, fighting alongside of Liu Hu. Yang

Ching, who never lost his temper, now almost shouted to the squad leader, "We should die together if need be. What a disgrace for us to return like this!" Chen Sung felt even worse about it than the rest. For the sake of the whole detachment he had had to leave his dearest comrade-in-arms behind. Lying in the boat, he felt as if all the shots being fired on the island were aimed at him. Just now when he was being closely pressed by a whole platoon, he had kept cool. Now he was out of danger, but he felt dry throated and tense. He wished the firing would stop, yet dreaded what that might mean.

As their cutter passed round the other side of Small Rat Island they could hear the enemy shooting at the sea. Chen Sung, listening carefully, was certain that Liu Hu must have jumped into the sea. Otherwise why should the enemy fire into the water? Without a moment's hesitation, he issued the order, "Steer towards Small Rat, quick." But when they were still 200 metres away the shooting stopped. Except for the waves and wind it was intolerably silent. Chen Sung, looking around, asked the others, "Anyone see a shadow on the water?" No one replied.

Yang Ching was sure the enemy must be searching for Liu Hu. Eager to avenge him, he hit on a way. After exchanging ideas with the squad leader, he turned to the captured radio man:

"I'll give you a chance to atone for your crimes. Will you take it?"

"With all my heart, with all my heart," agreed the man hastily.

"All right. I want you to speak to Big Rat," said Yang Ching. He turned to Chen Sung. "Please give your orders to the enemy, squad leader."

"Use your code," said Chen Sung, watching the radio man intently. "Say: The Communist army has occupied Small Rat. We have withdrawn to our vessel. Fire at Small Rat quick."

The man called through the transmitter, "Big Rat! Big Rat! Wild Cat has caught Small Rat. Centipedes have come aboard. Rain on Small Rat quick. . . ." In his anxiety to do well he sounded just like a beaten, panic-stricken soldier.

Soon a dozen guns on Big Rat Island started firing at Small Rat Island, sending the Kuomintang troops there howling for cover.

The fighters on the cutter were rejoicing when suddenly they heard someone on their port side exclaim, "Bravo!"

"Liu Hu!" All shouting together, they peered down into the water.

They dragged Liu Hu into the boat. Yang Ching, tears in his eyes, grasped Liu Hu's hand as if reunited with a long-lost friend. He was unable to utter a single word.

The cutter sailed full speed towards Wild Cat Island.

Suddenly, the chugging of an engine sounded ahead.

"Ready for combat!" ordered Chen Sung.

Everyone crouched down, holding his weapon already hot from firing. They strained to see what lay ahead.

Day was breaking. A ship appeared in the distance. It signalled to them.

"One of our ships!" They shouted and waved for joy.

From the moment the detachment set off, the regimental commander had been at his post in the observation room on Wild Cat Island, following events with concentrated attention. A ship had been sent to patrol the sea, ready to reinforce the detachment at any time.

The cutter, now towed by the ship, sped through the water. Seeing Chen Sung making an effort to stand up, Liu Hu and Yang Ching hurried to help him. With one hand on Liu Hu's shoulder and the other on Yang Ching's, Chen Sung stood there gazing at the eastern horizon. "Look! Look there!" he exclaimed excitedly.

The sun was rising in the east. It was a red, a pure red sun. It dyed half the sky red and its radiance continued to spread. Our young fighters were returning victoriously in the glory of the morning sun.

Translated by Chang Su
Illustrated by Hung Lu

The Tea Leaves Are Turning Green ▶
(coloured woodcut) by Liu Shu-chieh

Liu Shu-chieh, born in 1928 in Liaoning, studied in the woodcut department of the Chekiang College of Fine Arts. At present he works in the Wuhan branch of the Chinese Artists' Union.

In our November issue last year, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan, we published some revolutionary reminiscences. Below are two more. *Crucible* is about students in the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College, which was located in Yenan, then China's revolutionary headquarters. When the Japanese launched a full scale war in 1937, the Kuomintang government neither resisted the aggressors nor let the people resist. To be patriotic was called "criminal." Young people in enemy-occupied and Kuomintang-ruled areas were indignant and aggrieved. Braving all obstacles, including possible arrest by Kuomintang agents, they went by the thousands to Yenan, where many of them attended the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College run by the Chinese Communist Party. During the eight years of the war more than 200,000 military and political cadres were trained by this college. They played an important role both in the anti-Japanese war and in the War of Liberation later on. *South Island Arsenals* describes how the people fought the enemy on the island of Hainan, which is a part of Kwangtung Province separated from the mainland by a strait. The island was then occupied by the Japanese aggressors and the people were hard pressed.

Niu Ke-lun

Crucible

After completing our entrance formalities with the registration committee, we headed for the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College, asking directions along the way. It was housed in the handsome com-

pound of the former prefectural office. We had been assigned to Section Nine of Company Three. Ours would be the school's third term.

Dusk in early winter is quite cold in northern Shensi, but we were so thrilled we didn't feel it. Why shouldn't we be? Two months before we had been enduring humiliation under the bayonets of the Japanese. Today we had arrived in Yenan, where the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party was, and had become students in the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College. A brand new life was beginning.

The compound was in the southeast corner of the city. We wound along two streets and then we saw it — tall walls enclosing tile-roofed buildings, large neat letters on either side of its gateway forming the slogan: **United, alert, earnest, lively.** A few boys and girls, obviously students, were singing as they strolled out of the gate: "China's finest youth are gathered on the banks of the Yellow River...."

We entered. Emblazoned in red letters on the length of wall that screened the interior from the entrance was the following:

> Be courageous, determined, steady. Learn through struggle. Be ready to give your all at any time for the cause of national liberation.
>
> **Mao Tse-tung**

What magnificent phrases. What a stirring call. How many excited young people had passed this screen wall and gone on, in response to that great call, to unite, study and fight.

An instant later we were surrounded by students who had arrived earlier. Warm-heartedly they snatched our luggage and swept us along into the compound.

Suddenly someone shouted my name and a hand grabbed my shoulder. I looked around. It was my English teacher from middle school. I had gone on to Peiping University and hadn't seen him in two years. "You're here too, teacher," I exclaimed in pleased surprise.

Before supper we divided into sections and classes. I was assigned to Class Seven of Section Nine, Company Three. There were eleven of us, and we sat around a wooden table, on which a kettle of boiled water stood, and introduced ourselves. We came from every part of China. That simply-clad comrade had been a type-setter in Shanghai; that big fellow whose waist was bound with a military belt had been a non-com. in the old army. We also had an artist, a famous actor, a newspaper editor....

Many unexpected meetings took place in our school ranks. In addition to teachers and students, we also had husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, even three generations from the same family, finding one another again in the college.

Each had a fascinating tale to tell. The great war to liberate the nation from Japanese aggression, the great Chinese Communist Party, had drawn to Yenan and united thousands of hot-blooded youths and patriots. Workers and students from Peiping, Tientsin, Shanghai, Nanking — the big cities; fellow countrymen from the banks of the Sungari in the northeast; Chinese who had returned across the seas from abroad; people of various minority nationalities, from every province, from every walk of life... all seemed to be represented.

Moreover, even as we were removing our knapsacks and settling in, countless other young people like ourselves were crowding into trains and buses, or walking across the desolate wooded mountains, hurrying towards Yenan and its Anti-Japanese College. Every day new batches of them arrived. Over a hundred marched in one day. They were organized into a full section of their own.

Students kept coming right up until the end of December. We had already started class when a few college students arrived from the south. There was no place to put them, but they were insistent. "If you can't take us on as students," they said, "we'll work in the kitchen." It was impossible to refuse them. We pushed our sleeping pallets still closer together and squeezed them in.

The day school started, Comrade Li Chen-pang, our section's political instructor, came to see us after supper.

A veteran cadre who had been on the Long March, he was extremely kind. He asked about our adventures in coming to Yenan, then invited us out for a stroll.

As we walked, he told us about our college. During the first term, while the school was still at Paoan, the students built their own dormitories in old stables and cave-homes. The second term students persisted in their studies despite a severe shortage of supplies.

Gradually, the talk came around to the difficulties we third-termers would encounter. Comrade Li halted and pointed at the mountain opposite. "You see. . . ."

We looked. The bare slope had been cut into terraces. Fresh yellow earth was piled everywhere. What was it all about? We didn't understand.

"That's where our new dormitories will be," the political instructor said with a laugh. He explained that Yenan didn't have enough houses to accommodate an influx of thousands of students. The school had therefore called on the second-termers to build a hundred and fifty cave dorms in two weeks. They had already done the preliminary work. We would help complete them.

