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Ying Ruocheng

Lao She and His "Teahouse"

For various reasons, some more obvious than others, the year 1979 has been remarkable for the number of revivals of feature films and stage productions in Beijing. These included not only productions from the fifties and early sixties, but also traditional pieces and world classics. A glance at the entertainments columns in the Beijing papers would convince anybody that something significant has been taking place in the performing arts world. Among these revivals, Lao She's *Teahouse* produced by the Beijing People's Art Theatre created perhaps the greatest sensation.

The reasons for this are manifold. Lao She was honoured with the title of "People's Artist" in 1951, the only author to receive such a designation in the history of the People's Republic. Up to the time of his tragic death in 1966 he more than lived up to it. His literary output after his return to Beijing from the United States in 1949 was prolific, by far surpassing all the writers of the older

Ying Ruocheng, the translator of *Teahouse* in this issue, is of Manchu origin and was born 50 years ago in Beijing. He knew Lao She personally. After graduating from Qinghua University, he was among the original members of the newly founded Beijing People's Art Theatre. Today he is one of its leading actors. In *Teahouse* he plays the double part of Pock-mark Liu and his son. He is also known for his role as Interpreter Tong in the 1964 feature film *Dr Betbune* directed by Zhang Junxiang.

generation. Practically all his writing dealt with the life of the common people of Beijing. His love for this city and its glorious past was well-known, and, in return, the people of Beijing loved him dearly. His death and subsequent repudiation at the hands of the ultra-Leftists were never accepted by the common folk of Beijing. The revival of *Teahouse* was therefore regarded as a sort of spiritual triumph by many of his devotees. There is, however, another deeper reason for the phenomenal success of the 1979 revival. This play, written in 1957 at the height of the "Hundred Flowers" period, had always been controversial. True, criticisms against it did not reach the dizzying heights they acquired during the Cultural Revolution, but nevertheless they existed. These implied that in this play Lao She went too far in his sympathy for property-owners and petty shopkeepers, all more or less objectionable characters, and that there was a marked shortage of "positive" characters. Even staunch apologists felt that though the play was a gem artistically, politically speaking it was at best "harmless". In fact, the Beijing People's Art Theatre, which had a long history of close collaboration with Lao She as a playwright, decided to take *Teahouse* quietly off their repertoire twice, once in 1958 after its première and again in 1963 after its first revival. After Lao She's death in 1966, *Teahouse* became a prime target of calumny as a matter of course, and the amount of slanderous attacks on both the play and its production would fill a fair-sized volume. But that is not the point I wish to make here, for in that respect *Teahouse* is but another of the numerous examples of good plays unjustly suppressed and banned during that period. Its subsequent rehabilitation should, therefore, be the end of the story.

But the remarkable thing about *Teahouse* is not only that its 1979 revival was an instant hit and widely acclaimed (as can be seen from the box-office records and critical articles), but also the fact that because of it people are now rediscovering Lao She and reappraising some of the criteria with which *Teahouse* and other theatrical productions were judged (or misjudged). As a literary critic put it in one of the symposiums on *Teahouse*, "We have not done sufficient justice to Lao She's writing in the past. It took the



Lao She with the company of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, 1963. Director Jiao Juyin (first right), Lao She (second right) and Ying Ruocheng (second left)

upheaval of the last ten to twelve years to make us realize that. There is much we can learn from Lao She."

As an actor, who has taken part in the production of many of Lao She's plays and all the performances of *Teahouse* since its 1958 première, I fully agree with such an opinion. *Teahouse* has always been a popular play and the audience reaction has always been strong. But we were not quite prepared for the rapt attention and outbursts of spontaneous laughter we got in the 1979 performances. Was this due to the nostalgia and goodwill of our old fans? Not entirely. For one thing, a large proportion of the 1979 audience consisted of young people under thirty who have never seen any modern spoken drama, let alone *Teahouse*. The truth is that the revival of *Teahouse* served as a timely antidote to the kind of stereotyped ultra-Leftist fare crammed down people's throat in the last ten to twelve years. For a large number of people to see life truthfully and naturally portrayed, to hear the everyday speech of

Beijing turned into pithy, racy and expressive dialogue, were, in themselves exciting experiences. Even more significant is the fact that after so many years of turmoil, people are beginning to realize that the evils of the old social order die very hard indeed and that the phenomena Lao She depicted in this play as an indictment of the past social injustices have, in an uncanny and devious way, reappeared. The result is not only the audience but also the actors are reading new meanings into the text. To cite but two examples, the scene in Act One where Master Chang is arrested by the imperial secret police for the "crime" of having aired his worries about the future of the Qing Empire and the professional thug Erdez Jr in Act Three, who is all but illiterate yet who is made a college student overnight in order to suppress the student movement — both these remind people forcefully of what was happening a few years ago.

In order to understand the background of *Teahouse* it is necessary to go a little into the history of Lao She's friendship and collaboration with the Beijing People's Art Theatre. As is well known, by the time of the liberation of the whole country in 1949, Lao She was a well-established novelist. He did write a few plays in the late thirties at the beginning of the War of Resistance Against Japan, but they were not considered his principal works. It was only after 1949 that he began to take up play-writing in earnest. The reason usually given for this is that Lao She felt the performing arts as a whole had more access to the common people than novels in print, which required at least rudimentary literacy from the readers. This was undoubtedly true, as one could see from the large amount of skits, comic duologues, songs and local operettas that he turned out in those years. Equally true, however, is the fact that he was strongly attracted by modern drama, which became his main vehicle in the last fifteen years of his life. And it is here that the Beijing People's Art Theatre played such a crucial part. In 1950 he wrote *Dragon Beard Ditch*, a play about the life of destitute slum dwellers in the southern part of Beijing. The play, staged by the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1951, was an instant success and is now a classic of its kind. With the production of

this play Lao She found in Jiao Juyin (1905-75) the ideal stage director for his plays and in the Beijing People's Art Theatre a young but promising company for the portrayal of his characters. Most of the actors in the company were in their twenties, inexperienced but willing to learn, and, guided by Lao She's unique style of writing and Jiao Juyin's sure hand, they soon acquired a reputation as the best interpreters of Lao She's plays. Up to the production of *Teahouse* in 1958, the company put on more than half a dozen of Lao She's plays, including the popular comedy *Girl Shop Assistants*, which was revived in 1979, also with great success, and a stage adaptation of his world-famous novel *Rickshaw Boy*.^{*} Now, more than twenty years after its première, it is largely the same cast of actors who have taken part in the revival of *Teahouse*.

The circumstances leading to the birth of *Teahouse* are perhaps the best illustration of this close collaboration between the dramatist and the People's Art Theatre. In the original version of *Dragon Beard Ditch*, there was a scene about a small teahouse. Lao She only wrote the bare outline of it, leaving the actors plenty of scope to fill in the details. The young actors of the People's Art Theatre did a thorough job. They went to the real slum district and made friends with the people, actually living there for a time. What Lao She put down merely as a crowd scene turned out to be an exciting spectacle of characters, each with his or her individual traits, background, profession and temperament. Lao She was delighted at the result and the idea of a play with a similar setting was born.

The actual writing of the play was also closely linked with the Beijing People's Art Theatre. Lao She was deeply interested in the idea of constitutional democracy in China. In 1952 he wrote another play for the People's Art Theatre, entitled *A Family of Delegates*, on that theme. The play was never produced at his own request, but the idea persisted and when the Constitution of the People's Republic of China was promulgated in 1954, Lao She embarked on

^{*} Excerpts of this novel were published under the title "Camel Hsiang-tzu" in *Chinese Literature* Nos. 11-12, 1978. *Chinese Literature* No. 11 also contains an article "In Memory of Lao She" by Cao Yu.

another play dealing with the history of constitutional democracy and how it had failed under all the regimes before 1949. As was his habit at that time, he came to the Beijing People's Theatre to read the first draft and ask for comments. Unfortunately, or fortunately in this case, most of the people in the theatre were not too enthusiastic about this draft and Lao She was on the point of scrapping the whole thing. However, everyone agreed that one of the scenes, set in a Beijing teahouse at the end of the last century, was a superb piece of drama, offering unlimited scope to the actors, and urged him to expand it into an entire play. Lao She accepted the suggestion and the result was *Teahouse*.

Teahouse is a play of great dimensions, with more than sixty characters and covering a span of fifty years, from 1898 to about 1948. It has often been asked why Lao She chose the particular years 1898, 1918 and 1948 for the three acts of this play. The answer is quite simple, if we bear in mind the original intention of the work. These were the years when attempts had been made to give China a modern constitution along Western parliamentary lines. All the three attempts ended in dismal failure. The first one, led by scholars and officials like Tan Sitong, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao aimed at setting up a constitutional monarchy under the auspices of the Qing Emperor. The Empress Dowager promptly squashed it by staging a coup. Tan Sitong was beheaded, the emperor himself put in custody and Kang and Liang fled. The second had as its background the great scandal in parliament over the election of Cao Kun as president of the Republic. China had gone through the 1911 Revolution by which the rule of the Qing Dynasty came to an end. There was on paper a constitution. The first president elect, Yuan Shikai, however, was bent on restoring the monarchy, with himself as emperor. Civil war ensued and Yuan, forced to abdicate, died shortly afterwards. The country was then torn apart by numerous warlord separatist regimes. One of these warlord cliques, which occupied Beijing, tried to give itself a semblance of legality by staging elections in the parliament with Cao Kun as the only candidate. A great majority of the members of parliament received bribes of 5,000 silver dollars each, and Cao Kun was duly elected. When news of the affair leaked

out, there was a huge scandal and China was plunged into a period of incessant civil wars. Parliamentary democracy was totally discredited in the eyes of the people. The third attempt was an even greater fiasco. After the war against Japan had ended in 1945, Chiang Kai-shek, feeling confident of his own strength and American support to wipe out the Communists by force, tore up all the agreements previously reached and launched into total civil war. As a political facade, he convened the "National Congress" unilaterally and had himself elected president. The result was the total collapse of the KMT regime, politically, militarily and morally.

So much for the political background. Very little of it, however, emerged in the final product. Lao She seems to have adhered to the admonitions plastered on the walls in Wang Lifa's teahouse: "DO NOT DISCUSS AFFAIRS OF STATE". In retrospect, this was a most fortunate choice and one which required quite some courage at the time. A large number of dramatic writing in China in the fifties was, for justifiable reasons, imbued with topical political themes and few make interesting reading today. Political struggle, after all, is often just one aspect in the overall economic, social and moral picture of a given period in history. By delving into what lay below the surface, Lao She succeeded in giving us a three-dimensional, convincing image of the periods he portrayed. In order to achieve this, he never tackled any of the momentous political issues head-on (a great temptation for dramatists then), but skirted around them. At the same time nothing was too trivial to escape his notice, and some have thought that he went out of his way to look for the grotesque (again a great risk for dramatists then) as long as it provided what he felt was necessary to bring out more of the spirit of a particular period. Some of the most memorable scenes in the play, such as the old eunuch taking a young girl as his wife, the pimp getting his head chopped off on the strength of false accusations and a mistaken identity, the three old men in the final scene throwing paper money into the air at their own imagined funerals, all verge on the bizarre and the ridiculous. Yet it is precisely these seemingly preposterous episodes that give *Teahouse* such an inner truth. After seeing

Teahouse for the first time in its present revival, more than one theatre worker of the younger generation expressed the same idea: they never thought a play could be written in that way and, moreover, they are beginning to feel that this might be the right way. This, I think, will prove to be the greatest contribution of Lao She's *Teahouse* to the development of modern Chinese theatre.

Finally, a word about the language of Lao She. Lao She has been hailed as one of the greatest stylists of modern Chinese, and with good reason. After the May 4th Movement in 1919, vernacular Chinese gradually replaced classical Chinese as the mainstream in literature. At the same time the movement to unify the spoken language throughout China slowly got under way, and it was generally agreed that the pronunciation should adhere to the Beijing dialect and the grammar roughly follow that of north China. It is in this field that Lao She occupies a special position. Being a native of Beijing, he was thoroughly familiar with the language as it is actually spoken and he made full use of this in his writings. The early novels of Lao She attracted many readers for that very reason; for here was a writer who was capable of writing in the language of the man in the street, of coolies, shopkeepers, artisans and petty officials. After 1949, when Lao She devoted himself to the writing of plays, this became even more important. Spoken drama, perhaps more than any other literary form, requires language to achieve an instantaneous auditory effect, and this is where Lao She excelled. This is not to say, however, that Lao She simply took the Beijing dialect as it is and put it in his plays. Far from it. The Beijing dialect under the pen of Lao She has become a language rich in meaning and expressive in nuances, at the same time succinct and pithy. What's more, since *Dragon Beard Ditch*, Lao She had been careful to divest his writing of the more obscure colloquialisms of Beijing but preserve the syntax. The result was that a new kind of *putong hua* (common speech), intelligible to most yet retaining a strong local flavour and a distinct personal style, evolved. As an actor, I must say that I, like all my colleagues, very much enjoy delivering lines written by Lao She because of their expressiveness, clarity and resonance. With *Teahouse*, I

think, Lao She reached the height of his power in this field. As a translator, alas, I am afraid I have quite different sentiments. Someone once said of poetry that it is untranslatable, and I am very much tempted to say the same of Lao She's language. My only consolation is that inadequate as it may be, this is the first time that Lao She's masterpiece *Teahouse* has been introduced to the world.

Lao She

In Reply to Some Questions About "Teahouse"

After *Teahouse* was put on the stage, many friends took the trouble to write to me inquiring about such things as how I came to write this play. Being busy I was unable to answer their letters individually. So I've picked out the more important questions to answer briefly here.

Question: Why did you choose a teahouse, of all subjects, to write about?

Answer: A teahouse is a place where people from all walks of life meet; it can admit vastly diverse characters. A large teahouse is a microcosm of the society. Although the play *Teahouse* consists of only three acts, it covers over half a century of change. In describing these changes, one cannot avoid politics. But as I was not acquainted with high officials and bigwigs in the political arena, I could not directly portray the way they accelerated or obstructed the march of history. Besides, I do not know much about politics. I had only known some unimportant persons, who frequented teahouses. Then, I thought, if I brought them together in a single teahouse and reflected the social changes through the

changes in their lives, wouldn't I be revealing indirectly some political message? So I decided to write *Teahouse*.

Question: How did you tackle the characters and the plot?

Answer: Since the play has so many characters and covers such a long period, it was difficult to find a central theme. So I resorted to four devices: (1) The main characters are present throughout the play, aging as the play progresses. In this way, although the plot is loose, the central characters provide a kind of focus which prevents the play from digressing too far and losing a sense of continuity. In writing this play I used these characters to develop the plot. This may seem rather like a skit, yet it is not the same. This play concentrates on the characters, while a skit often concentrates on an incident. (2) The secondary characters are hereditary and are played by the same actors. This also helps give the plot a sense of continuity. It is merely a device and not based on any theory. In real life the son need not carry on the father's profession. In the theatre, however, having the same actor play both father and son makes it easier for the audience to see the connection between the acts, which are set many years apart. (3) I have tried to make all characters tell their own stories, but at the same time I have tied them in with the historical circumstances. Thus, the cook is like a cook and the story-teller is like a story-teller, for they talk about their own problems. Yet these problems are linked to the times. For example, the skilled cook, who has been reduced to cooking for the prison, reveals that it is overcrowded. While complaining that there is little interest in his art, the story-teller indicates that the country is going to the dogs, and that traditional arts are in danger of being lost. . . . So, although all speak about their own lives, they reveal something of the age in which they were living, so that the audience is confronted with different types of people and also sees glimpses of their times. Even though some of them have only a few lines, they nonetheless indicate their fates. (4) As for the minor characters, they are brought on stage and removed as required, without much ado.

The characters having been thus laid out, the plot can be easily tackled. Since the characters are there, you can always find things

for them to talk about. Some consider that this play lacks an intricate plot, and suggest that if I could build the story around Kang Shunz's misfortune and Kang Dali's involvement in the revolution, I would probably write a better play than the existing one. I am grateful for such a suggestion, but cannot accept it, because to do so would make it difficult to achieve my aim of "burying" once and for all those three bitter historical periods. If I had developed the play around a single incident, I'm afraid that the teahouse would have collapsed long before it was taken over by the Kuomintang. In writing this play, I did not allow myself to be restricted by established convention, but I tried some new devices.

Question: Will you discuss the language used in the play?

Answer: There is not much that can be said about it. All that I would like to point out is that without life there can never be living language. I had some experience of the old society and I am familiar with those people who frequented the teahouses. I know how they lived, and therefore how they talked. Proceeding from this, I exaggerated a character's words here and touched up those of another there, so that their lines are both their own and mine. For example, Tang the Oracle says, "I've given up opium. . . . I've taken up heroin instead." These are actually his own words, for he is a cheeky person. But I put into his mouth the following comment — "British imperial cigarettes and Japanese heroin! Two great powers looking after poor little me. Aren't I lucky?" This shameless statement is quite believable from this impudent character, but at the same time I made him reveal the viciousness of the imperialists at that time, who were out for our wealth and blood!