"This is a very important subject," said the political instructor. "The president of our school, Comrade Lin Piao, once said: 'We have a subject in our school that's not listed in the curriculum — Overcoming Difficulties Through Struggle.' You're going to start that class tomorrow."

The next day before it was light we were awakened by the sound of laughter and song and the clang of metal tools. We got up and looked outside. In the courtyard were piles of shovels and hoes, as well as wheelbarrows and baskets. In the centre of the yard were kerosene drums which had been cut in half and converted into cooking pots. Students from each class were sitting around them eating millet gruel. I hurriedly took my place among my classmates. After consuming two bowls of gruel, I grabbed a shovel and set out with the others.

Actually the building of the dormitories was almost completed. All we had to do was to put on some finishing touches. It wasn't very heavy work. But to most of us students, who had never held a shovel in their hands before, it was a severe trial. At the end of a day's work we were drenched in sweat, our hands were blistered, our backs stiff, our legs sore. But it was precisely this sort of work that tempered and educated us, that reformed our thinking. It gave us the courage and the strength to conquer difficulties.

In his dedicatory remarks when the dorms were formally opened, Chairman Mao Tse-tung put it well. He said: "When the Communist Party and the Red Army face up to them, all ordinary so-called difficulties don't exist. The worst hardships can be overcome. The Red Army is invincible."

One morning, ten days after school started, all the students gathered in our Company Three courtyard for a farewell party for the second-term graduates, who were leaving for the front. Each of the companies sang, shouted slogans. It was very jolly. Suddenly the singing stopped. Lo Jui-ching, dean of the school, stood up and announced:

"And now, Chairman Mao will address us."

A hush fell on the assembly. Then we broke into enthusiastic applause. After the December Ninth Student Movement* in 1935, when we were still in the Kuomintang controlled areas, we used to read Chairman Mao's works in secret. When we arrived in Yenan we learned from our political instructors and from the students who had come earlier that our college had been organized and built under the leadership and direction of Chairman Mao personally. Beginning with the second term he had assumed the duties of chairman of the school's education committee and defined the school's objectives. These were: "Keep firmly to the correct political orientation, maintain an industrious and simple style of work, be flexible in strategy and tactics." These aims, plus the motto "United, alert, earnest, lively," became our college's traditional guidelines. Later, at the third anniversary of the founding of the school, Chairman Mao, referring to the three aims in an essay, wrote: "These are the three essentials in the making of an anti-Japanese revolutionary soldier."

We had been hoping that Chairman Mao would appear, and now our wish had come true. Wearing a grey cotton uniform, smiling, he walked slowly forward, his hand raised.

First he analysed the war situation, then he offered considerable advice to the graduating class. Finally, he took a few steps towards our Company Three and said: "You've come to Yenan. That's fine. We welcome you."

*On December 9, 1935 the students in Peking, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, held a patriotic demonstration, putting forward such slogans as "Stop the civil war and unite to resist foreign aggression" and "Down with Japanese imperialism." This movement broke through the long reign of terror imposed by the Kuomintang government in league with the Japanese invaders and very quickly won the people's support throughout the country.

A stir of animation ran through the audience.

"Can you eat millet?" Chairman Mao asked us.

"Yes," we shouted back.

"Can you make straw sandals?"

"We can," we replied in unison.

Chairman Mao smiled. "Good. You have to be able to eat millet, make straw sandals and climb mountains before you can be considered a real Anti-Japanese College student. You've come here to join the revolution and study Marxism. You must understand: eating millet, climbing big mountains — that's revolution, that's Marxism."

Although Chairman Mao didn't speak very long, his words were very enlightening. We had begun learning a bit what "hard struggle" meant, and had started toughening up, eating millet, making straw sandals, and toting bags of grain a long distance. But we hadn't realized until hearing Chairman Mao how important hard struggle was to a person who wanted to become a revolutionary.

We gradually settled down and dug into our studies. Our purpose, as the school authorities had told us several times, was to learn in order to use, to thoroughly understand. This was in accordance with the principles frequently stressed by Chairman Mao and our President Lin Piao of "linking theory with practice" and "aiming for quality rather than quantity", as opposed to swallowing large chunks of indigested text material and memorizing a lot of rules.

Chairman Mao attached great importance to our political studies and gave them a special position in our curriculum. We heard that when he lectured to the second-termers on *On Contradiction* and *On Practice*, he also joined in their class discussions. He told them that the whole point of studying theory was to be able to apply it practically, to remould the subjective and objective world.

Because our level of political understanding was low we weren't able at first to utilize Chairman Mao's teaching very well. I remember when we just started our discussions, all most of us could do was leaf through our notes and rack our brains. We were so tied up in the concepts and the terminology, we didn't know what to say. In the end it was the veteran comrades with practical experience who

spoke up first. They talked of the Kuomintang's passive attitude to the resistance, of the harm the Kuomintang was inflicting on the nation and the people. They talked of the Communist Party's determined resistance to the Japanese invaders, of how it was saving the nation and the people. Vividly, they related the things they had seen and heard, showing us why the Chinese people, under the leadership of the Party, was sure to defeat Japanese imperialism.

This improved our understanding of the situation. We found we also had things to say. Each of us spoke of his own experience, ideas and comprehension. Our discussion grew quite spirited.

So that we younger students who were lacking in personal experience might learn something of the true nature of the War of Resistance, the school took every opportunity to organize talks by old Red Army men and leaders who had returned from the front. The school also arranged for us to visit places in and around Yenan and increase our practical knowledge.

We learned to relate theory to practice not only in political matters but in our military studies as well.

I remember one day Comrade Liu Ya-lou gave us a lecture on guerrilla warfare. His speech was very simple, concrete, practical, and cited many thrilling examples. Although we students had never taken part in battle, we quickly grasped the basic principles he expounded.

That night my class gathered around the oil lamp on our big oven bed as usual for study and discussion. Our topic was: The surprise element in guerrilla warfare.

It was a lively session. We were so absorbed we didn't hear the signal for lights out, and talked far into the night.

A few nights later, the northwest wind was splitting our paper window panes. But the oven bed was heated and we were snug and warm inside our quilts. We had done a lot of exercise that day and all of us were sleeping soundly.

Suddenly, the sharp crack of rifles broke the silence. Whistles shrilled urgently in the courtyard. The students on duty rushed from door to door and ordered:

"Assemble in full battle kit. Don't light any lamps. No noise."

Although our company commander hurried around, urging: "Don't be alarmed. Keep cool," we couldn't help being tense and excited. In our pitch-black room, this student couldn't find his puttees, that student lost his shoe, one young fellow put on another boy's clothes, enamelled metal drinking cups were dropped and rolled clanging across the floor....

Our ranks hastily assembled. The roll was called, and we trotted out of camp to a ridge outside the city.

It was light by the time we set up on the mountain. Our company commander and political instructor accompanied some comrades from the school administration on a tour of inspection of our position. Then came the announcement: "The practice is over. Each class is to make its own summary."

So it was only a practice manoeuvre. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. We looked at each other's bedraggled appearance and folded over in helpless laughter.

"What was the idea of the emergency assembly?" someone asked.

The company commander grinned. "Have you forgotten? Yesterday we had a class on night action."

It often happened that way. Whatever was talked about, we did. If we had a lecture on weapons, we immediately had to learn how to

take apart and reassemble rifles and practise shooting. If we had a lecture on defence and attack, we had to practise them in the field. The principles of learning in order to use and linking theory to practice permeated every subject we studied and became part of our daily lives.

Shortly after the New Year holiday, our political instructor sent for me. He said: "It will soon be the sixth anniversary of the 'January 28th Incident.'* By way of commemoration all classes are going to take part in a cultural and athletic competition. Let's get our 'National Salvation Room' into shape."

These "National Salvation Rooms" had evolved from the old Red Army "Lenin Rooms." Every company in the school had one. They served as clubs and meeting halls. There we held our larger discussions, or criticized unhealthy tendencies. We had our cultural activities there in our spare time. The day after I arrived at the school I had been put in charge of our company's "National Salvation Room."

Our Company Nine was lucky. We had a whole crowd of people from a Shanghai theatrical troupe. We had singers, actors, artists, poets — anything you could want, we had. Our choral leader was especially talented. *In Praise of Yenan* was Company Nine's "contribution."

To commemorate "January 28th" we decided to perform the opera *On the Whampoa River*. Our drama group, chorus and orchestra rehearsed almost every night after supper in our "National Salvation Room." Cymbals and fiddles sounded right up to the holiday eve.

Our performance was very successful. We were given an "excellent" rating.

There was also another place where we used to gather. That was on the banks of the Yenho River.