Question: One more question, please. Is there any basis in real life for a character like Director Shen, who appears on the stage only to mouth his few "okay's" with an affected foreign accent?

Answer: Yes, there is. I've observed many high officers and officials of the Kuomintang. They put on airs, always wearing a sullen expression on their faces. They disdained to shake hands with others, or offered only a few cold fingers (cold because they suffered from general debility), which were quickly withdrawn.

They were pretentious and conceited. They were voluble when cracking dirty jokes with people of their own type, but when speaking to those below them, they said as little as possible, in order to emphasize their own importance. Yes, there are grounds for those "okay's" too. In short, one cannot master language without experiencing life.

Lao She

Teahouse

—A play in three acts

CHARACTERS

- WANG LIFA *When we first see him, in Act One, he is only a little over 20. Though young, he is already the manager of Yutai Teahouse because of his father's early death. A shrewd man, somewhat selfish, but not really bad at heart.*
- TANG THE ORACLE *A man around 30, who makes his living by fortune-telling. An opium addict.*
- MASTER SONG
MASTER CHANG *A man around 30, upright and robust, he is a good friend of Song's. Both are regular customers at Yutai Teahouse.*
- LI SAN *A waiter at Yutai, in his thirties, hard-working and kind-bearded.*
- ERDEZ *An Imperial Wrestler, in his twenties.*
- MASTER MA *A minor character, in his thirties, of some influence, who lives off the Christian missionaries and bullies the people.*
- POCK-MARK LIU *A professional pimp, vile and venomous, in his thirties.*
- KANG LIU *A starving peasant from the outskirts of Beijing, about 40 years old.*

- TUBBY HUANG *An underworld boss, in his forties.*
- QIN ZHONGYI *Owner of Wang Lifa's premises, in his twenties in Act One, son of a rich family. He later becomes a capitalist with Reformist leanings.*
- OLD MAN *82 years old, destitute.*
- PEASANT WOMAN *In her thirties, so poor that she tries to sell her small daughter.*
- LITTLE GIRL *Daughter of the Peasant Woman, 10 years old.*
- EUNUCH PANG *40 years old, after amassing a fortune, he now wishes to take a wife.*
- XIAO NIUR *Pang's personal attendant, in his teens.*
- SONG ENZ *An old-fashioned secret agent, in his twenties.*
- WU XIANGZ *A colleague of Song Enz, in his twenties.*
- KANG SHUNZ *Daughter of Kang Liu, 15 years old in Act One, who is sold to Eunuch Pang as his wife.*
- WANG SHUFEN *Wang Lifa's wife, about 40 years old, more fair-minded and upright than her husband.*
- POLICEMAN *In his twenties.*
- PAPER BOY *16 years old.*
- KANG DALI *12 years old, a son purchased by Eunuch Pang; he and his foster-mother Kang Shunz are deeply attached to each other.*
- LAO LIN *A deserter from the warlord armies, in his thirties.*
- LAO CHEN *Another deserter, 30 years old, Lin's sworn brother.*
- CUI JIUFENG *A former member of parliament, now in his forties, who devotes himself to Buddhist canonical studies. A tenant in the lodging-house attached to Yutai.*
- ARMY OFFICER *30 years old, with the Execution Squad.*
- WANG DASHUAN *Wang Lifa's eldest son, about 40 years old, a man of principle.*
- ZHOU XIUHUA *40 years old, Dashuan's wife.*
- WANG XIAOHUA *13-year-old daughter of Dashuan.*
- DING BAO *17-year-old waitress of easy virtue, but with a mind of her own and a lot of courage.*
- POCK-MARK LIU JR *Son of Pock-mark Liu, in his thirties, carrying on and increasing his father's "profession".*
- ELECTRICITY BILL COLLECTOR *In his forties.*
- TANG THE ORACLE JR *Son of Tang the Oracle, in his thirties, carrying on his father's profession and entertaining hopes of becoming a Heavenly Teacher in a KMT-supported superstitious cult.*
- CHEF MING *A banquet chef, in his fifties.*
- ZOU FUYUAN *A well-known professional story-teller.*

WEI FUXI	<i>Originally a story-teller trained by the same master as Zou, but now a Beijing opera singer, in his thirties.</i>
FANG LIU	<i>A crafty dealer in second-hand goods, in his forties.</i>
CHE DANGDANG	<i>A dealer in silver dollars, about 30 years old.</i>
MADAME PANG	<i>An ugly and repulsive woman of 40, the wife of Eunuch Pang's fourth nephew, and now aspiring to be the empress of China.</i>
CHUNMEI	<i>19 years old, bondmaid of Madame Pang.</i>
YANG	<i>Pedlar of haberdashery, in his thirties.</i>
ERDEZ JR	<i>Son of Erdez, and a professional thug, 30 years old.</i>
YU HOZHAI	<i>Wang Xiaobua's teacher in the primary school, in his forties.</i>
XIE YONGREN	<i>Another teacher from the same school, in his thirties.</i>
SONG ENZ JR	<i>Son of Song Enz, a secret agent like his father, about 30 years old.</i>
WU XIANGZ JR	<i>Son of Wu Xiangz, a hereditary secret agent, about 30 years old.</i>
XIAO XINYAR	<i>A 19-year-old waitress of easy virtue.</i>
DIRECTOR SHEN	<i>Chief of a division in the Military Police Headquarters, 40 years old.</i>
SILLY YANG	<i>A male professional beggar who goes from shop to shop reciting improvised doggerel.</i>
SOME REFUGEES	<i>of both sexes and all ages.</i>
SEVERAL LODGERS	<i>all male.</i>
THREE TO FIVE SOLDIERS	<i>all male.</i>
FOUR MILITARY POLICEMEN	<i>all male.</i>
A NUMBER OF TEAHOUSE CUSTOMERS	<i>all male.</i>
ONE OR TWO TEAHOUSE WAITERS	<i>all male.</i>
EXECUTION SQUAD	<i>7 in number, all male.</i>

Act One

TIME: *Early autumn in 1898, just after the Reform Movement led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had been crushed. Morning.*

PLACE: *Yutai Teahouse, Beijing.*

THE CURTAIN RISES: *One doesn't find large teahouses like this any more. A few decades ago, every district in Beijing had at least one. Tea was served as well as simple snacks and quick meals. Bird fanciers, after having spent what they considered sufficient time strolling about with their caged orioles and thrushes, used to come here every day to rest, sip tea and demonstrate the singing virtuosity of their birds. The teahouse was also a meeting place for all sorts of discussions and transactions, and a haven for go-betweens and pimps. Gang fights were common in those days, but fortunately there were always friends around to calm things down. Between 30 to 50 toughs from both sides, reconciled through the good offices of a mediator, would gather here to drink tea and consume bowls of noodles with minced pork (a speciality of large teahouses, cheap and easy to prepare), and peace would once more have been restored in the land. In short, the teahouse was a most important institution, a place where people could come for business or just to while away the time. At its tables one could hear the most preposterous stories, such as how a giant spider turned into a demon until it was finally struck by lightning; or the most extraordinary views, such as how far it was possible to prevent all foreign armies from landing by the simple expedient of building a long high wall along the seacoast. Yet this was also the place to learn the latest aria devised by some Beijing opera actor or the most sophisticated method for preparing opium. Here too one could see newly-acquired treasures such as an excavated jade fan-pendant or a three-colour glazed snuff-box. The teahouse was indeed an important place, almost a centre of cultural exchange.*

It is just such a teahouse we are about to see. Immediately inside the entrance we see the counter and the brick stove, though for the stage we can do away with the stove if it's too much trouble and make do with the clatter of pots and pans offstage. The building is extremely large and high, with rectangular tables, square tables, benches and stools for the customers. Through the window an inner courtyard can be seen, where there is a matted canopy for shade and seats for customers. There are devices for hanging up bird-cages, both in the teahouse and in the courtyard.

Paper slips, with "DO NOT DISCUSS AFFAIRS OF STATE" written on them, are pasted all over the place.

Two customers, who shall be nameless, with their eyes narrowed to a slit and their heads rocking, are softly humming a tune, beating time with their hands. Two or three others, also nameless, are fascinated by some crickets in an earthenware jar. Two men in grey gowns, Song Enz and Wu Xiangz, are talking to each other in whispers. From their appearance one can deduce they are agents from the Northern Yamen, the security authority in those days.

Another gang fight has been brewing today. The reason, according to some sources, was a dispute over the ownership of a pigeon. It seemed quite likely that the whole affair might end in violence. If so, then a loss of life would result, for the toughs invited by both parties included characters well-known for their physical prowess such as the Imperial Wrestlers and Guards of the Imperial Storehouses. Fortunately, nothing of the sort will happen, for before either party had assembled their ranks, mediators were already busy trying to bring about some kind of truce — so now, the two sides are meeting in the teahouse. Throughout the first part of this act these toughs, in twos and threes, looking belligerent and dressed in short clothes (for fighting, as opposed to long gowns), will enter the teahouse and head for the inner courtyard.

Master Ma, alone in a corner, sits inconspicuously drinking tea.

Wang Lifa sits at a vantage-point behind the counter. Tang the Oracle enters, his shoes half off his feet, and wearing an extremely long and dirty gown, some scraps of paper tucked into his hat near the temples.

WANG LIFA: Mr Tang, why not take a walk somewhere else?

TANG THE ORACLE (*with a wan smile*): Oh, Manager Wang, boost up poor old Oracle a bit. Offer me a cup of tea, and I'll tell your fortune for you. With palm-reading thrown in, it won't cost you a copper! (*Without waiting for Wang's consent, takes hold of his hand.*) Now, it's the 24th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, the Year of the Dog, and your honourable age. . . ?

WANG LIFA (*snatching his hand away*): Enough, enough! I'll

give you a cup of tea, but spare me the sales talk. What's the point of fortune-telling? In this harsh world, we're all on our own. Life will never be easy. (*Comes out from behind the counter and makes Tang sit down.*) Sit down! Listen! If you don't stop smoking opium, you'll never have any luck. There, you see, I'm a better fortune-teller than you!

(Master Song and Master Chang enter, each carrying a bird-cage. Greeted by Wang Lifa, they hang up the cages, then look for a place to sit. Song, who has a genteel air about him, carries a delicate oriole's cage, whereas Chang, looking bold and sturdy, has with him a thrush's cage of much greater dimensions. The waiter Li San hurries over to prepare their lidded cups of tea, the leaves of which they have brought themselves. When the tea is ready, Song and Chang offer it to the customers around them.)

MASTER SONG and MASTER CHANG: Won't you have some of this? (*They look towards the inner courtyard.*)

SONG: Trouble again?

CHANG: Don't worry, they won't come to blows. If it was serious, they'd have gone out of the city long before this. Why come to a teahouse?

(Erdez, one of the toughs, enters just in time to overhear Chang's words.)

ERDEZ (*moving over*): What you think you're talking about?

CHANG (*refusing to be intimidated*): Who, me? I've paid for my tea. Do I have to bow to anyone too?

SONG (*after sizing up Erdez*): Excuse me, sir, you serve in the Imperial Wrestlers, don't you? Come, sit down. Let's have a cup of tea together. We're all men of the world.

ERDEZ: Where I serve ain't none of your bloody business!

CHANG: If you want to throw your weight around, try the foreigners! They're tough alright! You're on the public payroll,

but when the British and the French armies razed the old Summer Palace, I didn't see you lift a finger to stop them!
ERDEZ: Leave the foreigners out of this! I'll teach you a lesson first! (*Raises his fist.*)

(The other customers go about their business unperturbed. Wang Lifa, however, rushes over.)

WANG LIFA: Now, now, gentlemen! Surely we can settle this as friends. Master Erdez, why not take a seat in the inner courtyard now?

(Erdez, ignoring Wang Lifa, suddenly sweeps a teacup off the table, smashing it. He makes a move, trying to grab Chang by the collar.)

CHANG (*dodging him*): What do you think you're doing?

ERDEZ: Perhaps I don't touch the foreigners, but I'll give you one of me touches. I will!

MASTER MA (*without getting up*): Erdez, you're quite an important person, aren't you?

ERDEZ (*looking round and spotting Ma*): Oh, it's you, Master Ma! Pardon, sir, I never see'd you sitting there. (*Goes over to Ma, dropping one knee in the traditional gesture of obeisance.*)

MASTER MA: Settle your disputes in a reasonable way. Must you always resort to fisticuffs?

ERDEZ: Yes, sir. I'll go direct to the inner courtyard. Li San, I'm paying for this table! (*Exit to inner courtyard.*)

CHANG (*coming over to Ma, wishing to air his grievances*): Sir, you're a sensible gentleman. Please tell us who you think was right?

MASTER MA (*standing up*): I'm busy. Goodbye! (*Exit.*)

CHANG (*to Wang Lifa*): How odd! Queer character, isn't he?

WANG LIFA: Don't you know that's Master Ma? No wonder he snubbed you. You offended him too.

CHANG: Offended him? This is my lucky day!

WANG LIFA (*lowering his voice*): You were saying something

about foreigners just now. Well, he lives off the foreigners. Follows their religion and speaks their language. If he wants he can go straight to the Mayor of Beijing on business. That's why even the authorities handle him with care.

CHANG (*going back to his seat*): Pshaw! I've no time for people who serve foreign masters!

WANG LIFA (*tilting his head slightly in the direction of Song Enz and Wu Xiangz, in a whisper*): Be careful what you say! (*In a louder voice*) Li San, a fresh cup of tea here! (*Picks up the shards of the smashed teacup.*)

SONG: How much for that teacup? I'll pay for it. We men aren't like mean old women!

WANG LIFA: No hurry. We can settle that later. (*Moves off.*)

(The pimp Pock-mark Liu leads Kang Liu in. First, Pock-mark Liu greets Song and Chang.)

POCK-MARK LIU: You gentlemen are early today. (*Takes out a snuff-box and measure out a little.*) You must try this! I just got it, the genuine thing from England! So fine and pure!

CHANG: Imagine! Even our snuff has to come from abroad. How much silver must flow out of the country every year!

POCK-MARK LIU: Our Great Qing Empire has mountains of silver and gold. It'll never run out. Please be seated, I've some business to attend to. (*Leads Kang Liu to a seat.*)

(Li San brings over a cup of tea.)

POCK-MARK LIU: Now, let's talk it over. Will ten taels of silver do? Be quick! I'm a busy man. I haven't got all day to wait on you!

KANG LIU: Master Liu! A fifteen-year-old girl only worth ten taels?

POCK-MARK LIU: A brothel might give you a few taels more, but you don't want that.

KANG LIU: My flesh and blood, how could I...?

POCK-MARK LIU: But you can't feed her. Who's to blame?

KANG LIU: We peasants can't live any more. If we had a bowl of gruel each every day... and I still wanted to sell my daughter, then I'd be a beast!

POCK-MARK LIU: That's your problem, not mine! You asked me to help you, so I'll see to it you're not cheated and your daughter fills her belly. What more do you want?

KANG LIU: Who's she being sold to?

POCK-MARK LIU: This should please you. A palace official!

KANG LIU: What palace official wants a peasant girl?

POCK-MARK LIU: That's why your daughter's a lucky girl!

KANG LIU: But who is he?

POCK-MARK LIU: The Grand Eunuch Pang! Even you must have heard of him. A personal attendant of the Empress Dowager, her great favourite! Even the vinegar bottle in his house is made of agate!

KANG LIU: But Master Liu, please, how could I ever face my daughter again if I sold her to be the wife of a eunuch?

POCK-MARK LIU: But you *are* selling her, aren't you? How can you face her any way? Don't be a fool! Think about it. Once she's married, she'll eat delicacies and wear brocades! I call that a lucky fate! Well, make up your mind, yes or no. Let's get it over with!

KANG LIU: But who's ever heard of such a thing. . . ? Ten taels. Is that all he'll pay?

POCK-MARK LIU: Where in your whole village can you scrape up ten taels? You know very well in the countryside a child can be bought for five cattles of wheat flour.

KANG LIU: I, well, I'll have to talk it over with my daughter.

POCK-MARK LIU: I'm telling you, you won't find another chance like this. If you lose it, don't blame me! You'd better get a move on.

KANG LIU: Yes. I'll be back as soon as I can.

POCK-MARK LIU: I'll be here waiting for you.

(Exit Kang Liu, dragging his feet.)

POCK-MARK LIU *(moving over to Song and Chang)*: These

country bumpkins are a nuisance. They're so slow making up their minds!

SONG: Another big deal?

POCK-MARK LIU: Not so big. If all goes well, I may get about twenty taels of silver.

CHANG: What's going on in the countryside? Why are they selling their children like this?

POCK-MARK LIU: Who knows? That's why people say, even a dog wants to be born in Beijing.

CHANG: Master Liu, it takes nerve to have a hand in such a business!

POCK-MARK LIU: But if I didn't bother, they might not find a buyer! *(Changing the subject abruptly)* Master Song *(taking a small pocket-watch out of his pocket)*, have a look at this!

SONG *(taking the watch)*: What a fine little watch!

POCK-MARK LIU: Listen to it, ticking away merrily!

SONG *(listening)*: How much does it cost?

POCK-MARK LIU: Why, you like it? Then it's yours! Just five taels! Whenever you're tired of it, give it back to me and I'll refund you to the last copper! It's really top quality, fit for a family heirloom.

CHANG: It puzzles me, the amount of foreign thing we all have. Take you, for instance, Liu, you have foreign snuff, a foreign watch, a gown made from foreign satin, and a jacket and trousers made of foreign cloth. . .

POCK-MARK LIU: But foreign things look so fine! If I went around in country cloth, looking like a clodhopper, who'd ever talk to me?

CHANG: I still think our own satin and Sichuan silk are more handsome.

POCK-MARK LIU: Master Song, you really ought to keep this watch. Nowadays, if you carry a foreign watch around, people will treat you with new respect. Isn't that so?

SONG *(in love with the watch, but shying at the price)*: I. . .

POCK-MARK LIU: Keep it for the time being. You can pay later!

(Fubby Huang enters.)

TUBBY HUANG (*a severe case of trachoma, with consequently very poor eyesight. Bending one knee as soon as he enters*): Now, now, folks, for my sake, please, I'm here greetin' you all! We're all brothers, ain't we? Let's have none of them bad feelings!

WANG LIFA: These aren't the people you've come to see. They're in the inner courtyard.

TUBBY HUANG: Oh, my sight ain't too good! Manager Wang, prepare them bowls of noodles! With me, Tubby Huang here, no one's goin' to fight! (*Heads for the inner courtyard.*)

ERDEZ (*coming out to greet him*): The two sides have already met. Come quick!

(*Erdez and Tubby Huang go in.*)

(*Waiters begin to busy themselves taking hot water for tea into the inner courtyard. The Old Man, carrying metal toothpicks, beard combs, earpicks and such items, enters. He moves slowly from table to table, his head bent. No one is interested in his wares. Just as he is heading for the inner courtyard, he is stopped by Li San.*)

LI SAN: Now, old uncle, better try somewhere else. They're trying to settle a dispute in there. No one will buy your things. (*Hands him a cup of left-over tea in passing.*)

SONG (*lowering his voice*): Li San! (*Pointing at the inner courtyard*) What's it all about? Why are they spoiling for a fight?

LI SAN (*in a low voice*): It's supposed to be all over a pigeon, which flew from the Zhang family over to the Lis. The Lis refused to return it... Well, better not go into it. (*To the Old Man*) Old uncle, you must be well on in years.

OLD MAN (*drinking the tea*): Thanks a lot. I'm eighty-two! No one to look after me. These days, a pigeon's better off than a man. Well, well! (*Goes out slowly.*)

(*Qin Zhongyi, meticulously dressed and in high spirits, enters.*)

WANG LIFA: Oh! Master Qin! How can you spare the time to visit the teahouse? Not even a servant to accompany you?

QIN ZHONGYI: Just taking a look around — to see if a young fellow like you can run a business like this.

WANG LIFA: Well, I learn as I go along. I have to. It's my living! With my father dying so young, I've no choice. Luckily my customers were all friends of my father. They're ready to overlook my slips. In a business like this you have to be popular. I do everything just like my father. Always be polite, always make obeisances, try to please everybody. Then there won't be any serious trouble. Please take a seat, sir. I'll make you a cup of our very best tea.

QIN ZHONGYI: I don't want any tea and I won't sit down.

WANG LIFA: Just for a moment! You'll be doing me a great honour.

QIN ZHONGYI: Oh, all right. (*Sits.*) But don't make such a fuss.

WANG LIFA: Li San, a cup of our choicest tea. Sir, your family are all well, I hope? And what about your business? Thriving?

QIN ZHONGYI: Not so good.

WANG LIFA: But surely you've got nothing to worry about. With so many different interests, a mere trifle to you would be my entire fortune and more!

TANG THE ORACLE (*edging his way closer*): Oh, what auspicious features! Truly an inspired forehead and a commanding jaw! Not the makings of a prime minister, but the potentials of fabulous wealth!

QIN ZHONGYI: Leave me alone. Go away!

WANG LIFA: Mr Tang, you've had your tea, go somewhere else. (*Gently pushes Tang away.*)

TANG THE ORACLE: Oh, very well! (*Exit dejectedly.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Now, young man, don't you think it's about time we raised the rent a bit? The pittance your father used to pay me as rent won't even keep me in tea!

WANG LIFA: Of course, sir, how right you are! But there's no need for you to bother yourself over such small matters.

Send your steward round, I'll work it out with him. I'll certainly pay what's fair. Yes I will, sir!

QIN ZHONGYI: You rogue, you're even more crafty than your father. You just wait, one of these days I'll take this place back.

WANG LIFA: You're joking, sir! I know perfectly well you're concerned about my welfare. You'd never drive me out on to the streets, to sell tea from an earthenware pot!

QIN ZHONGYI: Just you wait!

(The Peasant Woman enters, leading in her hand the Little Girl, with a straw stuck in her hair, indicating that she is for sale. Li San is on the point of stopping them, but, feeling a twinge of pity, leaves them alone. The two make their way slowly into the teahouse. The customers suddenly stop their talk and banter and watch them.)

LITTLE GIRL *(stopping in the middle of the room)*: Ma! I'm hungry! I'm hungry!

(The Peasant Woman looks blankly at the Little Girl. Suddenly her legs give way, she sinks to the floor and sobs into her hands.)

QIN ZHONGYI *(to Wang Lifa)*: Get rid of them!

WANG LIFA: Yes, sir. Go away! You can't stay here.

PEASANT WOMAN: Won't some kind person do a good deed? Take this child! Only two taels of silver!

CHANG: Li San, fetch two bowls of noodles, and take them outside to eat.

LI SAN: Yes, sir! *(Going over to the Peasant Woman)* Get up! Wait at the entrance. I'll get you the noodles.

PEASANT WOMAN *(rises and goes to the entrance wiping her tears, looking dazed as if she has forgotten about the child. After a few steps, she suddenly turns around, takes the child in her arms, kissing her)*: Pet!

WANG LIFA: Now, now, move on!



Wang Lifa: Don't you think I'm right, sir?

(The Peasant Woman and the Little Girl go out. Li San follows them a moment later with two bowls of noodles.)

WANG LIFA *(coming over)*: Master Chang, you're really soft-hearted giving them noodles! But let me tell you, there are so many cases like this. Too many! You can't help them all. *(To Qin Zhongyi)* Don't you think I'm right, sir?

CHANG *(to Song)*: It seems to me, the Great Qing Empire is done for!

QIN ZHONGYI *(imperiously)*: Whether it's done for or not doesn't depend on giving bowls of noodles to the poor! Really, Wang, I'm serious about taking back this house.

WANG LIFA: But you can't do that, sir!

QIN ZHONGYI: Oh, yes, I can. Not only the houses, but also the shops in the city and the land in the countryside. I'm going to sell them all!

WANG LIFA: But why?

QIN ZHONGYI: I'm going to put all my capital together and start a factory!

WANG LIFA: A factory!

QIN ZHONGYI: Exactly. A big . . . really big factory! That's the only way to help the poor, keep out foreign goods and save the empire. (*Speaking to Wang Lifa but with his eyes on Chang*) But what's the use of talking to you about such things? It's above your head.

WANG LIFA: Do you mean you're going to get rid of all your property, just for the sake of others, with no thought for yourself?

QIN ZHONGYI: You wouldn't understand. It's the only way to make the country prosperous and strong. All right, time for me to go. Now, I've seen with my own eyes that you're doing good business. Don't you dare play your tricks and refuse to raise the rent!

WANG LIFA: Just a moment. I'll get you a cart!

QIN ZHONGYI: Don't bother. I'd rather walk.

(*Qin Zhongyi turns to go with Wang Lifa seeing him off.*)
(*Eunuch Pang enters, supported by Xiao Niur who is carrying a water pipe.*)

EUNUCH PANG: Why, Master Qin!

QIN ZHONGYI: Your Excellency, Master Pang! You must be feeling a lot more relaxed these past few days.

EUNUCH PANG: Of course. Peace reigns once more. The Imperial Edict has been proclaimed and Tan Sitong is sentenced to death. I tell you, anyone who dares to meddle with the statutes laid down by our ancestors will have his bean chopped off!

QIN ZHONGYI: I always knew that.

(*The customers are suddenly silent, as if holding their breath listening.*)

EUNUCH PANG: Ah, yes, you're so smart! That's why you've made such a mint.



Qin Zhongyi: Allow me the pleasure of paying you a visit one of these days. Goodbye!

QIN ZHONGYI: My little bit of property isn't worth mentioning.

EUNUCH PANG: How modest you are! Who in Beijing hasn't heard of Master Qin? You're more powerful than the mandarins. I've heard it whispered that quite a number of the rich support the Reformists.

QIN ZHONGYI: Well, I wouldn't say that. What little influence I may wield won't go far in your presence. Ha! Ha! Ha!

EUNUCH PANG: Well said! Let's both try our best, and see what happens. Ha! Ha! Ha!

QIN ZHONGYI: Allow me the pleasure of paying you a visit one of these days. Goodbye! (*Exit.*)

EUNUCH PANG (*muttering to himself*): Bah! If an upstart like that dares to bandy words with me, times must really

have changed! (*To Wang Lifa*) Is Pock-mark Liu here?
WANG LIFA: Your Excellency, please take a seat.

(Pock-mark Liu had spotted the Eunuch the moment he entered but refrained from interrupting the latter's conversation with Qin.)

POCK-MARK LIU: Oh, my master! May Heaven bestow fortune on you! I've been waiting for you for a long time!
(Helps Eunuch Pang to sit down.)

(Song Enz and Wu Xiangz come over to pay their respects. The Eunuch whispers something to them.)
(The other customers in the teahouse, after being silent for a while, resume their conversation.)

FIRST CUSTOMER: Who is this Tan Sitong?

SECOND CUSTOMER: I seem to have heard of him somewhere before. He must have committed a horrible crime. Otherwise he wouldn't be sentenced to death.

THIRD CUSTOMER: In the past two or three months, some officials and scholars were trying to stir up all sorts of trouble. We'll never know what mischief they were up to.

FOURTH CUSTOMER: One thing's certain. My Bannerman's* subsidy is safe again. That Tan and Kang Youwei were saying all subsidies should be abolished and we should make our own living. I call that wicked!

THIRD CUSTOMER: Anyway, by the time we get our subsidies, our superiors have creamed off the best part of them. It's a dog's life whichever way you look at it.

FOURTH CUSTOMER: Still that's better than nothing! A dog's life's better than no life. If I were to earn my own living, I'd surely starve.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, let's leave off discussing affairs of state, shall we?

* A Banner was an administrative, social and military unit of the Manchus during the Qing Dynasty. A Bannerman was another name for a Manchu.

(People quieten down and turn to discussing their own affairs once more.)

EUNUCH PANG (*already seated*): What's that? Two hundred taels of silver for a country girl!

POCK-MARK LIU (*standing in attendance*): A country girl, true, but what a peach! Once in the city, with a bit of make-up and instruction, you'll have a well-mannered beauty on your hands. I've done more than I would for my own father. I left no stone unturned trying to serve Your Excellency!

(Tang the Oracle comes back.)

WANG LIFA: Hey, Oracle, what are you doing here again?

TANG THE ORACLE: The streets are crawling with soldiers and horsemen. What's happening?

EUNUCH PANG: They have to nose out Tan Sitong's supporters, don't they? Don't worry, Oracle, no one wants to lay hands on you.

TANG THE ORACLE: Thank you, Your Excellency! Now, if you would oblige me with a few grains of your prepared opium, I'd be most grateful.

(Several customers sensing trouble, one by one begin to leave stealthily.)

SONG: We'd better start moving too. It's getting late.

CHANG: Right. Let's go.

(The two men in grey gowns — Song Enz and Wu Xiangz — approach them.)

SONG ENZ: Just a moment!

CHANG: What's the matter?

SONG ENZ: You said just now, "The Great Qing Empire is done for!" didn't you?

CHANG: Me? I love the empire! I hope it isn't done for.

WU XIANGZ (*to Song*): You heard him? Did he put it like that?

SONG: Now, now, gentlemen, we have tea here every day. The manager knows us well. We're both law-abiding men.

WU XIANGZ: I'm asking you whether or not you heard him!

SONG: We can easily settle this. Please take a seat.

SONG ENZ: You refuse to answer? We'll take you in too. Since he said "The Great Qing Empire is done for!" he must be a follower of Tan Sitong.

SONG: Well, I — I heard him, but he was only saying. . . .

SONG ENZ (*to Chang*): Get going!

CHANG: Where to? I demand an explanation!

SONG ENZ: Oho! So you're resisting arrest? Look, I've got the "law" here with me! (*Pulls out the iron chain from under his gown.*)

CHANG: Remember, I'm a Bannerman!

WU XIANGZ: A Bannerman turned traitor gets a heavier sentence! Chain him!

CHANG: Don't bother! I won't run away!

SONG ENZ: Just you try! (*To Song*) You come along too. Tell the truth in court and you won't get into trouble.

(Tubby Huang, accompanied by three or four others, comes out from the inner courtyard.)

TUBBY HUANG: Well, we've done it again! All been smoothed over! I never come here for nothing!

SONG: Master Huang! Master Huang!

TUBBY HUANG (*rubbing his eyes*): Who's that?

SONG: Me! Song! Please come over and put in a good word for us.

TUBBY HUANG (*finally understands the situation, turning to the two secret agents*): So! It's you two gentlemen! On official business, are you? Carry on! Carry on!

SONG: But Master Huang, please help us. Just a few kind words!

TUBBY HUANG: What the authorities can't handle, I do. But

when they can, I keep my nose out! (*To all present*) Ain't that so?

CUSTOMERS: Yes! That's right!

(Song Enz and Wu Xiangz escort Song and Chang towards the entrance.)

SONG (*to Wang Lifa*): Please take care of our birds!

WANG LIFA: Don't worry, I'll send them to your houses.

(Exeunt Chang, Song, Song Enz and Wu Xiangz.)

TUBBY HUANG (*told by Tang the Oracle that Eunuch Pang is present*): Ah, Your Excellency! I hear that you are starting a family. Allow me to congratulate you before the happy event.

EUNUCH PANG: You'll be invited to the banquet!

TUBBY HUANG: What an honour! I'm so honoured! (*Exit.*)

(The Peasant Woman enters with the empty bowls, which she puts on the counter. The Little Girl follows her in.)

LITTLE GIRL: Ma! I'm still hungry!

WANG LIFA: You'd better go now.

PEASANT WOMAN: Let's go, child.

LITTLE GIRL: You're not going to sell me now? Oh, ma! I won't be sold!

PEASANT WOMAN: Love! (*Weeping, she leads the Little Girl away.*)

(Kang Liu enters leading Kang Shunz. They stand in front of the counter.)

KANG LIU: My daughter! Oh, Shunz! Your father's a beast! But what can I do? You have to find somewhere to feed yourself or you'll starve. I must get a few taels of silver or our landlord will beat me to death. Shunz, accept your fate and have pity on us!



Eunuch Pang: I ordered something alive. I won't take it dead!

KANG SHUNZ: I — I — *(Unable to speak.)*

POCK-MARK LIU *(rushing over)*: So you're back! She agreed?
Good! Come and meet His Excellency. Kneel down before
His Excellency!

KANG SHUNZ: I . . . *(Faints.)*

KANG LIU *(supporting his daughter)*: Shunz! Shunz!

POCK-MARK LIU: What's wrong with her?

KANG LIU: She's so hungry and upset, she's fainted. Shunz!
Shunz!

EUNUCH PANG: I ordered something alive. I won't take it
dead!

(Silence.)

FIRST CUSTOMER *(playing a chess game with the Second Customer)*: Check! You're finished!

(Curtain)

Act Two

TIME: Nearly twenty years later. It is now the period after Yuan Shikai's death,* when the warlords, at the instigation of the imperialist powers, set up their separatist regimes by force. There were continual civil wars. Early summer. Before noon.

PLACE: Same as in Act One.

THE CURTAIN RISES: The large teahouses in Beijing have closed up shop one by one. Yutai, the only one still open, has had to change both its appearance and line of business in order to survive. The front part continues to serve tea, but the rear section has been converted into a boarding-house. Only tea and refreshments like melon seeds are sold; "noodles with minced pork" are a thing of the past. The stove has been moved to the back, for preparing meals for the lodgers. The teahouse has undergone a great improvement too. The tables are now smaller, with pale green table-cloths and wicker chairs. The huge painting of "the intoxicated eight immortals" on the wall and the shrine of the god of wealth have disappeared. In their place are posters of fashionably dressed beauty-queens — advertisements for foreign cigarette manufacturers. The "DO NOT DISCUSS AFFAIRS OF STATE" slips, however, have survived, written in an even larger script. Like "a sage who follows the fashions", Wang Lifa has not only managed to keep Yutai going, but has also given it a new look.