At dusk when the sunset tinted the pagoda on the hilltop, you would see students walking in small groups along the edge of the

*On January 28, 1932 the Japanese imperialists launched an armed attack on Shanghai. Although the Kuomintang government behaved in its usual weak-kneed manner, the troops and people of Shanghai rose to resist.

clear waters. Some, in grey army uniforms, had just finished a day of drilling. They wore Anti-Japanese College badges. Boys and girls from the Northern Shensi School dressed in multi-coloured garb. As the young people strolled, they gazed at the pagoda and at the ancient temple in the foot-hills. Some let their voices out in full-throated song from neighbouring ridges. Some played tag along the river bank. They strolled, and chatted, and argued. They talked of the scenery in their home towns, of the war, of the political situation in Europe. During those evenings in Yenan, our feet left their prints on every stone, our songs echoed in every vale, we discussed every conceivable topic.

Winter passed. Spring, 1938, came to northern Shensi.

After several months of study and steeling ourselves, we third-termers came to the end of our course in the college. Exams were over, marks were in. A donation rally, suggested by the girls of our company, was in full swing. A few comrades who had already received their assignments were packed and ready to go.

Everything was in order. We waited only for the command, and we would rush to the front. Would Chairman Mao address us at our graduation ceremony? Soon we would be leaving our school, leaving Yenan, for posts behind the enemy lines. It might be a long time before we could see and hear our beloved leader again.

Chairman Mao seemed to know what was on our minds. Just when our anxiety was at its height we received word that he would speak to us.

On a clear morning in the beginning of April, he addressed our entire student body — over two thousand people — at the foot of a mountain outside the city.

He started by talking about the graduation of us third-termers. Smiling, he said, "Your studies at this college involve three periods, there are three subjects you have to pass. The eight hundred *li* trip from Sian to Yenan was the first subject.* Living in cave dorms at

*During the War of Resistance Against Japan, young people going to Yenan from the Japanese-occupied and Kuomintang-ruled areas had to pass through Sian, central Shensi, where the Kuomintang stationed a large number of troops to blockade the revolutionary base.

school, eating millet, drilling and attending classes — that was the second subject. You've passed that, too. You are now coming to the third, and most important, subject — learning in the midst of struggle."

Chairman Mao explained to us in detail the importance of learning through struggle, through practical experience. Then he told us about conditions on each of the battlefields in the enemy's rear.

In conclusion, he urged us to learn through actual struggle and be able to "keep firmly to the correct political orientation, maintain an industrious and simple style of work, and be flexible in strategy and tactics." He gave illustrations of these principles, referring to the classical novel *Pilgrimage to the West** to show why a revolutionary must have a clear orientation, why we must be single-minded and never turn back no matter how severely we are taxed by hardships.

He made particular reference to the white horse ridden by the monk Hsuan-tsang in the ancient story. "You shouldn't underestimate that little steed," Chairman Mao said. "It sought neither fame nor fortune, but doggedly stuck it out, delivered the monk to the Western Regions, obtained the holy scriptures, and brought him back. We revolutionaries also have loads to carry. Some may weigh sixty catties, some may weigh a hundred. We must shoulder the heavier burdens, not the lighter. That's what we mean by a simple, solid style of work. We all must adopt this kind of working style."

Chairman Mao's words, frequently interrupted by applause and laughter, made a lasting impression upon us.

Not long after hearing this talk, we third-termers, guided by what Chairman Mao had taught us, left the college, revolutionary crucible of our great era, and speeded to the battlefields in the enemy's rear. There we began a new stage — learning and steeling ourselves in the midst of struggle.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Illustrated by Ku Ping-hsin

*A well-known Chinese novel of the 16th century, describing the long hard journey to the Western Regions of Hsuan-tsang (A. D. 596—664), a Buddhist translator of the Tang dynasty, to obtain holy scriptures.

Chen Ta-hsin

South Island Arsenals

In Meiho on Hainan Island in a green lichee grove the clang of iron, the wheeze of bellows, the cadence of work chanteys, could be heard day and night. It was here that the weapons arsenal for our Chiungyai Column was hidden.

At first we had only four men. Our equipment consisted of a small bellows, a hand-operated drill, two wrenches, and a couple of hammers. Later, the Central Committee of the Communist Party sent us two technicians from Yenan, and our arsenal gradually began to expand. When we moved to the revolutionary base on Chiungshan Mountain at the end of 1940, we joined forces with the weapons repair group led by Comrades Fu Chi-sheng and Chou Ju-sung. This brought our arsenal personnel to well over a hundred. Some comrades were sent to set up branch arsenals in our detachments. Our own arsenal followed the column wherever it was fighting. Sometimes we operated in a village, sometimes in the hills, sometimes on a boat.

In August that year, we surrounded and attacked the forces of the traitor Li Chun-nung at Tashui. To keep our men supplied with ammunition, our arsenal moved to the front. We worked day and night, close to the choking fumes of the battlefield. Empty shells ejected from the chambers of our fighters' rifles were picked up and turned over to the arsenal promptly by local people who were helping us. We replaced the primers, filled the shells with powder, put in new bullets, and got the ammunition back to our men the same night. Several hundred people, who had been organized into transport teams, were bringing us scrap iron and copper from as far away as a hundred *li*. Our Party branch had raised the slogan: "Shells delivered today are shells refitted today." We pumped our bellows and swung our hammers for five days and nights without a break.

As a result, after this battle the enemy were itching to get their hands on our arsenal. Swearing they would destroy it, they searched for us everywhere. They arrested peasants who had transported materials for us and seized our purchasing agents. The struggle grew more bitter. Sometimes we had to move three times in one day. And each time, Comrade Fu Chih went ahead as the advance guard. Although he was suffering from diarrhoea, that hand-operated drill and big hammer never left his shoulder. Other comrades wanted to help him carry them, but he said: "I'm all right. Why don't you look after One Leg?"

One Leg was the nickname for Comrade Chou Ju-sung. He had lost his left leg in a factory accident while working somewhere in the South Seas and his English boss had fired him. Chou returned home to Hainan and joined the Chiungyai Column. Although past forty, he followed us up hill and down dale on his crutches. Whenever we had to move the arsenal we asked him to set out ahead of time, Chou would wave a crutch and retort laughingly: "What's the hurry? Surely three legs are better than two."

Only after he put his tools in order would he leave with the rest of us. His arm-pits grew chafed by the crutches and marching became painful. But on the road he was always encouraging young comrades with his jokes.

"Come on, young fellow," he would say. "I'll give you a race. Let's see who can run the faster."

Sometimes on a long march comrades were afraid it would be too much for him, and offered to support him. With a chuckle, Chou would refuse. "My leg isn't made of dough. Give a hand to the sick."

Each time we set up in a new place, the local Party and government organization not only supplied us with food and materials, they organized the people to protect us. Villagers patrolled, acted as lookouts atop cocoanut palms, disguised themselves as cowherds and watched for enemy activity. The enemy had only to leave their base and a tall bamboo pole in the vicinity would slowly be lowered to the ground. At this the village reconnaisance man would hurry into our arsenal and warn us to move.

Even if the enemy "mopped up" every day, we could carry our tools and shift our base of operations. But the concealment of materials was a problem. Our Party branch finally decided that we should hide our explosives and scrap metal beneath bridge pilings, or bury them in sweet potato patches or rice paddies.

One day a detachment of puppet troops collaborating with the Japanese in a "mop up" foraged a village all morning for food. The people had concealed everything so well, the enemy couldn't find a thing. Very hungry, they let the water out of a paddy field in order to get at the fish being raised there. In doing so, they exposed our "secret store-room." Like mongrels fighting over garbage, they dragged out our scrap metal, thinking to turn it in to their Japanese masters and claim a reward.

Villagers, watching them from the bushes, reported this to us at once. Our army unit quickly laid an ambush for the puppets outside the village of Pingcheng. We hit them so hard, they dropped their loads and fled, leaving behind a light machine-gun and several rifles as well.

Not long after, the enemy spread into Taotsung Township, and we had to shift to another sector. It was necessary to simplify our equipment for the sake of transport. Our furnace of several hundred

catties was melted down. In its place we used a cauldron and a face-basin lined with white clay. A wooden levered bellows replaced the heavy piston type hollowed out of a big log. To keep our troops supplied with ammunition we worked on barren slopes or on small boats, while posting look-outs on the tops of tall trees.

Japanese encroachment spread and grew more savage. Kuomintang traitors co-operated with the enemy in attacks on our forces. It was no longer possible for our arsenal to produce on a large scale. General headquarters decided to let the local comrades go back to their own regions and set up a number of little arsenals. Our furnace technicians Hsu Ching-feng and Hsu Ching-hua, brothers, returned to their native village and took jobs in the blacksmith shop where they forged plough-shares during the day and made hand-grenade casings at night. We also trained girl apprentices.

When the enemy came, our local comrades buried their moulds, dropped their grenade casings in the well and pretended to be blacksmiths. As soon as the enemy left, they fished the casings out again.

Our carpenter, Tseng Hsing-kuo, moved to the village of Fuchiu. To all appearances he was just an ordinary carpenter. Actually, he was manufacturing grenade handles and wooden holsters for pistols. Our blacksmith Chen Jo-sheng set up in the countryside where he made sickles and hoes for the peasants. Secretly he was also producing metal fittings for pistol holsters.

The thirty some-odd people remaining in the original arsenal were divided into three groups. Whenever the enemy left our locality, we resumed production. When they approached again, we concealed our equipment with rocks and mud and scattered into the hills.

In order to thoroughly defeat the enemy's spreading encroachment, our army left only small forces to fight them. Our main body broke through the enemy lines and opened up new territory in their rear. Our arsenal personnel reassembled and went with our army to the Juwan Mountains on the west side of the Nantu River.

But the enemy had us tightly blockaded. We were very short of the gunpowder and metal we needed for mines and ammunition. The local Communist Party branch decided that members could pay their dues in copper or iron. As a result, we soon began receiving ancient

bells, ceremonial swords and bronze incense burners. At the same time we asked the local people to bring us empty cartridge and artillery shells from enemy-controlled territory. Our army ordered our soldiers to save and turn in the shells of the bullets they fired whenever possible.

This didn't solve our gunpowder problem, however. We proposed getting it from enemy dud bombs and floating mines. The column's Party committee supported this suggestion, and immediately notified each local Party organization to get the help of the masses. People brought us unexploded bombs from over a hundred *li* away. Many risked a violent end carrying live floating mines to us from the sea. For certain vital materials we relied entirely on the people. They broke through innumerable barriers to buy them for us in the heart of enemy territory. Not a few comrades gave their precious lives in the process.

But how were we to dismantle bombs and mines? Who should dismantle them? Since its establishment our arsenal had paid in blood several times for our lack of experience. Comrade Chen Fu-tung was blown up while loading a rifle-grenade, the boy Wu Ching-lin lost his life because he loaded a hand grenade improperly; Comrade Wang Yun-kao died and several others were killed or wounded because he stirred powder drying in the sun with an iron rod.

My heart contracted when I thought of these bitter lessons. How were we going to perform the task confronting us?

As I was pondering, a tall form appeared in the doorway. I jumped up, surprised.

"One Leg, you work so late every night. Why don't you sleep a little longer?"

"You're always talking about others. Why don't you get some rest yourself?" One Leg leaned his crutches against the wall and sat down on the edge of my bed. After a moment's silence he said tentatively: "Arsenal chief, I'd like to try —"

"For the past two months you've been sweating over that heavy machine-gun, and hardly getting any sleep, until you finally repaired it," I interrupted. "Now, here you are again." He wanted to take the most difficult burden on his own shoulders, as usual. I knew what he was thinking the moment he spoke.

"I'd like to try dismantling that bomb. Give me the job."

The need was urgent enough, but could I let him take the risk? He was our best technician. No matter how complicated the damaged weapons sent to us might be, no matter how short we were of metal,

he always managed to repair them. Recently we had received a captured heavy machine-gun. A number of comrades said it was beyond repair, that it only could be used as scrap. One Leg spent over two full months on it, and finally put it in working order.

But dismantling a live bomb was something else again. If you made a mistake in assembling a machine-gun, you could do it over again. With a bomb, you'd never get another chance. It was a very dangerous business, especially for a person who had never done it before.

"It's all right, chief," One Leg assured me. "Of course I might have a little difficulty, but there's nothing so wonderful about bombs. If other people can put them together, why can't we take them apart?"

"Well... I'll have to talk it over with the Party committee."

"Sooner or later we'll have to dismantle them, and it's better to let me do it than some other comrade. I'm a Communist. It's only right that I should do the hardest jobs. Besides, the comrades at the front must have bullets for their guns."

"You've never worked on bombs. They're nothing to play around with. We lost Comrade Chen Fu-tung because we —"

"To win a revolution, a price has to be paid." One Leg struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"That's true," I replied, "but you have to think of the entire setup." As soon as the words were out of my mouth I realized I shouldn't have said them. Comrade One Leg was volunteering precisely because the over-all situation required a solution quickly. "Our arsenal only has a few veteran technicians," I added lamely. "We can't afford to lose a single one. Each of you is indispensable."

"I'm a Communist," he insisted. "I'm sure the Party organization will agree. I'll be careful." He spoke calmly, as though he had dismantled dozens of bombs. Seeing that I was still hesitating, he continued: "If I dismantle this one, not only will we have gunpowder, but we'll understand the bomb's structure. In the future we'll be able to make our own."

Outside, dawn was breaking. My heart seemed to rise and fall like the waves. Comrade One Leg stood so tall, he saw so far. We

had many such comrades, men willing to give their blood to wrest a bright tomorrow for the people.

The Party committee decided that since Comrade One Leg was brave, steady and a meticulous worker, he could be entrusted with this glorious and dangerous task. Comrade Fu Chih and several others offered to be his assistants, but he refused them. "This isn't a free-for-all," he laughed. "What do I want with a lot of helpers?"

After we mulled over what we knew about bombs for two days, we had one carried to a ravine outside the village of Kunshan. We waited uneasily two hundred yards away. Because there was a grove of trees between us, we couldn't see him clearly. We could only guess: "Has he unscrewed the cap? He must have the fuse out by now...." Every minute seemed an hour.

Then we heard the joyous shout: "It's open." We rushed towards him. Leaning on his crutches, he was holding the fuse high in one hand, his bearded cheeks dripping with sweat.

"Who would have thought that a little gadget like this could cause so much trouble," he quipped.

After Comrade One Leg cracked the secret of dismantling bombs and floating mines, he trained a number of others in this art. People had only to discover a bomb or a mine and we went at once and dismantled it. Gunpowder was no longer a rare and precious commodity.

A crucible tempers steel, and our Red Arsenal was the finest steel of the fine. For we were tempered in battle, becoming stronger and "redder" every day.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Illustrated by Lu Yen

Ping Chih

Works by Young Writers

In the last few years many works by young spare-time writers have appeared in Chinese magazines and newspapers. The Peking People's Literature Publishing House, the China Youth Publishing House and the Shanghai People's Literature Publishing House have just brought out *Selected Works by New Writers* in five volumes, *Selected Short Stories by Young Writers* in two volumes and fourteen books of the *Meng Ya* Library series respectively. These new books represent the best work by these writers and another step forward in modern Chinese writing.

I picked up a volume at random and the first story I read aroused my interest. The narrator, the head of a surveying team, described how his team set out to help open up a large tract of waste land in the Tarim Basin of Sinkiang, striking north across the great Taklamakan Desert to survey the Tarim River. They lost their way in the forest and were puzzled by the discovery of some footprints which resembled neither those of men nor beasts. Could these have been made by the legendary bear-man? Upon following these tracks they came to a trap set for hares, and then they met a wild-looking old Uighur. "He was an old greybeard with long unkempt hair and a swarthy, grimy

face, dressed in a fearfully tattered sheepskin cape and sheepskin trousers in slightly better condition." His feet were shod with sheepskin moccasins. This was the old hunter Ibrahim Bawdin. His grandfather had been a peasant in Aksu, but he suffered so much at the hands of the local landlord that he fled away with his grandchild to these wild parts.

When Ibrahim Bawdin was a boy, he and his grandfather were forced to go to Merket to find treasures for a foreign "explorer," and the grandfather died of thirst in the desert. Ibrahim Bawdin had moved quarters many times because the Tarim River changed its course so often. All but one of his twelve sons had died, and of his twelve grandchildren only a twelve-year-old granddaughter was left, but now she was seriously ill. His family had been so dogged by misfortune that the old man was suspicious of all strangers. However, after many dramatic incidents he finally made friends with these surveyors and acted as their guide, telling them what he knew of the changes in the course of the Tarim during the last century....

A few years later the team leader went back there, and this time the old man guided him not through waste land and forests but through a well-mechanized state farm. An equally staggering change had taken place in Bawdin's family, for they were living better than they had ever dreamed of.