The teahouse has not been open for the last few days, owing to slight repairs. Now it is getting ready for its formal opening the following day. Wang Shufen and Li San are busy putting the place in order, trying out different positions for the tables and chairs, adjusting and re-adjusting them until the desired perfection is achieved.

Wang Shufen has her hair coiled up in a round bun, fashionable at that time. Li San, however, still wears his pigtail stipulated

* Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) was a powerful warlord at the end of the Qing Dynasty. After the fall of the dynasty, by his treacherous manoeuvres and relying on the support of the imperialists, he became the provisional president of the Republic in 1911, and in 1915 declared himself emperor. He was forced to abdicate and died the following year.

by the previous Qing Dynasty. Two or three students come out of the boarding-house, exchange greetings with them, then go off.

WANG SHUFEN (not happy about Li San's pigtail): Master Li, with our "reformed" teahouse, don't you think it's time you got rid of that pigtail?

LI SAN: Reformed indeed! Soon you'll have nothing more left to reform!

WANG SHUFEN: Don't put it like that. You must have heard, the Detai Teahouse at Xizhimen, the Guangtai Teahouse at Beixinqiao and the Tiantai Teahouse in front of the Drum Tower have all closed down. Of all the large teahouses, our Yutai is the only one still in business! Why? Because my husband's good at reforms!

LI SAN: Humph! The emperor's gone, isn't that reform enough for you? But, with all that reforming, Yuan Shikai still wanted to be emperor. After he died, what a mess! Guns firing away today, the city gates closed tomorrow! Reform indeed! I'll keep my pigtail where it is. What if they decide to reform the reform, and bring the emperor back again?

WANG SHUFEN: Don't be so stubborn, Master Li. Since the country's been reformed and a republic set up for us, we'd better conform, hadn't we? Look at our teahouse. With all the re-arranging, doesn't it look more tidy and smart? Now our customers will be fine gentlemen. Won't that be more respectable? But that pigtail of yours, it's an eyesore!

LI SAN: It may be an eyesore to you, but I'm sore about other things!

WANG SHUFEN: Why, what are you sore about?

LI SAN: Don't you know? A teahouse here, a boarding-house there. Only the manager and I! We'll never be able to cope!

WANG SHUFEN: Leave the teahouse to him. I'll always lend a hand with the boarding-house.

LI SAN: Even with your help it's too much. Twenty-odd rooms to clean and twenty-odd mouths to feed. Plus making tea, fetching hot water, doing the shopping and delivering letters. Well, I ask you, how can one man do all that?

WANG SHUFEN: You're quite right, Master Li, but these days you can thank your lucky stars if you have a job at all. We all have to be a bit patient.

LI SAN: Well, I'm at the end of my tether! I can't go on. Only four or five hours' sleep every night. I'm not made of iron!

WANG SHUFEN: You poor man! But none of us has it easy! You wait, Dashuan will finish primary school this summer and his brother is growing up fast. When they can give us a hand, life will be easier. You've been with us since the days of the old manager. You're our old friend, our old partner!

(Wang Lifā enters from the rear, looking very confident.)

LI SAN: Old partner? It's more than twenty years now. Did I ever get a raise? Since you're so keen on reforms, why don't you reform my wages?

WANG LIFA: That's no way to talk! If business gets better, of course I'll give you a raise! Enough of that now. We're opening tomorrow. We need all the luck we can get. Let's not argue. Just leave it at that, *ça va*?

LI SAN: Leave it at what? If you don't reform my wages, I'm leaving!

(Someone calls from the rear, "Li San! Li San!")

WANG LIFA: Mr Cui is calling you, better hurry up. We can talk about this another time.

LI SAN: Huh!

WANG SHUFEN: Yesterday the city gates were closed and perhaps they'll be closed again today. Master Li, let the manager attend to things here. Please go and buy some food. If nothing else, at least some pickled turnips!

(More calling from the rear, "Li San! Li San!")

LI SAN: I like that. Ordering me here and calling me there! You might as well cut me in half! (Goes off grumpily to the rear.)

WANG LIFA: Well, old girl, he's getting on. You'd better. . .

WANG SHUFEN: He's been grouching all morning. But he has

his grounds. I didn't want to say so in front of him, but I tell you frankly, we must get more help!

WANG LIFA: More help means more wages! Where's the money to come from? If I were good at something else but refused to budge from this teahouse, then I'd be a bloody fool!

(Distant rumbling of cannons.)

WANG LIFA: Those bloody cannons are at it again! And you stand there making a scene! How are we going to open tomorrow? What a mess!

WANG SHUFEN: I didn't expect to hear such nonsense from you! What have the cannons got to do with me?

WANG LIFA: Oh, stop arguing! Go and do some work!

WANG SHUFEN: One thing's certain. Either your slave-driving or those cannons will finish me! *(Goes off to the rear reluctantly.)*

WANG LIFA *(relenting)*: Now, now, old girl, no need to be so jumpy! We've been through these cannonades quite a few times, but we've never been hit. Beijing's a charmed city!

WANG SHUFEN: Charmed indeed! My heart's always in my mouth! Well, I'll go and get some money for Master Li to do the shopping. *(Exit.)*

(A group of refugees gather at the entrance, begging.)

REFUGEES: Kind sir! Do a good deed. Take pity on us!

WANG LIFA: Move on. We're not handing out anything today. We're not open yet.

REFUGEES: Have mercy! We're all refugees.

WANG LIFA: You're wasting your time! I haven't even enough for myself!

(The Policeman enters.)

POLICEMAN: Go away! Buzz off! Be quick about it!

(The refugees disperse.)

WANG LIFA: How are things, my friend? Is the fighting fierce?

POLICEMAN: Very fierce! Otherwise there wouldn't be all these refugees. We've been instructed by our superiors that you're to provide us with eighty catties of unleavened pancakes before noon. We must feed the soldiers in the city before sending them out to the battlefield, mustn't we?

WANG LIFA: That's reasonable! But you know I only provide food for the lodgers now. The teahouse doesn't serve meals any more. And we haven't opened yet. I can't even hand over one catty of pancakes, let alone eighty!

POLICEMAN: You have your excuses, I have my orders! Well, do as you like. *(Makes as if he is going away.)*

WANG LIFA: Wait a minute! I'm not open yet. You know that! When we are, we'll need your help even more. Take this and buy yourself a small packet of tea. *(Hands over some banknotes.)* Put in a good word for me and I'll be most grateful!

POLICEMAN *(accepting the money)*: All right, I'll try, but don't count on it.

(Three to five soldiers in tattered uniforms, all armed with rifles, charge in.)

POLICEMAN: Look here, sirs, I'm making a routine check of the residents. This place isn't open yet.

A SOLDIER: Balls!

POLICEMAN: Manager Wang, offer them some money for tea. Then they'll go elsewhere.

WANG LIFA: Sirs, I'm so sorry we're not in business yet, otherwise we'd be honoured to have you billeted here. *(Hands over some banknotes to the Policeman.)*

POLICEMAN *(passing on the money to the soldiers)*: I'm sure you'll understand. He really can't serve you today.

A SOLDIER: Balls! Who wants paper money? Give us silver dollars!

WANG LIFA: Sirs, where can I get silver dollars?

A SOLDIER: Balls! Beat the shit out of him!

POLICEMAN: Quick! Give them some more!

WANG LIFA (*taking the money out of his pocket*): You can burn my house down! I haven't one dollar more! (*Hands over paper money.*)

A SOLDIER: Balls. (*Takes money, turns to go out, and, in passing, snatches away two new tablecloths. Exeunt the soldiers.*)

POLICEMAN: There! Saved you from real trouble. If they'd stayed, it would have been the end of you! Not a single teacup left!

WANG LIFA: And I mustn't forget such a service, eh?

POLICEMAN: Aren't you going to do something about it then?

WANG LIFA: Right! How stupid of me! You better search me, I haven't a copper left. (*Lifting up his gown to be searched*) Go ahead, search me!

POLICEMAN: OK, you win. See you tomorrow. Tomorrow's anybody's guess! (*Exit.*)

WANG LIFA: Mind your step! (*Stamps his foot when the Policeman has gone.*) Damn it! War, war, all the bloody time! What the hell are you fighting about?

(*Tang the Oracle enters. He is as emaciated and as dirty as ever, but now he wears a silk gown.*)

TANG THE ORACLE: Ah, Manager Wang. Congratulations!

WANG LIFA (*still grumpy*): It's Mr Tang! No free tea any more. (*Takes another look at him. Smiles.*) So, you're doing all right. In silk, too!

TANG THE ORACLE: Somewhat better off than before, thanks to the times.

WANG LIFA: Thanks to the times? Say that again!

TANG THE ORACLE: The more chaos the better my business. Nowadays life and death are a matter of luck. More and more people want their fortunes told, their features read. You understand?

WANG LIFA: Well, that's one way of looking at it!

TANG THE ORACLE: I hear you've converted the courtyard into a boarding-house. What about renting me a room?

WANG LIFA: Now, Mr Tang, with that addiction of yours, don't you think. . . ?

TANG THE ORACLE: I've given up opium.

WANG LIFA: What! Then you'll be able to make something of yourself!

TANG THE ORACLE: I've taken up heroin instead. (*Pointing at the cigarette advertisement on the wall*) Look, see that "Hatamen" brand of cigarettes. They're long and the tobacco's loosely packed. (*Taking out a cigarette to demonstrate his point*) By knocking one end gently you get an empty space, just right for heroin. British imperial cigarettes and Japanese heroin! Two great powers looking after poor little me. Aren't I lucky?

WANG LIFA: Yes, very lucky indeed! But our place is full up. As soon as I get a vacancy, I'll keep it for you.

TANG THE ORACLE: I know, you don't think much of me. You're afraid I won't pay the rent.

WANG LIFA: Nothing of the sort! We all grew up in the streets. It's not for us to look down on one another. See, I'm being perfectly frank like an old friend!

TANG THE ORACLE: You've got a smooth tongue! Better than mine!

WANG LIFA: I'm not just talking. My heart's in the right place. How many cups of free tea have you had off me all these years? Count for yourself. Now that you're better off, has it ever crossed your mind to pay me back?

TANG THE ORACLE: I'll pay you back one of these days. But altogether, it won't come to much! (*Muttering these words he tries to beat a retreat.*)

(*The Paper Boy crying in the streets, "Read all about the great battle at Changxindian! Paper! Paper! Read all about the great battle at Changxindian!" The Paper Boy pokes his head in.*)

PAPER BOY: Hey, manager! Latest news about the fighting at Changxindian. Won't you buy a copy?

WANG LIFA: Any news about people *not* fighting?

PAPER BOY: Maybe. Look for yourself!

WANG LIFA: Go away! I'm not interested!

PAPER BOY: Won't make no difference, manager! The fighting'll go on just the same. *(To Tang the Oracle)* Sir, you interested?

TANG THE ORACLE: I'm not like him. *(Points at Wang Lifa.)* I'm always concerned about affairs of state. *(Takes a copy and sneaks off without paying.)*

(The Paper Boy runs off after him.)

WANG LIFA *(to himself)*: Changxindian! Changxindian! That's near here. *(Shouts.)* Master Li! Master Li! You'd better go for the food right away. The city gates are sure to close soon. We won't be able to get anything. You heard me? *(When no answer comes from the back, he goes towards there angrily.)*

(Master Chang enters with a string of pickled turnips and two chickens.)

CHANG: Manager Wang!

WANG LIFA: Who's that? Why, Master Chang! What are you doing these days?

CHANG: Selling vegetables. Earning my own living. I'm not going to knuckle under. Today there was such a pandemonium outside the city. I couldn't pick up any vegetables. All I could get were these two chickens and some pickled turnips. I heard you're opening tomorrow. Thought these might come in handy, so I brought them along.

WANG LIFA: Thanks a lot! I didn't see how I was going to manage.

CHANG *(taking a look around)*: Nice! Very nice! You've done it up well! All the large teahouses have closed down.



Wang Lifa: Master Chang, what do I owe you?

You were the only one sharp enough to make the most of the changes and reforms.

WANG LIFA: Thanks for the compliment! I do my best, but if the country carries on in this mess, it'll all be wasted.

CHANG: Well, the likes of me won't be able to afford a seat in such a posh teahouse, that's for sure!

(Master Song enters, his clothes looking threadbare but still carrying his bird-cage.)

SONG: Manager Wang! You're opening tomorrow? I've come to offer my congratulations! *(Sees Master Chang.)* Oh, my old friend! How I've missed you!

CHANG: Master Song, my brother! How've you been?

WANG LIFA: Why don't you both sit down?

SONG: Oh, Manager Wang! How are you? How's the missus? How are your boys? How's business?

WANG LIFA *(trying to answer all the greetings)*: Very well,

thank you. (*Picks up the chickens and the pickled turnips.*)

Master Chang, what do I owe you?

CHANG: As you like. Whatever you think's fair.

WANG LIFA: Of course! I'll get you a pot of tea. (*Goes to the back with the things.*)

SONG: Master Chang, how, how's life treated you?

CHANG: Now I'm selling vegetables! Since the Bannerman's subsidy was abolished, I earn my own living. What about you?

SONG: Me? Just hearing you ask that bring tears to my eyes. Look at my clothes! They're a disgrace!

CHANG: But you read and write, and do accounts! You can't find a job?

SONG: Exactly. Who wants to starve? Yet who wants a Bannerman! Looking back, the Great Qing Empire wasn't so good, but now, in the Republic, I'm starving!

WANG LIFA (*returning with a pot of tea and giving Master Chang some money*): I don't know what you spent. Hope that's enough!

CHANG (*taking the money without counting*): Never mind!

WANG LIFA (*pointing at the bird-cage*): Still mad on orioles? Does it sing well?

SONG: Of course it's an oriole! I may starve, but I won't allow my bird to. (*Cheering up a bit*) Look! (*Opens cover.*) He's such a handsome bird! Whenever I look at him, I don't want to die.

WANG LIFA: Master Song, you mustn't talk of dying. One of these days your luck will change!

CHANG: Come, brother, let's go and have a drink. Drown our sorrows in wine. Manager Wang, I won't invite you. Not enough money, you understand?

WANG LIFA: I've got work to do, anyway. Forgive me for not keeping you company.

(Just as Chang and Song head for the entrance, Song Enz and Wu Xiangz enter. They are still in grey gowns, but with

narrower sleeves because of the new fashion, and with black jackets.)

SONG (*recognizing them, involuntarily goes down on one knee to pay his respects*): Oh, it's you, gentlemen.

(Wang Lifa, apparently influenced by Song, also greets them in the same way. The two secret agents are disconcerted.)

SONG ENZ: What's the matter with you? We've been a republic for several years now. No need to bend the knee. Don't you know how to bow in the new style?

SONG: Seeing your grey gowns makes me feel it's still the Qing Dynasty. I can't help bending my knee!

WANG LIFA: Me too. I feel that bending the knee's more satisfying than bowing.

WU XIANGZ: Ha! Ha! Master Song, your Bannerman's subsidy used to be a sure source of income. Well, that's all gone now. But our grey gowns proved a better bet, eh? Ha! Ha! (*Seeing Master Chang*) It's Master Chang, if I'm not mistaken.

CHANG: Yes, you have a good memory. In 1898 I made the remark here, "The Great Qing Empire is done for!" For that I was arrested by you two, and imprisoned for more than a year!

SONG ENZ: Your memory's not bad either. Doing all right these days?

CHANG: Yes, thank you. It was 1900 soon after I got out of prison, the year of the Boxers. Their slogan was "Support the Qing and annihilate the foreigners". I joined them and fought a few battles against the foreign armies. But that didn't help. The Great Qing Empire was done for after all! It deserved it! I'm a Bannerman, but I must be fair! Now, I'm up everyday before dawn, carrying two baskets of vegetables to the city. By ten they're sold. I earn my own living and I'm stronger than ever. If foreigners come here again with their armies, I'm ready to fight them. I'm a

Bannerman, but Bannermen are Chinese too! How's life treating you two gentlemen?

WU XIANGZ: Oh, muddling along! When there was an emperor, we served him. When there was President Yuan Shikai, we served him. Now, Song Enz, how should I put it?

SONG ENZ: Now we serve anyone who puts rice in our bowls.

CHANG: Even foreigners?

SONG: Master Chang, let's get going!

WU XIANGZ: Understand this, Master Chang. Everyone we serve is backed by some foreign power. How can anyone make war without foreign arms and guns?

SONG: You're so right! So right! Master Chang, let's go.

CHANG: Goodbye, gentlemen. I'm sure you'll soon be rewarded and promoted! (*Goes off with Song.*)

SONG ENZ: Bloody fool!

WANG LIFA (*pouring out tea*): Master Chang has always been stubborn, won't bow down to anyone! Take no notice of him. (*Offering them tea*) Have a cup, it's fresh.

SONG ENZ: What sort of people do you have as lodgers?

WANG LIFA: Mostly university students, and a couple of old acquaintances. I've got a register. Their names are always promptly reported to the local police-station. Shall I fetch it for you?