This is the story told in *An Old Hunter Bears Witness* by Teng Pu (See *Chinese Literature* No. 8, 1965). The writer reveals to us a strange new world, but what moves us most is not the remarkable scenery of the Tarim Basin or the dramatic plot, but the gradual change in the old hunter's outlook. This "wild man" gains a new lease of life in the new society. He not only bears witness to the many changes in the course of the Tarim in the last hundred years and to the way in which it conquered men in the past; more significantly, he bears witness to the Tarim Basin's swift advance from primitive conditions to modern civilization, to the Big Leap Forward in socialist construction, to the way in which men who had been conquered by nature succeeded in conquering nature.

Teng Pu's story is about a remote border region, but it has a general significance for us. If not for the genuine socialist transformation

in China, many people would never have known a happy life. His pen probes the depth of history, but instead of describing some lost ancient city he shows us a new city emerging on the ruins of the old. This is the significance of the old hunter's story.

Quite a few of these young writers have chosen historical themes, and young as they are they show deep insight into history, for they view it from the standpoint of the present day and reveal the changes in human society. The great majority of these new works, however, deal with the new types of people in new China.

We could cite several dozen similar stories. For example, Jen Pin-wu's *Forging Ahead Against the Wind,* Chi Ping's *Stormy Seas* (See *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1965), Lin Yu's *Sharpening the Sword,* Chang Chun-hsi's *The High Peak*, Hsu Shao-wu's *A Night in Phoenix Rest* (See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1965), Asar's *On the Road* (See *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1964) and Li Teh-fu's *A Spring with Many Flowers* (See *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1965), to name only a few.

The High Peak deals with the problem of how to bring up successors for the revolution. Chang Chien, the political commissar of his regiment, goes to inspect a radar station on Crouching Tiger Mountain and finds that Kuan, the officer in charge, is not training his men seriously and sneers at some soldiers who train hard on their own. The political commissar's attention is caught by a radar controller Hung Chia-keng who used to be an apprentice in a steel mill. This young fellow is tirelessly climbing up and down a steep, rocky peak to accustom himself to actual combat conditions. Impressed by his strong sense of responsibility and revolutionary keenness, Chang Chien helps him to improve his political understanding. Eventually Kuan realizes that there are many such hopeful young men in the station; the problem is how to guide them and train them into fine soldiers.

This story by Chang Chun-hsi deals with an important issue in China today. Like many other young writers, he has based his story on his own experience of real life and he is able to grasp the innermost thoughts of the soldiers and to depict their splendid qualities; for these writers understand soldiers just as well as themselves. This story analyses convincingly how Hung Chia-keng comes to have such a high sense of responsibility and enthusiasm. We can illustrate this

by a short passage. In a book young Hung is reading Chang Chien discovers a book-mark, not the usual kind decorated with flowers or insects, but a newspaper cutting pasted on a slip of cardboard. The cutting lists various crimes committed by the U.S. aggressors in Viet Nam, but the words are blurred as if they have been scratched many times. Here is the explanation Hung gives Chang:

> At night I often dream of our factories.... I've never seen the Vietnamese people's factories, but I'm sure they must be just as big and fine as ours; and now U.S. planes are coming to destroy them. The thought of this makes me tremble with anger and unconsciously I claw at that newspaper cutting, wishing we could go straight to the aid of our Vietnamese brothers, just as in the Korean war, to drive out those U.S. gangsters.

That is the fine way our soldiers' minds work as their hearts seethe with passionate indignation. All their thoughts, actions and affections are closely linked with the construction of their motherland and the revolutionary struggles of the people of the world.

The same qualities are evident in Jen Pin-wu's *Forging Ahead Against the Wind*. A shooting contest is about to be held, and the narrator of the story is on his way to an army camp to select a crack shot, when word comes to him that the celebrated sharp-shooter Lu Niu-tzu has been defeated. Lu, who is from a poor fisherman's family, has such determination that he is called "the one who forges ahead against the wind." A brilliant marksman, he can bring down three seagulls with three quick successive shots. The narrator watches a contest between Lu and another soldier named Chen, and once again Lu is beaten. Is he really losing his grip? The story goes on to unravel this mystery. This young soldier with a strong character realizes during one contest that if he wants to perfect his skill he must not be satisfied with five hits out of five shots. As his general has said to him, "For a revolutionary soldier who is defending the motherland, to score five hits with five shots is not the goal but only the starting point." Because he wants to hit his mark every single time and never miss, Lu sets himself a number of amazing tasks. He can score the full five hits already in a contest, but if a shot fails to hit the bull's-eye he counts it as a miss. Similarly, when he brings down three seagulls, if one is shot through the wing instead of the heart he considers he has failed.

It is not simply a matter of professional pride with him; the strict demands he makes on himself in his striving for perfection show the sort of spirit he has.

In creating the character Lu Niu-tzu, Jen Pin-wu tried to sum up the spirit of the age in art, and this gives the story its great social significance. The writer searched painstakingly among the innumerable sharp-shooters in the army for their common characteristics, what made them so outstanding. He succeeded in grasping the heart of the matter — these men's revolutionary fervour, their determination to carry on the revolution to the end and become thoroughly revolutionary; hence he was able to make this common soldier vivid, lifelike and at the same time very noble.

Hsu Shao-wu's *A Night in Phoenix Rest* shows us the spirit of the members of a people's commune. A girl going to work in the countryside is sent by the village functionaries to stay in a peasant family. The man of the house happens to be the production brigade leader, his wife the brigade Party secretary; but neither is at home when the girl arrives and lies down in a small room. They come back later, unaware of her arrival, and she overhears their conversation. The wife gives her husband some comradely criticism, urging him to be more careful of the collective property although they are now doing well, and to help other brigades. Then, late as it is, they decide to go to the hills to look for fertilizer so that they can offer the good fertilizer they have found nearby to a neighbouring brigade. This selfless eagerness to build up the commune and the generosity of spirit which makes over the best things to others are so vividly depicted that readers are just as moved as the girl who overhears their conversation.

The mistress of this house is a poor peasant in her twenties who before liberation did not even have a name of her own, but now she has become one of the village leaders. Devoted heart and soul to the collective, she epitomizes China's ordinary but great peasant women today. In this story she only appears three times and has only three brief contacts with the girl, but the overheard conversation between the husband and wife who are also comrades shows how well they

love and encourage each other, while their unseen activities clearly conjure up the noble qualities of Communists.

A somewhat similar young woman is the mill-hand Hsin Hsia-ying portrayed in *A Spring with Many Flowers* by Li Teh-fu. She is a model textile worker well-known for her high output and the quality of her work; but she gives up the chance of continued commendation by volunteering to share a loom with Chu Pao-chin whose work has always lagged behind. She makes high demands of the other girl, patiently helps her to master technique, and encourages her to have more confidence. Hsin Hsia-ying's strength comes from her intense love for the revolution and her high political consciousness. Her philosophy is: "A single flower does not make a spring. Spring must have a mass of flowers." And this idea is behind her strength and nobility of character. Hsin Hsia-ying's fine qualities are very common among the Chinese people today.

The fact that so many new heroes and heroines of the common people have been created by these young writers is due to the active part they play themselves in various posts where fresh material is easily accessible to them. These stories take us to cities, mining areas, factories, villages, forests, deserts, schools, shops and hospitals, from the Sungari in the northeast to Hainan Island in the south, from the eastern sea coast to the Tibetan plateau. Reading them gives us a general picture of life in the whole of China. The people of new China are transforming themselves in the process of transforming the world around them, becoming better and nobler; thus new characters, new moral qualities and a new working style have emerged. The old hunter's experiences may appear rather remote to young readers in China, but other characters like the soldiers Lu Niu-tzu and Hung Chia-keng, the woman Party secretary of Phoenix Rest and the mill-hand Hsin Hsia-ying, are pen-sketches of the new type of people produced by our new society. Since these are the true masters of new China, it is only natural that they should occupy a prominent position in our literature.

The people too want to see themselves reflected in literature and set a high moral standard for their writers; but this is possible only when the people have a rich cultural life and live in a revolutionary

environment. Lenin said that literature should be written by the masses, and this is beginning to happen in China today. These numerous spare-time writers from factories, villages and the armed forces are real people's artists and at the same time genuine workers, peasants and soldiers. Their thoughts, feelings and moral qualities inevitably bring something fresh to literature, which causes important changes in the mode of expression. On the one hand the new writers follow the best traditions of the past, but instead of being fettered by old conventions they have the courage to create something new. From their works we can see that the revolutionary ideals and heroism of their characters are often synchronized with romanticism; the sane, healthy atmosphere of their stories is accompanied by clear, robust language and an invigorating style. In other words, a suitable form has been found to express the revolutionary content. This is the special feature of these works by young writers.

Hu Yu

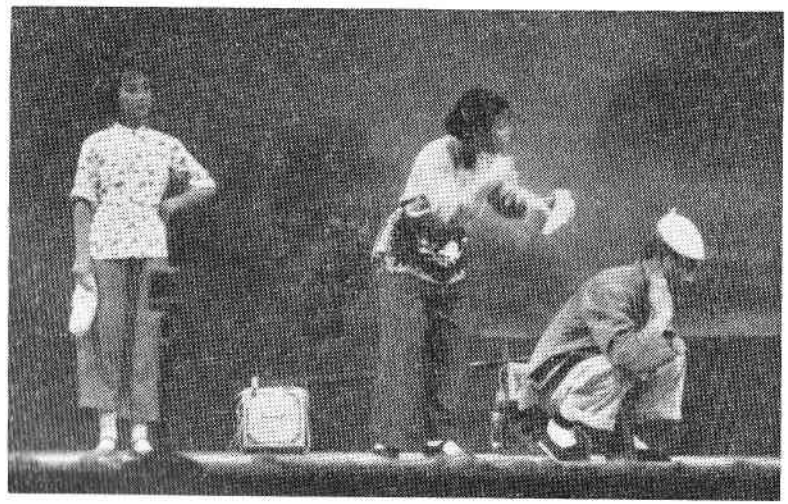
Short Comedies

Since the autumn of 1964 a wide-spread and far-reaching revolution has taken place in the Chinese theatre. The stage formerly occupied by the emperors and princes, generals and ministers, talented young scholars and beautiful young ladies of old, now gives pride of place to the new heroic characters of modern times. This change is seen most clearly in Peking opera, which has a long tradition, as we reported in *Chinese Literature* No. 9, 1964. In recent months drama festivals in different parts of China have helped to speed up the development of our dramatic art, and the many new plays and local operas put on in various provinces and municipalities by drama groups of different nationalities are a true example of "a hundred flowers in bloom." A considerable number of these dramas are short comedies which have aroused keen interest owing to their fresh, humorous style, compact plots, strong flavour of real life and successful use of traditional forms combining singing and dancing.

The great majority of these new comedies deal with everyday village life under socialism, and this is only natural because the great bulk of our audience are peasants. Some of these plays give enthusiastic

praise to the characters of a new type who defend the collective interest; others expose selfish, individualistic ideas and behaviour, ridicule the old view that some jobs are more honourable than others, reveal the relationship between the individual and the collective through contradictions in family life, or tackle the problem of how to bring up a younger generation of revolutionaries.... Although they touch upon different aspects of our life, one cannot fail to see an outstanding feature in common: the presentation of various contradictions within the ranks of the people today. For although class exploitation and oppression no longer exist in China, the exploiters who have been overthrown are still struggling to regain their old positions while their ideological influence has not yet been completely eradicated from men's minds; thus the struggle between socialism and capitalism is still going on and is seen not only in clashes between the people and the enemy, but also in contradictions among the people over changes in ownership, for example, or the struggles between new and old ideas, morality and social customs, which occur now and then in real life and need solving. Our new playwrights come from among the people and live and work in their midst, and when they

A scene from *Taking Goods to the Countryside*



A scene from *Mending the Pan*

sense and reflect these contradictions this gives their works a strong flavour of real life and serious significance for our age.

Let us cite a few examples. The short Honan opera *Taking Goods to the Countryside*, which is very popular, has only three characters. Yao San-yuan, an old pedlar who now works as a commissioned agent, has not changed his old ways. When he goes to the countryside he still tries to make a dishonest profit by selling cut-price goods at the original price. It so happens that Tu Chuan, a salesgirl from the supply and marketing co-operative, discovers this and goes after Yao. With the help of a customer, Sister Wang, she proves him a swindler and forces him to admit his fault and return the extra money he has charged. This simple comedy gives an incisive picture of the different outlook of the two main characters, while the singing and stylized movements during Yao's guilty flight and Tu Chuan's spirited pursuit add distinction to the humorous performance.

The Hunan flower-drum opera *Mending the Pan*, presents a competent pig-breeder, Mrs. Liu, who wants her daughter to marry a young man with technical skill and a good, "dignified" profession. But her daughter Lan-ying loves her old classmate Li Hsiao-tsung, who after leaving school has taken up the tinker's trade which Mrs.

Liu despises. One day the pan Mrs. Liu uses for her pigs' mash starts leaking and she wants it mended quickly. Lan-ying fetches a young tinker who starts chatting with Mrs. Liu and helps her to realize that in our socialist society there is no distinction between high jobs and low, for every trade contributes to the people's welfare and pig-breeders cannot do without workers to mend their pans. When she hears that the mother of this young man's girl friend despises him because he is a tinker, she expresses indignation. Further questioning discloses that she is that mother. This plot is extremely simple, but again the successful use of the beautiful dancing movements and melodies of the flower-drum opera make this a most gay and delightful comedy.

Sounding the Gong, another flower-drum opera from Hunan, has only two characters. Its story is as follows: In a certain village

A scene from *Sounding the Gong*

after the autumn harvest the production brigade sends Tsai Chiu out to sound a gong and urge everyone to keep all fowl shut up, to prevent them from eating the grain still in the fields. The year before this, shrewd, grasping Mrs. Lin made Tsai Chiu drunk so that she could let loose her hens and ducks, and she intends to do the same this year. Tsai Chiu has learned his lesson, however, and takes his job seriously. He refuses to drink and to make any concessions. After a brisk exchange of repartee this glib woman is forced by the simple, honest fellow to take her fowl home and criticize herself for her lack of public spirit. This brief opera is packed with dramatic incidents which make it extremely lively.

Since the contradictions in real life are the basis for dramatic conflicts, the playwrights of these comedies choose events which have a typical significance and make them more meaningful and comprehensive by giving them artistic form. Selfish behaviour which might have passed unnoticed in the old days is now frowned upon and condemned. Audiences laugh when the old pedlar Yao San-yuan tries so hard to make an extra profit; but behind their laughter is an awareness of the tragedy of die-hards like Yao San-yuan. Such petty survivors of the old exploiting class live in our new socialist society, yet persist in their old capitalist ways. Although they know very well that swindling is impermissible today, they are reluctant to give it up and think themselves very smart — until they are discovered and put to shame. While these characters make us laugh, they arouse our vigilance too.

Then there are women like Mrs. Liu and Mrs. Lin, both commune members and working people. Their old ideas are ridiculed in a light, humorous way, but the playwrights' attitude to them is friendly. And the audience, while enjoying the entertainment, learns serious lessons and is helped to see things more clearly. The dramatists point out the good qualities of these working women. For instance, Mrs. Liu is a keen, skilful pig-breeder but she has backward ideas; thus her character is complex. Then we are shown convincingly how she changes her views and makes progress, and we see that she can have a good future once she repudiates her old ideas. Such comedies are serious in intention, but full of optimism. The dramatists boldly

expose the contradictions in real life and criticize old backward phenomena, at the same time making it clear that the main trend in our society is good and healthy. Hence these dramas are invigorating and inspiring.

Whereas most comedies in the past laid stress on criticizing the old social system and had more negative than positive characters, these new comedies present positive characters and give them the most prominent position. This is one of their special features. The successful creation of positive characters shows up the despicable, ludicrous behaviour of the backward, negative ones. In the comedies mentioned above the heroes and heroines are people of complete integrity who love the new society and are absolutely loyal to the collective, like the firm, incorruptible salesgirl Tu Chuan, the keen, intelligent tinker Li Hsiao-tsung, and the honest peasant Tsai Chiu. Such people have no patience with the old ideas and old forms of behaviour.

The comedy springs not only from satirizing backward characters and their old ideas, but also from the wit and humour of the positive characters. In *Mending the Pan* Li Hsiao-tsung's future mother-in-law appeals to him in desperation for help, at the same time opposing her daughter's marriage to a tinker because she despises this trade. This creates a comic situation, which is intensified by Li's witty remarks and subtle hints, while Mrs. Liu's discomfiture when she learns the truth is enough to bring down the house. *Sounding the Gong* starts with Mrs. Lin preparing to feed her fowl on the commune's grain. When Tsai Chiu comes along she is confident that she can trick him again and therefore looks thoroughly at her ease, while the honest peasant looks tense and on his guard, and so the drama unfolds. Since this time Tsai Chiu resists her attempts to cheat him, he is soon in command of the situation and cunning Mrs. Lin starts to lose her confidence. Tsai Chiu's initial tension and later triumph are humorously presented and grip the audience.

The positive characters are depicted in the main as fully confident that they can defeat the old ideas with new ideas. Sometimes it takes them a little time to build up their confidence before they can cope easily with a situation and floor their opponents in the course of a

humorous dramatic conflict. The criticism of old ideas and old behaviour, combined with praise for the positive characters, gives these dramas balance and vivid effectiveness.