WU XIANGZ: We don't look at books. We look at people!

WANG LIFA: No need for that. I can vouch for them all.

SONG ENZ: Why are you so partial to students? They're not generally quiet characters.

WANG LIFA: Officials one day and out of office the next. It's the same with tradesmen. In business today and broke tomorrow. Can't rely on anyone! Only students have money to pay the rent each month, because you need money to get into university in the first place. That's how I figure it. What do you think?

SONG ENZ: Got it all worked out! You're quite right. Nowadays even we aren't always paid on time.

WU XIANGZ: So that's why we must make arrests everyday, to get our bonus.

SONG ENZ: We nick people at random, but they never get out at random. As long as we make arrests, we get our bonus. Come on, let's take a look back there!

WU XIANGZ: Yes, let's go!

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, gentlemen! Don't trouble yourselves. Everyone behaves himself properly, I assure you.

SONG ENZ: But if we don't take a look, we can't nab anyone. How will we get our bonus?

WU XIANGZ: Since the manager's not keen to let us have a look, he must have thought of another way. Ought to try to help him keep up a front. Right, Manager Wang?

WANG LIFA: I . . .

SONG ENZ: I've an idea. Not all that brilliant perhaps. Let's do it on a monthly basis. On the first of every month, according to the new solar calendar, you'll hand in a . . .

WU XIANGZ: A token of friendship!

SONG ENZ: Right. You'll hand in a token of friendship. That'll save no end of trouble for both sides.

WANG LIFA: How much is this token of friendship worth?

WU XIANGZ: As old friends, we'll leave that to you. You're a bright fellow. I'm sure you wouldn't want this token of friendship to seem unfriendly, would you?

LI SAN (*entering with a shopping basket*): Oh, gentlemen! (*Bends down on one knee.*) Are the city gates going to be closed again today? (*Heads for the entrance without waiting for an answer.*)

(*Two or three students return in haste.*)

A STUDENT: Master Li, better stay at home. The army's seizing people on the streets for coolies. (*They continue to the rear.*)

LI SAN (*not stopping*): So what? I'm just a coolie here, aren't I?

(*Pock-mark Liu, frightened out of his wits, rushes in and collides squarely with Li San.*)

LI SAN: What's wrong? You look like death!

POCK-MARK LIU (*breathlessly*): Don't — don't go out! They nearly grabbed me!

WANG LIFA: Master Li, better leave it for now.

LI SAN: What about lunch?

WANG LIFA: Tell everybody there'll only be pickled turnips and rice for lunch. That's the best we can do. For supper, we'll have those two chickens.

LI SAN: As you like. (*Goes off to the boarding-house.*)

POCK-MARK LIU: Oh, lord! Almost scared me to death!

SONG ENZ: So what! You'll only buy and sell a few more girls!

POCK-MARK LIU: Well, some wish to sell and some wish to buy. All I do is to lend a helping hand! Don't blame me! (*He drinks the three cups of left-over tea on the table one by one.*)

WU XIANGZ: I'm warning you! Since the time of the empire we've been dealing with revolutionaries. We don't like dirtying our hands with slave-traders and pimps like you! But now if we catch you at it, we won't turn a blind eye any more. When the likes of you get pulled in, you can be sure of this, you'll get chained to the piss-pot!

POCK-MARK LIU: Now, now, gentlemen, no need to put it like that! These days I'm down-and-out like every one else. In the good old days, I had connections with the Manchu nobles and eunuchs of the court. Since the revolution, I've been leading a dog's life. When ministers and vice-ministers, generals and colonels take concubines, they want sing-song girls and Beijing opera stars. They'll pay thousands of silver dollars for them. I can't even get my toe in the door. Why pick on my miserable bit of business?

SONG ENZ: You'll change your tune when you're chained to that piss-pot!

POCK-MARK LIU: Gentlemen, gentlemen! I've nothing to offer you today, but, one of these days, I promise you something worthwhile.

WU XIANGZ: You must be doing a deal of some sort or you wouldn't poke your nose out on a day like this.

POCK-MARK LIU: No! I'm not!

SONG ENZ: There's never a word of truth from you. Lying to us won't do you any good! Manager Wang, we'll take a walk around. The first of next month, according to the new solar calendar. Don't forget!

WANG LIFA: I may forget my own name, but never your business!

WU XIANGZ: That's settled, then! (*Goes off with Song Enz.*)

WANG LIFA: Master Liu, had enough tea, I hope? Now take yourself off somewhere else!

POCK-MARK LIU: Carry on! Don't mind me! I'm waiting here for a couple of friends.

WANG LIFA: I'd better make it clear, once and for all! Conduct your line of business elsewhere! We've reformed! We're civilized now!

(*Kang Shunz, a parcel in her hand and leading Kang Dali, peeps in at the entrance.*)

KANG DALI: Is this the place?

KANG SHUNZ: It's the place all right! But it looks so different. (*Enters, takes a good look around, and sees Pock-mark Liu.*) Come in, Dali. This is it, alright!

KANG DALI: You sure, ma?

KANG SHUNZ: No mistake! With him here, I'm quite sure.

WANG LIFA: Who are you looking for?

KANG SHUNZ (*without answering, goes straight to Pock-mark Liu*): Pock-mark Liu, recognize me? (*Wants to strike him, but is unable to raise her hand. Seized by a fit of trembling*) You! You! (*Wants to swear at him, but finds it difficult too.*)

POCK-MARK LIU: Why pick on me, missus, for no reason at all!

KANG SHUNZ (*summoning all her strength*): No reason? Take a good look at me! Do you see who I am! Couldn't

you make a decent living any other way? Do you have to follow your filthy trade? Pah!

WANG LIFA: Now, now, madam! Don't get so upset! Calm down!

KANG SHUNZ: Are you the manager? Do you remember, almost twenty years ago, there was a eunuch who bought a wife?

WANG LIFA: Ah, so you're Eunuch Pang's. . .

KANG SHUNZ (*pointing at Pock-mark Liu*): And it was all his doing! Today I'm going to make him pay for it! (*Attempts to strike him once more, but is still unable to bring herself to do it.*)

POCK-MARK LIU (*dodging*): Lay off! Lay off! What decent man will fight a woman! (*Backing away*) I — I'll get someone to make you see sense. (*Runs to the rear.*)

WANG LIFA (*to Kang Shunz*): Please sit down, madam. Take your time. Where's the Eunuch?

KANG SHUNZ (*sits down, out of breath*): Dead! Starved to death by his nephews! After the Republic, he still had money, but no more influence. His nephews treated him badly. When he died, they threw us out, without so much as a blanket!

WANG LIFA: And this is. . . ?

KANG SHUNZ: My son.

WANG LIFA: Your. . . ?

KANG SHUNZ: Also bought. As the Eunuch's son.

KANG DALI: Ma, is this really where your father sold you?

KANG SHUNZ: That's right, my dear. This is the place! I fainted as soon as I came in. I'll never forget it.

KANG DALI: But I can't remember where my father sold me.

KANG SHUNZ: Well, you were only a year old then. Ma brought you up. We'll always be together, won't we, dear?

KANG DALI: That old rotter! He used to pinch you, bite you and jab me with his opium skewer! There were too many of them. There was nothing we could do. Ma, if it wasn't for you, I'd have died long ago.

KANG SHUNZ: Yes, there were too many of them, and we

were too soft. Just now, when I saw Pock-mark Liu, I wanted to bite him, but I couldn't even slap him. I just couldn't raise my hand!

KANG DALI: Ma, when I grow up I'll help you beat them all up! I don't know who my real mother was, so you're my mother, my real mother!

KANG SHUNZ: Yes, my dear. I am! We'll stick together, always! I'll earn some money so you can go to school. (*At a loss for a moment*) Manager, since I was sold here, it seems a bit of luck that we've met again. Can you find me a job of some kind? It's not for myself, but he's a good boy with no one but me to look after him. He mustn't starve.

(*Wang Shufen enters and stands there unnoticed listening.*)

WANG LIFA: What can you do?

KANG SHUNZ: Washing, sewing, mending, cooking, things like that. I come from the countryside. I don't mind hard work. As long as I'm not a eunuch's wife, anything will be sweet.

WANG LIFA: How much would you want?

KANG SHUNZ: I'll be happy with three meals a day, a bed to sleep in and enough to send Dali to school!

WANG LIFA: Right, I'll keep an eye open for you. Fact is, I've never forgotten what happened here all these years ago. Always left a bad taste in my mouth!

KANG SHUNZ: But where can we go now?

WANG LIFA: How about going back to the countryside and looking up your old father?

KANG SHUNZ: Him? I haven't a clue if he's alive or dead. Even if he's still around, I won't look him up. He never stood by me, his own daughter, then. I won't call him father now!

WANG LIFA: But a job right away won't be all that easy to find!

WANG SHUFEN (*coming over*): She's good at housework and not asking too much. I'll keep her!

WANG LIFA: You?

WANG SHUFEN: Don't I run half the teahouse? You want to work me and Master Li to death?

KANG SHUNZ: Manager, give me a chance. Whenever you feel I'm not up to it, just say the word and I'll go.

WANG SHUFEN: Come with me, sister.

KANG SHUNZ: Since I was sold here, this is like my parents' home. Come, Dali.

KANG DALI: Manager, if you don't beat me, I'll help with the work, too. (*Goes off with Wang Shufen and Kang Shunz.*)

WANG LIFA: Damn! Two more mouths to feed! The Eunuch's gone but I get landed with his family!

LI SAN (*coming out with Pock-mark Liu, screening him*): Better get going! (*Goes back.*)

WANG LIFA: Make it snappy! Unless you want your face slapped!

POCK-MARK LIU: I told you, I have to wait for two friends!

WANG LIFA: I can't think of a good enough name for you!

POCK-MARK LIU: Nothing you can do about it. Once in a trade, always in the trade. You'll always be selling your tea. I'll always be doing my business! Till my dying day!

(*Lao Lin and Lao Chen enter, beaming.*)

POCK-MARK LIU (*despite the fact that the two deserters are both younger, he insists on addressing them respectfully*): Elder Brother Lin! Elder Brother Chen! (*Feeling Wang Lifa's anger, he hastily adds.*) Manager Wang, there's no one around. Let me borrow your place just this once, I promise it's the last time!

WANG LIFA (*pointing to the back*): Don't forget she's in there!

POCK-MARK LIU: Never mind, she can't do much. If she tries, these fellows can help me.

WANG LIFA: You! Bah! (*Retires to the back.*)

POCK-MARK LIU: Sit down. Let's talk it over.

LAO LIN: You say it, Second Brother.

LAO CHEN: No, you say it, Elder Brother.

POCK-MARK LIU: What's the difference who speaks?

LAO CHEN: You say it, you're the Elder Brother.

LAO LIN: Well, it's like this, we're sworn brothers.

LAO CHEN: That's right! Sworn brothers, so close we'd share the same pair of trousers.

LAO LIN: He's got a few silver dollars.

POCK-MARK LIU: Silver dollars?

LAO CHEN: Elder Brother here also has some.

POCK-MARK LIU: How much altogether? Tell me!

LAO LIN: We're not going to tell you that yet.

LAO CHEN: Not till we know if it's possible.

POCK-MARK LIU: With silver dollars everything's possible!

LAO LIN and LAO CHEN: Really?

POCK-MARK LIU: If I'm lying to you, I'll be damned!

LAO LIN: You say it then, Second Brother.

LAO CHEN: No, no! You say it, Elder Brother.

LAO LIN: See here. There are two of us, right?

POCK-MARK LIU: Right!

LAO CHEN: Our friendship's so close we can share the same pair of trousers, right?

POCK-MARK LIU: Right!

LAO LIN: No one would laugh at our friendship, would they?

POCK-MARK LIU: Friendship is friendship. Who laughs at that?

LAO CHEN: And no one makes fun of friendship among three people either, do they?

POCK-MARK LIU: Three people? Who?

LAO LIN: Us and a woman!

POCK-MARK LIU: Oh! Oh! Now I get it! But this is going to be tricky. I've never done anything like it before. People usually talk about some nice young couple. But who's ever heard of a nice young triple?

LAO LIN: Tricky, eh?

POCK-MARK LIU: Very tricky!

LAO LIN (*to Lao Chen*): What do you think?

LAO CHEN: We're not going to call it off, are we?

LAO LIN: Hell, no! We've been in the army for more than ten years and can't even end up with half a wife? Fuck it!
POCK-MARK LIU: We won't call it off. Let's think it over! How many silver dollars do you have?

(Wang Lifa and Cui Jiufeng come out from the rear, walking slowly. Pock-mark Liu and the two deserters cease talking.)

WANG LIFA: Mr Cui, why didn't you go when Master Qin sent you an invitation yesterday? You're a learned man. You know all about heaven and earth. You've been a member of parliament. Yet you shut yourself up here chanting Buddhist scriptures! Why not do something more useful? A good man like you should go into politics! With worthy men like you in office, we ordinary folk might enjoy a few days of peace!

CUI JIUFENG: You make me feel ashamed! Yes, I was a member of parliament, a grievous sin. What has the revolution accomplished? We misled ourselves and others! Now I spend my days in meditation and repentance. That's all I can do!

Pock-Mark Liu: How many silver dollars do you have?



WANG LIFA: But look at Master Qin! Running a factory and getting ready to open a bank!

CUI JIUFENG: With all his factories and banks, what can he do? He says he's going to save the country by industry and commerce. But who has he saved? Himself! He's richer than ever. And all his industry and commerce will collapse if the foreigners lift just one little finger. Then he'll never get on his feet again.

WANG LIFA: Oh please don't say that! Isn't there any hope for us?

CUI JIUFENG: Hard to say. Very hard to say. Now Marshal Wang wages a war on Marshal Li. The next day Marshal Zhao attacks Marshal Wang. Who's behind it all?

WANG LIFA: Who? The bastard!

CUI JIUFENG: The foreigners.

WANG LIFA: The foreigners? I don't understand.

CUI JIUFENG: One day you will, when China is reduced to a colony and all of us are slaves! I took part in the revolution. I know what I'm talking about.

WANG LIFA: Then why don't you do something? Save us from being slaves.

CUI JIUFENG: As a young man, I thought my ideals could save the world. I tried to follow them. Now I've seen through it all. China's finished!

WANG LIFA: But we must try to save her!

CUI JIUFENG: Save her? That's just wishful thinking! A corpse can't be brought back to life. Everything dies sooner or later. Well, I'm off to the Hongji Temple. If Master Qin should send for me again, just tell him I'm only interested in chanting Buddhist scriptures. *(Exit.)*

(Song Enz and Wu Xiangz enter again.)

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen! Any news?

(The two say nothing and take seats near the entrance, watching Pock-mark Liu and the two deserters.)

(Pock-mark Liu, nonplussed, looks at his toes.)

(Lao Lin and Lao Chen, also uncomfortable, look at each other.)

(Silence for fully a minute.)

LAO CHEN: Elder Brother, shall we go?

LAO LIN: Yeah!

SONG ENZ: Just a minute! *(Standing up, he blocks the way.)*

LAO CHEN: What's up?

WU XIANGZ *(also standing up)*: You'd better be telling me what's up!

(The four of them stare at each other for a moment.)

SONG ENZ: Better come quietly!

LAO LIN: Where to?

WU XIANGZ: Deserters, right? Trying to hide in Beijing, with a few silver dollars in your pockets, right? When the money runs out, become bandits, right?

LAO CHEN: None of your bloody business! I can lick eight of your sort with one hand! *(Prepares to fight.)*

SONG ENZ: You? Pity you sold your gun, right? Bare hands ain't no match for a gun, right? *(Patting the gun under his gown)* I can lick eight of your sort with one finger! Right?

LAO LIN: We're all brothers, aren't we? No need for unpleasantness.

WU XIANGZ: That's more like it. Let's sit down and have a little chat. Make your choice. Your silver dollars or your lives!

LAO CHEN: We went through hell to earn this bit of money! We fought for whoever paid us! Shit! The number of battles we fought!

SONG ENZ: But you know very well how they treat deserters!

LAO LIN: Let's talk it over. After all, we're all brothers.

WU XIANGZ: That's the way to talk among friends. Now let's get down to business!

WANG LIFA *(at the entrance)*: Hey! The Execution Squad's coming!

LAO CHEN and LAO LIN: Oh? *(In a panic, they try to run to the back.)*

SONG ENZ: Stop! Our word of honour: Split the silver dollars with us and you'll be safe. We're friends, right?

LAO LIN and LAO CHEN: Yeah! Friends!

(The Execution Squad enters: two soldiers carrying rifles and broadswords swathed in red cloth in the lead; one bearing the execution edict shaped like a huge arrow in the middle; and four soldiers carrying clubs painted red at one end and black at the other bringing up the rear. The Officer enters last, dominating the squad.)

WU XIANGZ *(standing at attention with Song Enz, Lao Lin and Lao Chen in a line, takes out his credentials from under his cap and shows it to the Officer)*: May I report, sir? We're interrogating a deserter here.