The large number of short comedies produced in recent years is not fortuitous but closely connected with our whole social development. This is a revolutionary period in China, a time of tremendous zest and enterprise; and culture and art must reflect this revolutionary age in order to serve the masses. Drama is not merely entertainment but a means of educating the people. Our people, particularly those in the countryside, love short comedies as these are one of the most popular dramatic forms. Indeed, these comedies have inherited most of the distinctive features of the traditional drama, but at the same time new reforms and innovations have also been introduced. Thus they are at once traditional and fresh, displaying a vigorous vitality. Since they have few characters and simple stage properties and the performances are short, they can easily be taken to the factories, villages and armed forces to cater for the workers, peasants and soldiers, making a significant contribution to our people's cultural life and enabling art to serve the people better.

Ouyang Hai at the Crucial Moment ▶ (sculpture) by Tang Ta-hsi

Tang Ta-hsi, born in 1936, started making sculptures in 1956. At present he is working at the Canton Studio of Sculpture.

About this sculpture see the article on the next page.

Fu Tien-chou

New Sculptures

Many ancient works of Chinese sculpture are still extant today. Those in the grottoes of Yunkang, Lungmen and Meichishan Mountain, for instance, are among the finest in the world. Beautiful and precious though those ancient works of art are, however, few of them depict the common people. A new change has taken place only after liberation. Contemporary Chinese sculptors are developing a realistic art to reflect the spirit of our age and to portray in their works the labouring people. Their efforts in evolving fresh techniques and ways to express this new content have opened a new stage in Chinese sculptural art.

The heroes of today have naturally inspired our sculptors, particularly those noble characters who have not hesitated to sacrifice their lives for the revolutionary cause. The sculptures *Ouyang Hai at the Crucial Moment*, depicting a real life hero, and *Sister Chiang*, the heroine of the novel *Red Crag*, are two successful examples.

Ouyang Hai, a twenty-three-year-old soldier, was out on a mission on November 18, 1963 when he came to the Peking-Hankow Rail-

way and saw a frightened pack-horse on the line with a passenger train pounding down on it. By a superhuman effort the young soldier shouldered the horse out of the way of a collision that might have derailed the train with its hundreds of passengers. In saving others, however, Ouyang Hai lost his own life. His brave and selfless deed was no accidental action. His presence of mind, and resolution, was of a piece with his whole life. Not long before he died he had written in his diary: "When there is need to sacrifice one's life for the ideal of communism, every one of us should and can do so — without flinching or a quickening heart-beat."

The artist Tang Ta-hsi from Kwangtung Province has caught this spirit in a sculpture showing Ouyang Hai at the climax of his act of heroism. In a dynamic composition the young man is throwing his weight across the rail against the rearing bulk of the frightened horse. There is a noble spirit, a touch of grandeur, in the powerful action of this lifelike work.

The sculpture *Red Crag* by Wu Ming-wan from Szechuan Province is another outstanding work dedicated to those countless shining characters who in the long revolutionary struggle of modern China have died for the revolution.

Red Crag is originally the title of a novel depicting the underground and open battle waged by revolutionaries against the U.S. and Chiang Kai-shek secret police before the liberation. It is one of the most influential contemporary novels. In taking an incident from it as his theme, the sculptor has rejected an illustrative or narrative approach in favour of a bold summation of the essential spirit of the book. He has presented three figures in boldly simplified lines that emphasize their heroic character. It is a realistic and richly significant treatment. Two Communists are depicted, Hsu Yun-feng and Sister Chiang, and a young revolutionary; all three have fought bravely against the U.S. -Chiang Kai-shek agents and they are fearless in the face of death at the hands of the hated enemy. They stand firm on a rock with dense pine trees behind them. While showing the same fearless, heroic spirit, each has distinctive features. Sister Chiang appears as a loyal and steadfast revolutionary. She is described in the novel as never losing her composure even in the most critical

Red Crag by Wu Ming-wan

moments. When she learns that her beloved husband has been murdered by the Kuomintang, she is filled with grief. Still she controls herself and, turning her grief into strength, immediately plunges herself into new struggles. Arrested and imprisoned in the SACO (Sino-American Co-operation Organization) concentration camp, beaten and tortured, she never wavers. Before she goes to the execution ground she urges her fellow prisoners not to say a tearful

goodbye to her. The artist, stressing this characteristic of hers, shows Sister Chiang calm and composed, noble in character and dauntless in spirit.

Hsu Yun-feng stands in the middle. He is a worker who has been exploited and oppressed in the old society. Later, tempered in the struggle, he becomes a mature revolutionary leader. Arrested, taunted and persecuted by the enemy, he declares his faith in the path he has chosen. "When I see the mighty sweeping tide of revolution," he tells his enemies, "I can see that my own ideals are one with the desires of the people and I feel an infinite strength. I am proud that my life is linked with this ever youthful cause." This is the spirit that the sculptor endeavours to depict. He shows Hsu holding his head high, his hands behind him. Solemn and dignified, his face shows his contempt for the enemy. It is clear he is filled with confidence in the inevitable triumph of the revolution and the inevitable defeat of the enemy.

Fishing Girl of the South by Feng Tien-nuan

The youth standing beside Hsu is different. His suppressed anger and passion seem to be about to explode at any moment and shatter his shackles. His impatient gesture stands in striking contrast to Sister Chiang and Hsu Yun-feng. Each image brings out more vividly the meaning of the others. The background of rugged pine trees and the

pedestal of rocks at once complements and symbolizes the characters' strength, resolution and deathless bravery. Effective use of generalization and symbolism makes *Red Crag* an impressively successful work.

Many of the new works of sculpture take their themes from the daily life of the working people today. *Fishing Girl of the South* by Feng Tien-nuan of Kwangtung Province depicts a young girl making a net. She is energetic and graceful. There is a lyrical beauty in the movement of her capable hands that manifests her inner happiness. Yang Yun-hua's *To the Countryside* is a single figure of a young student determined to dedicate her youth to the countryside.

Escorting Prisoners Back to the Base by Chang Chin-fu

Practically all these works are done by young artists. While reflecting life in China today they are also keenly aware of the life, awakening and struggles of the peoples in other parts of Asia, in Africa and Latin America. Every general art exhibition contains sculptures on international themes. *Escorting Prisoners Back to the Base* by Chang Chin-fu is one of such works. It shows a girl guerrilla in south Viet Nam. In time of peace she would be a carefree young twenty-year old, but U.S. imperialist aggression has turned her into a strong armed fighter. She moves forward with resolute steps, single-mindedly, bent on carrying out her task. Alert and forceful, her walk and the way she grips her gun with both hands, are typical of a soldier on duty. But she is after all a young girl; her hair and arched brows, her intent gaze give an inkling of her

prettiness and innocence. The way she wears her scarf conforms to a girl's habits too.

All these sculptors live in the midst of the people, and some are of worker or peasant origin. Taking their themes from their own life's experience in the midst of China's struggles for the revolution and socialist construction, they have created with lively imagination new works portraying the Chinese people's life and struggle and revolutionary spirit. Artistically these works may lack maturity; but in experimenting in many ways of expression they are blazing the trail to carry an art with an age-old tradition on to a broad new road.

Foochow Handicrafts

Lacquerware

Foochow lacquerware, Peking *cloisonné* and Chingtehchen porcelain have been called the "three treasures" of Chinese handicrafts. These light, durable lacquer objects, with their vivid colours and beautiful designs, are highly decorative as well as useful. It is said that two hundred years ago a lacquer worker called Shen Shao-an went to a government office to mend a gilt tablet and found the wood of the tablet in bad condition but the coat of lacquer with its cloth lining still glossy and strong. He decided to try to make lacquerware without a wooden core, first making a clay mould as for an earthen figurine, then covering this with layers of cloth and lacquer. When the lacquer dried he immersed the object in water to detach the clay, and on cleaning the lacquer found it firm and strong. He applied another layer of lacquer, polished it and added decorations, thus producing a light and glossy lacquerware. This method was then popularized, and many generations of artists have worked at this handicraft.

Since the liberation in 1949 the art has been further developed with the help and encouragement of the government. This lacquerware today is finer than ever before with a great colour range and more elaborate designs. In addition to making bowls, plates, screens, vases

A Young Peasant (lacquerware)

and other utensils, the skilled Foochow craftsmen sculpt figures of workers, peasants and soldiers and various scenes as decorative objects. This art is used in industry too, to decorate cars or wireless sets, for example.