OFFICER *(pointing at Pock-mark Liu)*: Him?

WU XIANGZ *(pointing at Pock-mark Liu)*: Yes, him!

OFFICER: Tie him up!

POCK-MARK LIU *(screaming)*: Sir! I'm not! I'm not!

OFFICER: Tie him up!

(Exeunt the Execution Squad and Pock-mark Liu.)

WU XIANGZ *(to Song Enz)*: Let's go and pull in those two students.

SONG ENZ: Yes, come on! *(The two hastily head for the boarding-house.)*

(Curtain)

Act Three

TIME: *After the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, the period in which US soldiers and KMT secret service agents were running loose in Beijing. An early morning in autumn.*

PLACE: *The same as the previous act.*

THE CURTAIN RISES: *The Yutai Teahouse is no longer the dignified establishment of earlier times. The wicker chairs have disappeared, replaced by stools and benches. Everything, from the building to the furniture, looks gloomy. If there is anything outstanding which catches the eye, it is the paper slips with "DO NOT DISCUSS AFFAIRS OF STATE" on them. Their number has increased and the characters enlarged. Alongside these, new paper slips have been added, with "PLEASE PAY IN ADVANCE" on them.*

It is early morning, the wooden shutters have not yet been taken down from the windows. Wang Dashuan, Wang Lifa's son, in low spirits, is tidying the premises.

His wife Zhou Xiuhua, leading their young daughter Wang Xiaohua by the hand, enters from the back. They are talking to each other as they enter.

WANG XIAOHUA: Ma, make me some hot noodle soup for lunch. It's ages since we've had it.

ZHOU XIUHUA: I know, pet, but who knows if there'll be any flour in the shops today. Even if there is some, we don't know if we can afford it. What a life!

WANG XIAOHUA: Let's hope there will be both, ma.

ZHOU XIUHUA: You can hope, but that won't get you far.

Off you go now! Be careful of those jeeps on your way!

WANG DASHUAN: Xiaohua, wait!

WANG XIAOHUA: What is it, dad?

WANG DASHUAN: About last night. . .

ZHOU XIUHUA: I've dinned it into her. She's a sensible child.

WANG DASHUAN: Never tell anybody about your uncle Dali.

If you do, we've all had it! Understand?

WANG XIAOHUA: I won't say a word, even if they kill me.

If I'm asked about Uncle Dali, I'll just say he's been gone for many years. No news about him at all!

(Kang Shunz enters from the rear. Her back is now slightly bent, but she's still going strong. She is calling out to Xiaohua as she comes in.)

KANG SHUNZ: Xiaohua! Xiaohua! You still here?

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny Kang, what is it?

KANG SHUNZ: My dear, let me have another look at you.
(Stroking Xiaohua's hair) How pretty! But too thin! With more to eat she'd look even better.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Aunt, have you made up your mind to go?

KANG SHUNZ: Yes, I'll go. Then I won't be a burden to you. I brought Dali up. Now he wants me to go with him. How can I refuse? When we first came here, he wasn't even as big as Xiaohua is now.

WANG XIAOHUA: Now, he's so strong. He's wonderful!

KANG SHUNZ: He was here only a few minutes, but I really feel years younger. I haven't a thing in the world, but when I see him, I feel I've everything. Yes, I'll go with him. With him, hard work or sufferings will be sweet. You saw his big hands and feet, a real man!

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny, I want to go with you!

KANG SHUNZ: Xiaohua, you be a good girl and go to school. I'll come back and see you.

WANG DASHUAN: Xiaohua, go to school now. Don't be late.

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny, don't go till I've come back from school.

KANG SHUNZ: Yes, yes! Run along now, my dear!

(Exit Wang Xiaohua.)

WANG DASHUAN: Aunt, has dad agreed to let you go?

KANG SHUNZ: He hasn't decided yet. What worries me is, if Dali's visit somehow leaks out and then I suddenly disappear, it may mean trouble for you. People are getting arrested all the time. I don't want to let you down.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Now, aunt, you just go ahead. You'll have a chance to live if you go away. Customers are always whispering to each other, "If you want a chance to live, go to the Western Hills."*

* At that time Communist guerrillas were active in the Western Hills near Beijing.

WANG DASHUAN: That's right.

KANG SHUNZ: Well, Xiuhua, let's talk it over. I mustn't think of myself only and let all of you suffer for it. Dashuan, you'd better think it over too. *(Goes off with Zhou Xiubua.)*

(Ding Bao enters.)

DING BAO: Hi, manager, I'm here!

WANG DASHUAN: Who're you?

DING BAO: Little Ding Bao. Pock-mark Liu Jr told me to come here. He says the old manager here asked him to find a waitress.

WANG DASHUAN: Take a good look around, miss. You think a dump like this needs a waitress? But the old manager here's so desperate for money, he's always thinking up some crazy scheme!

(Wang Lifa enters with a slow gait. He's still in good health, but shabbily dressed.)

WANG LIFA: Now, Dashuan, who taught you to run down your elders behind their backs? Who's full of crazy schemes? Take down the shutters! The teahouse should have opened long ago.

(Wang Dashuan goes to take down the shutters.)

DING BAO: Old manager, you look pretty fit!

WANG LIFA: Yes. If there were some noodles with fried bean sauce around, I could pack away three huge bowls. Only there aren't any. Still in your teens, miss?

DING BAO: I'm seventeen.

WANG LIFA: Only seventeen?

DING BAO: Yes. My mother was a widow, tried to bring me up. After the war, the government insisted that the little house my father left us was traitor's property and took it away from us. The shock killed my mother. So I became a waitress. Old manager, I haven't a clue what traitor's property means. Do you know?

WANG LIFA: Better watch your tongue, miss. One wrong word can make anything traitor's property. Take the place behind here. Used to be a warehouse of Master Qin. Then someone frowned at it. Said it was traitor's property. It was confiscated. Simple as that!

(Wang Dashuan comes back.)

DING BAO: You said it, old manager. Even I'm traitor's property! I have to suck up to whoever's the boss. Hell! I'm only seventeen but I often wish I was dead! At least



Ding Bao: Hell! I'm only
seventeen but I often wish
I was dead!

my body would be my own! This job rots you away slowly.
WANG DASHUAN: Dad, do you really want to hire a waitress?
WANG LIFA: I had a chat with Pock-mark Liu Jr about it.
I've always been keen on reforming. And with business so
bad, I'm worried.
WANG DASHUAN: Me too! But don't forget Yutai's good
name. A respectable old name of sixty years' standing. Now
hiring a waitress?
DING BAO: Good old name my foot! The older you become,
the more worthless you are! You don't believe me? If I
were twenty-eight years old, I'd call myself Tiny Ding Bao
or Ding Baby but I bet no one would look at me twice.

(Two customers enter.)

WANG LIFA: You're early, gentlemen! Brought your own tea?
Dashuan, get the water. *(Wang Dashuan goes.)* I'm sorry,
but please pay in advance.
FIRST CUSTOMER: I never heard such nonsense.
WANG LIFA: I've been in this business fifty years now, and
I've never heard such nonsense either. But, as you know,
the prices of coal and such things are always going up. Perhaps
while you're having your tea now, they'll go up again. So
it saves a lot of trouble if you pay in advance.
SECOND CUSTOMER: Having no tea at all saves even more
trouble!

(Exeunt the two customers.)

WANG DASHUAN *(entering with hot water)*: What? They've
gone!
WANG LIFA: Now do you see what I mean?
DING BAO: If I'd gone over and said, "Hi, you two suckers!"
they'd have handed over a shiny silver dollar right away.
WANG LIFA: Dashuan, you're as stubborn as a mule!
WANG DASHUAN *(putting down the hot water)*: Do what
you like! I'll take a walk. It's too stuffy in here. *(Exit.)*
WANG LIFA: You find it stuffy? I can hardly breathe!

*(Pock-mark Liu Jr enters. He is in western clothes and carries
a briefcase.)*

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Hi, Little Ding Bao, so you're here!
DING BAO: On your orders! How could I refuse?
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Manager Wang, what do you think of
this little baby I've found for you? Looks, age, fashion, ex-
perience — she's a real smasher!
WANG LIFA: Only snag is I can't afford her.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: No problem. She doesn't want any
wages. Right, baby?
WANG LIFA: No wages?
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Leave it all to me, old man. Me and
baby have got a way all worked out. Haven't we, baby?
DING BAO: Sure, without your crooked ways, where would
you be?
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Crooked? You've said it! So was my
old man. He was nabbed right here! If you don't believe
me, ask Manager Wang. Wasn't that so?
WANG LIFA: Saw it with my own eyes.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: See, baby, I'm not just shooting my
mouth off about something that never happened. He was
dragged right to the middle of the street, and with one big
whack of the sword, his nob was chopped off. Right, old
manager?
WANG LIFA: I heard that whack.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: So I wasn't just telling you stories,
baby, was I? But my old man didn't have what it takes. All
that work, but he still didn't get far. Now it's my turn, and
I'm going to hit the big time! *(Opens briefcase and takes out
the plan.)* Here, baby, take a look at my plan.
DING BAO: I've no time. I think I'll take a day off and come
back to work tomorrow.
WANG LIFA: Ding Bao, I haven't made up my mind yet.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Manager Wang, I've made it up for
you! You'll see, tomorrow morning, baby will stand at the
entrance giving everyone the eye. Before you know what's

happened you'll have two hundred customers on your hands!
Now, baby, better listen to my plan, because you're in it.
DING BAO: Huh! I was hoping I wasn't.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: What's the matter, baby, you're such a
wet blanket! Listen...

(The Electricity Bill Collector enters.)

THE COLLECTOR: Hey, manager, your electricity bill.
WANG LIFA: Electricity bill? I'm how many months behind?
THE COLLECTOR: Three.
WANG LIFA: Wait another three months and I'll be half a
year. I still won't be able to pay you!
THE COLLECTOR: That's nonsense!
POCK-MARK LIU JR: No, perfectly serious! This joint's
under Director Shen's control. Ever heard of him? Member
of the municipal KMT Party committee, director of the
Military Police. You want to collect his electricity bills?
Come on, tell us?
THE COLLECTOR: What do you mean? No, no! Sorry, I
guess I came to the wrong place. *(Exit.)*
POCK-MARK LIU JR: See, Manager Wang, you can't do
without me! Your Qing-dynasty methods are way out of
date!
WANG LIFA: Right. That's why as they say, one must live
and learn. And I've a lot to learn!
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Now you're talking!

*(Tang the Oracle Jr enters. He wears a silk gown and new
satin shoes.)*

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Oh, shit! It's you, Oracle Jr!
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Oh, shit! It's you, Pock-mark Jr!
Come, let me give you the once-over! *(Looking him over,
front and back)* You little bastard! In that western gear,
from behind you look more foreign than a foreigner. Old
manager, I've been studying the stars and there's irrefutable
evidence that the true Son of Heaven will come amongst

us very soon now. That's why prodigies like me and Pock-
mark Jr here and...

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Little Ding Bao — the talk of the town!
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Ah, yes, and Little Ding Bao have
been sent into the world. Look at us, endowed with wit and
beauty, accomplished in letters and prowess — just right for
the times! And, boy, aren't we going to enjoy it! Old
manager, turn your face here. I'll read your features. Good,
good, a fine forehead! You're in for a spell of good luck!
Now what about a cup of tea?
WANG LIFA: Oracle Jr!
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Don't call me Oracle any more.
My new title is Tang the Heavenly Teacher.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Who gave you that?
TANG THE ORACLE JR: You'll hear about it in a few days.
WANG LIFA: All right, Heavenly Teacher, but don't forget,
your father had free tea off me all his life! That's not going
to be hereditary, I hope!
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Manager Wang, when I have put
on my special robes, you'll regret what you've just said. You
just wait!
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Tang, my old pal, I'll treat you to a
coffee later with baby here to keep us company. But first I
want to tell you something important.
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Manager Wang, has it never entered
your head that by offering me some free tea now I may
make you a county magistrate later? Now, Liu, my old
buddy, say your piece.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: I was just saying to baby here, I've got
a tremendous plan.
TANG THE ORACLE JR: I'm all ears.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: I'm going to organize a trust. That's
an American word, so perhaps you don't understand it. In
Beijing dialect it means "it's all yours".
TANG THE ORACLE JR: Of course, I see it. It means you
want to take care of all the girls.
POCK-MARK LIU JR: Right! That brain of yours really

works! Baby, listen carefully. You're a part of this too. Even the old manager here's included.

WANG LIFA: That's why I'm listening.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: I'm going to organize all the dance-hall girls, prostitutes in the brothels and tarts on the street, jeep girls and waitresses into a huge trust.

TANG THE ORACLE JR (*with his eyes closed*): Got all the official backing you need?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Sure! Director Shen will be chairman of the board. I'll be general manager.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: What about me?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: If you can think up a good name for it, you'll be our adviser!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: I won't take national currency bills for my fees.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Only greenbacks every month!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Fire away!

POCK-MARK LIU JR: The business will have four departments: Purchase and Sales, Transport, Training, and Service. Whoever wants to buy or sell girls, whether they're to be transported from Shanghai to Tianjin or from Hankou to Chongqing, whether it's training jeep girls or waitresses, or girls serving US army personnel or our own officials, all this will be taken care of by our firm. Total satisfaction guaranteed. What do you think of that?

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Marvellous! Marvellous! Theoretically, it follows the principle of getting everything under control. In practice it satisfies the needs of the GI's, and that's in the interest of the state.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Then, think of a nice name. Something real classy, like "Willow-leaf eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes; Cherry red lips of a dainty size". Poetic, you know.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: H'm... Trust, trust... No, that's not classy at all. In Beijing dialect, the word sounds like "Pull them in and tear them to pieces"! Sound too much like kidnapping to be classy.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: It may not sound classy, but it's an American word and that's fashionable.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: I still feel that "something incorporated" sounds better. It's got more taste.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: You've got a point there. But what "incorporated"?

DING BAO: How about "Crooked Incorporated"?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Look, baby, this is serious! Don't be so smart! Do your job well and there's a good chance you'll become the chief instructor of the waitresses.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: What about this: "Two Blossoms Incorporated"? What do pretty girls make you think of? Blossoms! If people want these girls, they'll spend lots of money and your business will — what? Blossom! The two blossoms! And in traditional opera there are many references to two blossoms. So what do you think?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Tang, old mate, I thank you. Thanks a lot! (*Warm handshake.*) I'll go right now and see Director Shen and discuss it with him. If he agrees, you'll definitely be our adviser. (*Puts the briefcase in order, ready to go.*)

WANG LIFA: Hey, what about Little Ding Bao?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Trust me! The trust will have everything under control. I'll try it out here first.

DING BAO: Didn't you say something about coffee?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: See if Tang's coming.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: You go ahead. I'm expecting someone here.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Then let's get going, baby.

DING BAO: Bye-bye, old manager. Bye, Heavenly Teacher. (*Goes off with Pock-mark Liu Jr.*)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Old manager, where's the paper?

WANG LIFA: I'll have to look for it. Perhaps some copies from two years ago are still lying around somewhere.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Oh, stop talking nonsense!

(*Three customers enter: Chef Ming, Zou Fuyuan and Wei*)

Fuxi. The chef finds a place for himself, while Zou and Wei sit together. Knowing them all, Wang Lifa greets them.)

WANG LIFA: My friends, I'm sorry to ask you, but please pay in advance.

CHEF MING: We all know that, old man.

WANG LIFA: Pay in advance! I'm really ashamed to say it. *(Busies himself preparing the tea.)*

ZOU FUYUAN: What about it, manager? How about story-telling as an added attraction in the evenings?

WANG LIFA: I tried, but it was no good. Only increased the electricity bill, but not the number of customers!

ZOU FUYUAN: Exactly! Take me. Day before yesterday, at Huixian Teahouse, I told the story of how the three gallants, four worthies, five braves, ten heroes, thirteen celebrities, nine elders and fifteen youngsters stormed Phoenix Mountain, how the hundred birds paid homage to the phoenix, and how the phoenix's leg was hurt. Guess how many came to listen to me?

WANG LIFA: How many? You're the only one left who can tell that story.

ZOU FUYUAN: A true connoisseur! But, only five turned up and two of them didn't even pay.

WEI FUXI: Well, anyway, you're better off than me. Another month now and I've had no work.

ZOU FUYUAN: But why did you give up story-telling for Beijing opera?

WEI FUXI: I've got the voice and the looks.

ZOU FUYUAN: But on stage, you don't throw yourself into the part!

WEI FUXI: Damn it, for singing the whole opera, I don't get enough to buy three maize buns! Why be fagged out? You think I'm off my head?

ZOU FUYUAN *(sighs)*: Well, Fuxi, it looks as though we've been beaten by pop songs and trashy operettas like *Spinning Cotton*. The way I feel about it, it doesn't matter if you or I live or die, but it breaks my heart to think that what's

left of our art will die out in a few years! We've failed our legendary founders. It's an old saying that evil will never vanquish good. But these are evil times, and everything good is rotting away at the roots!

WANG LIFA: Ah! *(Turning to Chef Ming)* Chef Ming, I haven't seen you for ages.

CHEF MING: Can't get about so much now. I'm now in charge of the food at the prison.

WANG LIFA: What? You? But you used to cater for those posh imperial-style banquets with more than a hundred tables. Now you're cooking for jailbirds!

CHEF MING: But what can I do? Nowadays you can only find so many mouths to feed in clink. Imperial-style banquets indeed! I've even sold off my cooking utensils.

(Fang Liu enters, with some traditional painting scrolls.)

CHEF MING: Mr Fang, come over here, please. What happened to my two dinner services? I need the money!

FANG LIU: Chef, pick one of these scrolls instead?

CHEF MING: But what would I do with a scroll.

FANG LIU: It's so well painted. Even better than the original!

CHEF MING: It may be the best in the world, but it won't fill my belly.

FANG LIU: When the owner handed them over to me, he was in tears.

CHEF MING: So was I when I handed over my dinner services!

FANG LIU: I know damn well who's in tears and who's stuffing his guts! That's why I'm always so upset. Don't imagine people in my trade have no heart and just go around buying and selling things.

CHEF MING: Mr Fang, everyone has at least a little humanity. You're surely not going to rook an old friend, I hope?

FANG LIU: Only two dinner services, wasn't it? Peanuts! Please don't mention them again. Doesn't sound friendly somehow!

(Che Dangdang enters, rattling two silver dollars together.)

CHE DANGDANG: Who'll buy silver dollars? Anyone want to buy silver dollars? Heavenly Teacher, won't you favour me?

(Tang the Oracle Jr ignores him.)

WANG LIFA: Dangdang, try your luck somewhere else. I can't even remember what silver dollars look like.

CHE DANGDANG: Have a good look then, old man. Free of charge!

(Drops the silver dollars on to the table.)

(Madame Pang enters with her bondmaid Chunmei. Her fingers encrusted with all kinds of rings, the woman is overdressed to a nauseating degree. Yang, the pedlar, enters in her wake.)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Your Imperial Majesty!

FANG LIU and CHE DANGDANG: Your Imperial Majesty!

MME PANG: Heavenly Teacher!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: At your service. *(Helps Madame Pang to a seat, pours tea for her.)*

MME PANG *(as Che Dangdang prepares to go)*: Dangdang, just a minute!

CHE DANGDANG: Yes, ma'am!

YANG *(opening up his chest of goods)*: Have a look, Your Imperial Majesty.

MME PANG: Let's hear that jingle of yours. It just kills me!

YANG: Yes, ma'am. *(Recites.)*

Yankee needles, Yankee thread;
Toothpaste white and lipstick red.
Patent potions, facial lotions;
Nylons sheer, you'll find here.
In my small box, all goods are fine
But atom bombs just ain't my line!

MME PANG *(laughing, picks two pairs of nylon stockings)*:

Chunmei, put them away. Dangdang, settle the accounts with Yang.

CHE DANGDANG: Oh, Your Imperial Majesty, don't do that to me.

MME PANG: But I lent you money, so what do you owe me now, at compound interest? Heavenly Teacher, check the accounts!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Immediately. *(Takes out a small notebook.)*

CHE DANGDANG: Heavenly Teacher, don't bother! I'll settle everything with Yang.

YANG: Your Imperial Majesty, have pity on me. I'll never get that money.

MME PANG: Don't worry, Yang. I'll see to it that he won't cheat you.

YANG: Yes, ma'am. *(To others present)* Anyone else want to buy something? *(Begins his recitation again.)* Yankee needles. . . .

MME PANG: Enough! Beat it!

YANG: Sure. *(Recites.)*

Yankee needles, Yankee thread;
If I don't go, I'm a silly fathead!

Let's go, Dangdang. (Exeunt Yang and Che Dangdang.)

FANG LIU *(coming over)*: Your Imperial Majesty, I managed to get hold of a set of cloisonné incense burners, five pieces in all. Antiques! The real thing! Dirt cheap too. Just right for the altar of our secret society. Why not have a peep at them?

MME PANG: Show them to the emperor.

FANG LIU: Of course! I hear that our emperor is going to have his coronation soon. My congratulations! I'll go and get the incense burners now and take them to the altar. If Your Imperial Majesty puts in a good word for me, I won't forget it. *(On his way out.)*

CHEF MING: Mr Fang, what about our bit of business?

FANG LIU: Keep an eye on those scrolls for the time being.
(Exit.)

CHEF MING: Hey! Wait! Do me out of my dinner services, would you? Remember I've still got my meat chopper left!
(Pursuing Fang, he goes off.)

MME PANG: Manager Wang, is Aunt Kang around? Please ask her to come here.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: I'll do it. (Running to the door at the back) Old Mrs Kang, please come here.

WANG LIFA: What's all this about?

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Momentous affairs of state!

(Kang Shunz enters.)

KANG SHUNZ: What do you want?

MME PANG (welcoming her effusively): Mother-in-law! I'm the wife of your fourth nephew. I've come to take you home. Please sit down. (Forces Kang Shunz into a chair.)

KANG SHUNZ: Wife of my fourth nephew?

MME PANG: That's right. But when you left the Pangs, I hadn't married into the family then.

KANG SHUNZ: I've finished with the Pangs. Why look me up?

MME PANG: Your fourth nephew, Haishun, is the high priest of the "Tri-emperor" Society, a big nob in the Kuomintang and a sworn brother of Director Shen. Soon he's going to be made emperor! Isn't that fantastic?

KANG SHUNZ: Going to be made emperor?

MME PANG: Yes. His imperial dragon robes are all ready. The coronation will soon take place in the Western Hills.

KANG SHUNZ: The Western Hills?

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Old lady, don't you know the Communist Eighth Route Army units are in the Western Hills? When Master Pang becomes emperor, he'll wipe out those Commies. Of course the Nanjing government is all for it!

MME PANG: I've nothing against the master, except that he's taken to boozing and women lately. Got himself several concubines already!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: But, Your Majesty, an emperor should have seventy-two concubines apart from his official wives. That's all laid out in the old books.

MME PANG: You're not an empress. How can you know what an empress has to suffer? Now, old lady, I've got an idea. If you side with me, I'll make you the empress dowager. Then between us we'll have the emperor under our thumbs. That'll make my life a lot easier. Come with me, old lady, and I promise you the best food and drink, plus some silver dollars to jingle in your pocket! What a posh life!

KANG SHUNZ: And if I refuse?

MME PANG: What? Refuse? (On the point of an outburst.)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Give her time to think it over. Give her time!

KANG SHUNZ: I don't need it. I'm finished with the Pangs for ever! Wife of my nephew, you carry on being an empress and I'll carry on being a poor old woman. Let's keep out of each other's hair! Just now you were about to throw a scene. You think that'd scare me? After all these years on my own, I know how to take care of myself. Try something, and I'll teach you a lesson! (Stands up and walks to the rear.)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Old lady! Old lady!

KANG SHUNZ (stops, turns to Tang the Oracle Jr): As for you, you young loafer, why don't you stand on your two feet and make a decent living? (Exit.)

MME PANG (venting her wrath on Wang Lifa): Manager Wang, come here! Go and talk some sense into that old hag! Persuade her, and I'll give you a bag of flour. If not, I'll have your teahouse smashed up! Heavenly Teacher, let's go!

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Manager Wang, I'll be back for your answer this evening.

WANG LIFA: Suppose I kick the bucket this afternoon?

MME PANG: Pah! Then good riddance! (Goes off with Tang the Oracle Jr and Chunmei.)

WANG LIFA: Huh!

ZOU FUYUAN: Now, have you ever seen a better act? Ha! Ha!

WEI FUXI: I know more than two hundred operas, but I've never come across this one before. Where does the old cow come from?

ZOU FUYUAN: Everyone knows! Her father's a local gangster, who runs the eastern district in Beijing. She, herself, before she got married gave birth to . . . er, well, let's not go into details! Looks as though those thugs are having their last fling before they go under. It won't be long now!

(Wang Dashuan comes back.)

WANG LIFA: Keep an eye on things, Dashuan, I have to go and talk over something. *(Exit.)*

ERDEZ JR *(with a thunderous shout before entering)*: Get out the way! *(Enters.)* Brother Dashuan, a pot of the very best. I'm in the money today! *(Takes out four silver dollars and puts them down one by one.)* Work it out for me. Just spent one dollar. Got four left. Half a dollar each, how many I done in?

WANG DASHUAN: Ten.

ERDEZ JR *(counting on his fingers)*: Right! Four the day before yesterday, six yesterday. That's ten all right. Brother Dashuan, here's a couple of dollars. When I'm broke, I drink your tea free. When I'm in the money, I pay you. Take 'em! *(Picks one up, blows on it, then holds it to his ear.)* That's a good 'un. Good enough for two! Take it!

WANG DASHUAN *(without accepting the money)*: Erdez Jr, what's your racket? Silver dollars don't grow on trees!

ERDEZ JR: I'm studying at the uni!

WANG DASHUAN: But you can't even read the character for "one"! How come you're at the university?

ERDEZ JR *(picks up the teapot and gulps it down from the spout. In a whisper)*: The Beijing KMT Party headquarters sent me to the Institute of Law and Politics. What a pushover!

A dream! Better than mixing with those bums in Tianqiao.* Half a dollar for every student I did in. How many did I get yesterday?

WANG DASHUAN: Six.

ERDEZ JR: Right. Including two chicks. One punch after another. A dream! Brother Dashuan, feel this. Feel it! *(Flexing his biceps)* Reinforced concrete! Imagine that on the students. Smashing, eh?

WANG DASHUAN: Of course they take it all lying down?

ERDEZ JR: I go for the easy ones. Think I'm nuts?

WANG DASHUAN: Listen, Erdez Jr, beating up people's wrong.

ERDEZ JR: Who says so? Look at the dean of the institute. He teaches KMT Party doctrines. When he gives a lecture first thing he does is to take out his shooter and bang it on the table. Me, I only use my fists, not shooters!

WANG DASHUAN: Dean indeed! He's a gangster!

ERDEZ JR: Right! A gangster! Ah, no, that makes me a gangster too! Now, Brother Dashuan, you've a queer way of knocking me! You've got guts! Don't my reinforced concrete muscles scare you?

WANG DASHUAN: You can beat me to death, but if I never give in, you don't win, do you?

ERDEZ JR: Such a queer way of saying things! You should come and teach Party doctrines. You've got what it takes. Well, today I won't be beating up any more students.

WANG DASHUAN: Why only today? Quit it altogether.

ERDEZ JR: I've got another job today.

WANG DASHUAN: What's that?

ERDEZ JR: The teachers! I'm going to lick into them!

WANG DASHUAN: Why? Beating up students is bad enough. Now you want to start on the teachers?

ERDEZ JR: I do what I'm told. My boss told me the teachers are going on strike. That means they're breaking the law.

* Before Liberation, a slum area of Beijing.

That means they gets what's coming to them — a thumping.
I was told to wait here and beat up all the teachers I see.
ZOU FUYUAN (*sensing danger*): Brother, let's move.
WEI FUXI: Let's. (*Exeunt Wei and Zou.*)
ERDEZ JR: Here, Brother Dashuan, take this dollar!
WANG DASHUAN: I won't take money you got for beating
up girls.
ERDEZ JR (*takes out another dollar*): Then take this one! I
got it for beating up the blokes! That's OK, isn't it? (*Wang
Dashuan still shakes his head.*) I know what. You keep an
eye open for me, and I'll run out and treat you to a good
nosh-up! What's life for without good chow, good drinks
and a bit of fun? (*Pockets the money and goes off.*)

(*Kang Shunz comes on carrying a parcel. Wang Lifa and
Zhou Xiuhua follow her.*)
KANG SHUNZ: Manager Wang, if you've changed your mind
and want me to stay, I will.
WANG LIFA: I —
ZHOU XIUHUA: Madame Pang won't dare smash up our
teahouse.
WANG LIFA: How do you know? It doesn't pay to tangle
with the "Tri-emperor" Society.
KANG SHUNZ: What really worries me is Dali's coming here
last night. If that leaks out, we're all finished. That's more
serious than smashing up the teahouse.
WANG DASHUAN: Better you leave, aunt! I'll see you off.
Dad, I can see her off, can't I?
WANG LIFA: Well —
ZHOU XIUHUA: All these years aunt has done so much for
us. The least we can do is see her off.
WANG LIFA: Did I say no? Go ahead, see her off!
WANG DASHUAN: Just a minute, aunt. I'll fetch a coat.
(*Exit.*)
ZHOU XIUHUA: What's up, dad?
WANG LIFA: Don't ask me any more questions. Can't think
straight. I'm all muddled. Never been so muddled before.

Xiuhua, you go with aunt first. I'll tell Dashuan to catch
you up. Aunt, if you have any trouble, you just come back!
ZHOU XIUHUA: This will always be your home, aunt.
WANG LIFA: But who knows what will. . . .
KANG SHUNZ: And I'll never forget you. Old manager, I
wish you good health yourself! (*Goes off with Zhou Xiuhua.*)
WANG LIFA (*follows them a few steps and stops*): Good
health! What's the use?

(*Two teachers, Xie Yongren and Yu Houzhai, enter.*)
XIE YONGREN (*after a look at the wall, places money on the
table*): Old manager, a pot of tea, please. (*Sits.*)
WANG LIFA (*takes money first*): Right.
YU HOUZHAI: Yongren, perhaps this is our last time in a
teahouse?
XIE YONGREN: I may be coming a lot from now on. I've
decided to throw up teaching. I'm going to start pedalling a
pedicab instead!
YU HOUZHAI: You'll certainly earn more than a primary
school teacher!
XIE YONGREN: It's crazy! Being a gym teacher when both
the kids and I are starving!

(*Wang Xiaohua runs in.*)
WANG LIFA: Why are you back from school so early, Xiaohua?
WANG XIAOHUA: Our teachers are on strike! (*Sees Yu
Houzhai and Xie Yongren.*) Oh, Teacher Yu, Teacher Xie!
you weren't at school today. Aren't you going to teach us
any more? Oh, please come back! We missed you so much.
We were all crying. We had a meeting. Everyone promises
to behave and never make you angry again.
YU HOUZHAI: We hate upsetting your studies as much as
you do. But we can't teach on empty stomachs. We've
children of our own. It isn't fair to let them starve while
we teach other children, is it? There, there, don't worry!
After we've had our tea, we're going to a meeting. Maybe
we can find a way out.

XIE YONGREN: Stay at home and revise your lessons. Don't go fooling around, Xiaohua.

(Wang Dashuan enters from the rear, a parcel under his arm.)

WANG XIAOHUA: Dad, these are my teachers.

WANG DASHUAN: Teachers! You'd better go away quickly! They've got a thug lying in wait.

WANG LIFA: Who?

WANG DASHUAN: Erdez Jr! He was here a moment ago. He'll be back any time.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, here's your money back. *(Handing over the money)* Please go! Now!

WANG DASHUAN: Come with me.

(Erdez Jr enters.)

ERDEZ JR: The streets are full of demonstrators! Can't buy a damn thing! Brother Dashuan, where're you going? Who are those two?

WANG DASHUAN: Customers. *(On the way out with Yu Houzbai and Xie Yongren.)*

ERDEZ JR: Hey! Stop! *(The three ignore him.)* What's this? Don't listen, eh? I'll show you!

WANG LIFA: Erdez Jr!

ERDEZ JR *(already swinging his fist)*: Take this!

XIE YONGREN *(giving Erdez Jr a slap with his hand and a kick with his foot)*: And you take this!

ERDEZ JR: Ouch! *(Falls down.)*

WANG XIAOHUA: Serves you right! Serves you right!

XIE YONGREN: On your feet! Another round!

ERDEZ JR *(struggles to his feet, a hand to his face)*: Ow! Ow! *(Backing away)* Ouch!

WANG DASHUAN: Let's beat it! *(Drags the two away. Exeunt.)*

ERDEZ JR *(venting his anger on Wang Lifa)*: You just wait, you old fool! You let them get away. You'll pay for that! Maybe I can't lick them two, but I can sure beat the shit out of an old duffer like you! *(Exit.)*

WANG XIAOHUA: Grandad! Grandad! Is Erdez Jr after our teachers? What can we do?

WANG LIFA: Don't worry! He won't dare do anything! I've seen lots like him in my time. Bullies like him are all cowards!

WANG XIAOHUA: But what if he comes back here after you?

WANG LIFA: Me? Grandad knows how to charm him with a few nice words.

WANG XIAOHUA: Where's dad gone?

WANG LIFA: He'll be back soon. Don't worry. Now go and do your lessons. There's a good girl!

WANG XIAOHUA: I hope nothing will happen to our teachers. I'm so worried! *(Exit.)*

(Ding Bao runs in.)

DING BAO: Old manager, old manager! I've something to tell you!

WANG LIFA: What, miss?

DING BAO: Pock-mark Liu Jr's up to no good. He's going to take over your teahouse!