Foochow lacquerware can boast more than a hundred decorative techniques, but in the main these come into three categories: carving in modelled relief, designs in flat relief and underlying designs. In the first category the lacquer surface is carved or embossed so that the designs stand out. Utensils and decorative objects are often carved in this way with landscapes, figures, flowers, birds or animals in various colours. Flat relief designs are made by drawing pictures on the lacquer or inlaying it with silver or mother-of-pearl. The effect is delicate and elegant. Underlying designs are made by coating a lacquer painting with transparent lacquer. The surface is smooth and the design glows and sparkles. For example, the goldfish on plates made in this style gleam red as if they were swimming in the water. This last category shows the greatest variety and is the most admired.

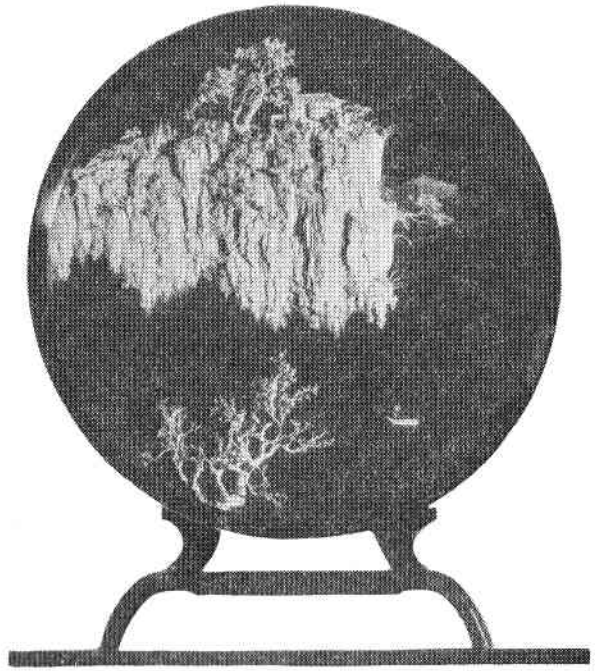
Wood-pictures

Foochow wood-pictures are a fairly recent form of handicraft developed from wood carving, but although they have a history of only about forty years they now rank with other celebrated Chinese handicrafts. First the artist draws his design, then he cuts the component parts out of soft wood and puts them together in a frame

with or without a background to form a composition or landscape with trees, mountains, rocks, houses or figures glued on separately. The earliest pictures of this sort generally depicted human figures, landscapes, flowers and birds or pavilions and terraces, executed in relief with few variations. In recent years three-dimensional figures have been made and pictures that can be looked at from both sides.

The well-known wood-picture handicraftsman Chao Chuan, with the help of other artists, has evolved a new technique combining wood carving and lacquer painting, using the glossy lacquer to reflect shadows and images, in this way producing uncannily lifelike effects. His new wood-picture *A Scene in a Mountain Town* is done on a glossy black lacquer ground to which is glued a spirited pale yellow wood carving showing one corner of the mountain town.

A Scene in a Mountain Town (wood-picture)



An old tree in the lower part of the picture has a few bright crimson leaves which contrast effectively with the sombre background, conveying a touch of variety and an impression of strength and solidity.

Foochow has many different kinds of wood-picture. That known as *tu-an* is a meticulous three-dimensional copy of some photograph or painting which achieves a vivid authenticity. Others spring from the artist's own imagination. One recent example is *The Rice Is Ripe,* which shows cranes winging over a paddy field. The cranes, inserted between two sheets of glass, can be viewed from both sides. This is a lively, beautiful composition, and the glass is invisible to those who look at the picture. In the last few years the themes for these wood-pictures have come to cover a much wider range, dealing mainly with present-day life and revolutionary history. For instance, the noted artists Chen Kuan and Chen Lang have made excellent pictures of the Long March, Tien An Men Gate and the Temple of Heaven as well as other places of interest in Peking.

New Literary and Art Publications on Sinkiang

Sinkiang in northwest China is a region with many nationalities. Recently the Sinkiang branch of the Writers' Union and the Sinkiang People's Publishing House have edited and published a number of works reflecting the life of the different nationalities there since liberation and the distinctive scenery and features of this rich and beautiful region. *The Road to the Tienshan Mountains* is a collection of articles describing the frontier city of Ining, the new city of Shihhotzu in the Gobi Desert, the development of various farming and herding districts, the celebrated Hami melons, the rug industry and jade of Hotien, as well as other special Sinkiang products. Another collection of reportage *Water Flows in the Gobi* vividly reflects the tremendous changes in construction and in the people's life and outlook in such places as the Tarim Basin, the Dzungarian Basin, the Turfan Basin and the Tienshan Valley. The anthology of poems *Splendid Years* includes poems by the folk singer Esmagul and the poets Yen Chen, Wen Chieh, Kauselkhan, Ho Ching-chih and Kuo Hsiao-chuan, who sing of the record harvests on the plains, the flourishing herds, the growth of the oil industry and the youngsters who are working selflessly like heroes to help open up and develop new districts.

Other publications include *A Myriad Songs for the Party*, a collection of more than ninety folk songs popular among the various nationalities north and south of the Tienshan Mountains; *Songs of Victory*, a selection of post-liberation songs; and an album of reproductions, *Selected Paintings of Sinkiang*.

Histories of a New Type

During the last few years it has almost become a mass activity throughout the country to write the histories of different families, villages, communes and factories. Such works are constantly appearing in newspapers, magazines and in book form. Based on copious facts, they deal mainly with life in the old society, the sufferings of the Chinese working people and their indomitable struggles against the reactionary forces who exploited and oppressed them. They constitute reliable records for the study of modern Chinese history and gripping source material for works of literature and art. They also help our people, especially the younger generation, to understand past history and the difficulties the earlier revolutionaries had to overcome to win liberation.

Some of the best written books of this kind are the collection of family histories *Sparks of Hatred*, the village history *Cutting Through Brambles to Create a New World*, the commune history *Fenghuo Commune*, and the factory history *Spring Returns to the Earth*. *Sparks of Hatred* tells how a peasant girl, Chen Yin-lan, was forced by dire necessity to disguise herself as a man for fourteen years to work first for landlords and then for capitalists in a grim coal mine; how another peasant, Wang Sheng, lived for 24 years as a beggar; how a woman signed a contract to work for life in a mill and there met with inhuman treatment; how Buhuo, a slave of the Yi nationality in the Lesser Liangshan Mountains, lived in utter misery and was finally beaten to death. *Cutting Through Brambles to Create a New World* contrasts the old life and the new in Yituho, a village in Huaijou County near Peking. Before liberation twelve landlords and rich peasants owned more than 700 *mou* out of a total 950 *mou* of land there, while 126 poor peasant families had less than 200 *mou* between them, and poor land at that.

Heavy taxation, natural calamities and human oppression reduced them to the verge of starvation. But after liberation when the peasants here became the masters of their own fate, they cut through the brambles and transformed their poor mountain village into an advanced farming community. *Fenghuo Commune* is the history of a people's commune in the province of Shensi which overcame its former poverty and backwardness so that now every brigade has surplus grain and every family money in the bank. *Spring Returns to the Earth* presents the contradictions and struggles between the workers and the boss in the Tungya Wool and Hemp Factory in Tientsin, and the changed conditions after liberation.

These accounts of real people and real events are written in various forms: reminiscences, interviews, reportage, novels, biographies or popular histories. People in all walks of life have taken a hand in writing them — professional writers and historians as well as workers, peasants, government functionaries and students.

Southwest China Drama Festival

Thirty professional and amateur drama groups from the southwestern provinces of Szechuan, Yunnan and Kweichow, the People's Liberation Army troops stationed in Chengtu and Kunming, and the Southwest Railway Bureau, held a drama festival in Chengtu in the autumn of 1965. They presented 75 full-length and short plays and operas, including modern dramas, Szechuan, Yunnan, Kweichow and Pai operas, and lantern-plays from Yunnan and Kweichow. Most of these reflected the socialist construction going on in southwest China in recent years and the new life of the different nationalities, pointing out the contradictions between progressive and backward ideas within the ranks of the people, and giving fine representations of the new types of men and women under socialism, their splendid deeds and the new social morality. Other plays and operas dealt with China's revolutionary history and the political struggles in the world today. Prominence was given to dramas about the life of such minority nationalities as the Miao, Yi and Pai, who live in this region.

Szechuan opera with its long history and fine traditions is popular in this area which has a population of roughly a hundred million. Full-length Szechuan operas like *Loyal Hearts and Raging Waves*, *Hsu Yun-feng* and *Huang Chi-kuang* introduced many innovations in chorus singing, acrobatics and the techniques of singing, declamation and acting on the basis of the traditional conventions.

英文月刊1966年第1期　　本刊代号2—916