WANG LIFA: How come? What would he want with a shabby old place like this?

DING BAO: They'll be here any moment. No time to explain! You'd better think of something quick!

WANG LIFA: Thanks for the tip off, miss.

DING BAO: I just want to help you! Don't tell on me!

WANG LIFA: I'm not gaga yet, my girl! Don't worry!

DING BAO: OK. See you later. *(Exit.)*

(Zhou Xiuhua comes back.)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Dad, they've gone.

WANG LIFA: Good.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Dashuan said you're not to worry. He'll be back as soon as he's seen her safely there.

WANG LIFA: That's up to him!

ZHOU XIUHUA: Why? What's the matter, dad? Why are you so upset?

WANG LIFA: Oh, nothing, nothing! Go and see to Xiaohua. Didn't she want some hot noodles? If there's any flour left, make her some. Poor child, nothing good for her to eat!

ZHOU XIUHUA: There's not a scrap of flour left in the house! I'll see what I can do. Maybe make a bowl of dough drop soup with maize flour. *(Exit.)*

(Tang the Oracle Jr returns.)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Manager Wang, did you persuade her?

WANG LIFA: This evening. I promised you an answer this evening.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: You were complaining my father never paid you for his tea. So, in return, here's a piece of advice which may save your neck. Listen, the "Tri-emperor" Society's even stronger now than under the Japs. Smashing up a teahouse like yours is kidsplay to them! You'd better watch out!

WANG LIFA: Oh, I understand alright! You don't want to get my back up. Yet at the same time you want to get in your empress' good books. Right?

(Song Enz Jr and Wu Xiangz Jr enter, both in brand-new western-style suits.)

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Gentlemen, quite a busy day, eh?

SONG ENZ JR: Too damn busy! There's a teachers' riot!

WANG LIFA: So, now you gentlemen call it a "riot" instead of a "strike"?

TANG THE ORACLE JR: What's happening?

WU XIANGZ JR: They won't get away with it! We've already nabbed more than a hundred and beat the daylights out of more than seventy. That'll teach them!

SONG ENZ JR: They don't know on which side their bread's buttered. If they toe the line, the Yankees will send over rice and flour.

TANG THE ORACLE JR: Exactly. If there's any rice and flour on the way, don't forget me! When the time comes to

divine an auspicious site for your ancestral tombs, I'll do it for free. Well, gentlemen, back to business! *(Exit.)*

WU XIANGZ JR: You were asking just now, how a "strike" becomes a "riot", weren't you, Manager Wang?

WANG LIFA: I'm too old to understand new-fangled things. I just asked, that's all.

SONG ENZ JR: H'm! You all belong to the same bunch.

WANG LIFA: Me? You flatter me!

WU XIANGZ JR: We got no time to waste on you. Let's make it snappy.

WANG LIFA: That means?

SONG ENZ JR: There's someone behind the teachers' riot.

WANG LIFA: Who?

WU XIANGZ JR: Who came here last night?

WANG LIFA: Kang Dali!

SONG ENZ JR: That's the man! Hand him over!

WANG LIFA: If I'd known he was such a character, would I have told you his name? I dealt with your fathers long enough to learn at least that much, I hope!

WU XIANGZ JR: Talking about your age won't get you anywhere! Let's get down to brass tacks.

WANG LIFA: Hand him over or else pay up! Right?

SONG ENZ JR: Dad trained you well! You said it yourself! Either hand him over or those gold bars you've stashed away. Other shops come and go, but you've managed to keep your head above water. You must have a neat little pile tucked away somewhere.

(Erdez Jr rushes in.)

ERDEZ JR: Come quick! There ain't enough of us in the streets. Hurry up!

WU XIANGZ JR: You little bastard, what are you paid for?

ERDEZ JR: I fuckin' did my best. Take a look at my face! It's all swollen!

SONG ENZ JR: Manager, we'll be back in a jiffy. So make up your mind.

WANG LIFA: You aren't afraid I'll run off?

WU XIANGZ JR: Giving us some of your lip, are you, you old devil? We'll follow you to hell even! (*Slaps Wang Lifa, then goes off with Song Enz Jr and Erdez Jr.*)

WANG LIFA (*calling to the rear*): Xiaohua! Daughter-in-law!

ZHOU XIUHUA (*rushing out with Wang Xiaobua*): I heard everything! What are we going to do?

WANG LIFA: Get out of here! Try to catch up with Aunt Kang! At once!

WANG XIAOHUA: I'll get my satchel. (*Exit.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Take some clothes along, Xiaohua. Dad, what will you do all alone?

WANG LIFA: This is my teahouse. I've lived in it. I'll die in it!

(*Wang Xiaobua, her schoolbag slung over her shoulder and some things under her arm, runs back.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Dad!

WANG XIAOHUA: Grandad!

WANG LIFA: Don't cry! Off you go now! (*Takes out all his money and an old photograph.*) Daughter-in-law, take the money. Xiaohua, you take this. It's a photo of the old Yutai Teahouse taken thirty years ago. Give it to your dad. Now go!

(*Pock-mark Liu Jr and Ding Bao come back.*)

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Xiaohua, going to your granny's because the teachers are on strike?

WANG XIAOHUA: Yes.

WANG LIFA (*taking up the cue*): Xiuhua, be back soon!

ZHOU XIUHUA: We'll only stay a couple of days. (*Goes off with Xiaobua.*)

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Wonderful news, Manager Wang. Director Shen's approved my plan.

WANG LIFA: Congratulations!

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Congratulations to you too! The director also approved fixing up the teahouse. As soon as I sug-

gested it he said "Okay". It's the way he says it: "Okay!" Just like a foreigner!

WANG LIFA: What's all this about?

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Your troubles are over! The whole place will be managed by me. You can clear out. Get this straight now. I don't want you pestering me later on.

WANG LIFA: Don't worry! Pure coincidence! I'm on the point of moving out myself.

DING BAO: Pock-mark, the old manager's been here for ages. That's no way to treat him.

POCK-MARK LIU JR: We'll see. I always play fair. Now, Manager Wang, I'm going to fetch the director to look over this place. You tidy it up! Baby, you get hold of Xiao Xinyar. The two of you should be here to welcome the director. Remember to bring some perfume and spray it around the place. It stinks. Let's go! (*Goes off with Ding Bao.*)

WANG LIFA: Wonderful! Truly wonderful! Too wonderful to be true! Ha! Ha!

(*Master Chang enters with a small basket, in which there are some peanuts and paper money — white paper cut in the shape of coins which is scattered at funerals for the dead to use in the next life. He's over seventy but still holds himself straight.*)

CHANG: What's so wonderful, my old friend?

WANG LIFA: Why, Brother Chang! Just the man I was wanting to have a chat with. I'll make a pot of the very best tea. We'll drink it together. (*Goes off to make the tea.*)

(*Qin Zhongyi enters. He has aged beyond recognition and is very shabbily dressed.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Is Manager Wang here?

CHANG: Yes he is. You're —?

QIN ZHONGYI: My name's Qin.

CHANG: Master Qin!

WANG LIFA (*bringing the tea*): Who? Master Qin? I was

just thinking of telling you, another great "reform" is about to take place. Sit down! Sit down!

CHANG: I've got some peanuts here. (*Taking some out with his hand*) Tea and peanuts, what more can you want?

QIN ZHONGYI: But who's going to chew them?

WANG LIFA: Well, I never! At last we manage to get hold of some peanuts but we've no teeth left to chew them with! Isn't that a joke? How are things with you, Master Qin? (*They sit down.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: No one wants to listen to me any more, so I've come to you. I just went to Tianjin to have a look at my factory.

WANG LIFA: But it was confiscated, wasn't it? So they've given it back to its rightful owner again? Congratulations!

QIN ZHONGYI: It's been pulled down!

CHANG and WANG LIFA: Pulled down?

QIN ZHONGYI: Flattened! Forty years of my sweat and blood razed to the ground! Others may not know it but you do, Manager Wang. From my twenties I advocated national salvation through industry. And now . . . when they seized my factory, I couldn't lift a finger. I was a nobody. No match for them! Still I hoped they'd run it well. It could have helped the country to prosper and benefited the people. Now demolished! All the machines sold as scrap! Where in the world, in the whole wide world, can you find a government like this one? I ask you!

WANG LIFA: Years ago, my boarding-house was doing fine. But you insisted on building your warehouse here. Then what happened? The warehouse was sealed up and all the goods stolen! Years ago, I warned you not to sell off all your property. But you insisted so you could start your factory!

CHANG: Remember when? The time I gave that young woman selling her daughter two bowls of noodles and you mocked me.

QIN ZHONGYI: Well, I know better now! Manager Wang, I want to ask you a favour. (*Takes out one or two small*

machine parts and a pen-holder.) My factory's been razed to the ground. This is all I picked up from the rubble. This pen-holder has my name engraved on it. A witness to the number of cheques I signed and the number of plans I drew up. I'll leave these things with you. You can tell your customers stories about them when you've nothing better to do. Tell them, once upon a time there was a foolish man called Qin who was mad on industrialization. After many years, these were the only things he salvaged from the rubble of his factory. The moral of this story is, if you have money spend it all on wine, women and gambling. Only enjoy life. Never try to do anything useful! Tell them, this man called Qin didn't understand these simple truths until he was in his seventies, because he was a real bloody fool!

WANG LIFA: You'd better take care of the pen-holder yourself. I'm moving out of here soon.

CHANG: Where to?

WANG LIFA: What does that matter? Master Chang, Master Qin, I'm not as great as you. Master Qin, you had a great wealth and ambitions. But, as they say, it's the tall tree that bears the brunt of the storm. And you, Master Chang, you never gave in, never accepted injustice to yourself or to others. You never feared the consequences. Me, I've been an obedient subject all my life. I bowed and scraped to everyone. I only wanted a good future for my children. Food and clothes. To be safe and sound. Then, when the Japs were here, my second son ran off. My old missus died of a broken heart and worry. When the Japs finally left, we all hoped life would be better. Who'd have thought — (*Laughs grotesquely.*) Ha! Ha! . . .

CHANG: I'm no better off than you! I earned my own living and worked hard all my life. But where's that got me? Selling peanuts in my seventies. One man's life doesn't count. But what I hoped for was that our country would become a decent place. No longer sat on by foreign powers. But — Ha! Ha! . . .

QIN ZHONGYI: When the Japs were here, they called it co-operation. That was the last I saw of my factory. When our own government came back, my factory somehow became traitor's property. All the goods in the warehouse (*pointing to the rear*) were taken away! Ha! Ha!...

WANG LIFA: Reform, that's one thing I never forgot! Always afraid I'd lag behind. When tea wasn't selling well, I started the boarding-house. When that packed up, I threw in story-telling as a draw. When that didn't work, I swallowed my pride to hire a waitress! One has to live! I did everything just so that we could live! Yes, I handed over bribes when I had to. But I never did anything bad or criminal. Why shouldn't I be allowed to live? Who have I hurt? Who? All those bastards, that "emperor" and his "empress" are having the time of their lives. Why am I singled out to starve? Whose bloody idea is this?

CHANG: All I hoped for is that everyone would be fair and no one bullied. But I saw with my own eyes how my friends, one by one, starved to death or were killed off. I wanted to weep, but no tears came! Master Song, my friend, starved to death! I had to go and beg alms to get a coffin for him.

Chang: Whenever I see a funeral, I try to pick up some of this paper money.



Chang: From the family, a reward of one hundred and twenty strings of cash!

He was lucky to have a friend like me who could get him a rough coffin made of thin planks. What'll happen to me when my time comes? I love our country, but who loves me? See here, (*taking out paper money from his basket*) whenever I see a funeral, I try to pick up some of this paper money. I won't have any burial clothes. I won't even have a coffin. All I can do is to save some paper money for myself. Ha! Ha! . . .

QIN ZHONGYI: Master Chang, let's offer some sacrifice to ourselves. Throw the paper money in the air. Something special for us three old fogeys!

WANG LIFA: Right! Master Chang, don't forget to chant it like in the old days!

CHANG (*stands up, chanting*): Pall-bearers at the four corners,

from the family, a reward of one hundred and twenty strings of cash! (*T'throws the paper money into the air.*)*

QIN ZHONGYI and WANG LIFA: One hundred and twenty strings of cash!

QIN ZHONGYI (*holding a hand of each*): No need to say any more. Goodbye! (*Exit.*)

WANG LIFA: Goodbye!

CHANG: One last cup of yours! (*Drinks it at one gulp.*) Goodbye! (*Exit.*)

WANG LIFA: Goodbye!

(*Ding Bao and Xiao Xinyar enter.*)

DING BAO: They're here, Mr Wang! (*Spraying perfume in the room.*)

WANG LIFA: Good. I'll make room for them. (*Picks up the paper money and heads for the rear.*)

XIAO XINYAR: Mr Wang, why the paper money?

WANG LIFA: Who knows? (*Exit.*)

(*Pock-mark Liu Jr enters.*)

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Here he comes. One on each side, attention!

(*Ding Bao and Xiao Xinyar stand either side of the entrance.*)
(*The sound of a car stopping outside the entrance. Two military policemen enter first. Director Shen enters in off-duty clothes, riding boots and spurs, with a short whip in his hand. Two more military policemen follow him in.*)

*During a funeral procession in the old days, it was the custom in Beijing for a rich family to hire 32, 48 or 64 men to carry the coffin. Four men each carrying a streamer stood at the four corners. They gave signals for the coffin-bearers to march in step and change shifts. When the procession started and when sacrifices were offered on the way, the leading bearer would demand tips from the family or relatives of the dead and announce, in an exaggerated way, the amount of money they had been given. At this moment someone would throw paper money into the air.

SHEN (*as at a military inspection, he examines Ding Bao and Xiao Xinyar. After looking at them*): Okay!

(*Ding Bao gets a chair for Shen to sit in.*)

POCK-MARK LIU JR: May I report? The old Yutai has been in business for more than sixty years. It's well-known in every part of Beijing. Well-situated too! Such an old name would be ideal for our purposes of setting up an intelligence centre. I carry on selling tea here, and (*pointing*) Little Ding Bao and Xiao Xinyar will be the waitresses. I'll be here keeping an eye on people from all walks of life. We're sure to pick up a lot of information and get our hands on the Commies!

SHEN: Okay!

(*Ding Bao takes a packet of Camel cigarettes from a policeman and offers one to Shen; Xiao Xinyar takes a lighter and lights it for him.*)

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Behind here there used to be a warehouse. You've already got rid of the goods in it. It's quite empty now. I'm going to do it up, with a small ballroom in the middle and a few bedrooms at the side, complete with bathrooms. When you have a moment to relax, sir, you can come here to dance, play cards and have coffee. If it's late, and you feel like it, you can stay the night. Like it's your private club. With me in charge, compared to your official residence, it'll be easier, freer and gayer!

SHEN: Okay!

DING BAO: Director, may I make a suggestion?

SHEN: Okay!

DING BAO: It's a pity about the poor old manager here. If we give him a doorman's uniform, he can take care of the honoured guests getting in and out of cars. He's been here for ages. Everyone knows him. He's like a trademark!

SHEN: Okay! Summon him!

POCK-MARK LIU JR: Yes, sir! (*Runs to the back.*) Manager

Wang! Old manager! Friend of my father! Old Mr Wang!
(*Disappears. Reappears a moment later.*) May I report, sir,
he's hanged himself! He's dead!
SHEN: Okay! Okay!

(*Curtain*)

Appendix

As some time must be allowed between the acts for the actors to change their make-up, I have devised a character (who should be considered as one of the *dramatis personae*) reciting improvised doggerels with bamboo clappers as a sort of entr'acte. That may make the intervals seem shorter and at the same time give people some idea about the background of the play.

Act One (*Before the curtain rises*)

SILLY YANG (*recites*):

I'm Silly Yang, and from shop to shop,
I make my rounds till here I stop.
This great teahouse, Yutai by name,
A booming business, fortune and fame.
Trade is brisk, lots of tea sold,
Everyone welcome, young and old.
Some sing or hum, others sit and chat,
Each in his gown, each in his hat.
This is where bird fanciers meet,
Where cricket- and grasshopper-owners compete.
With tea and snacks, you can while away the day,
But not a crumb for those who cannot pay.
Here chess players meet for their favourite game,
Tasty meat balls, the winners claim.

Pomp is loved, but manners one must note,
Everything has style, even clearing the throat.
But above all else, get this straight,
Never, if you please, discuss affairs of state.
Matters there, alas, aren't good at all,
The Great Qing Empire seems heading for a fall.
Mandarins and generals have one common trick,
Faced by foreign armies, they turn tail double quick.
Foreign goods you'll find everywhere,
With opium thrown in as an extra fare.
The peasants' plight, words cannot say,
Forced to sell their children, there's no other way.
The rich got richer, the poor got worse,
Till Tan Sitong demanded a reverse.
Kang Youwei supported him and Liang Qichao,
All wanting the reforms, here and now.
But such changes the despots' doom presaged,
No wonder the Empress Dowager was enraged.
"Treason!" she screamed, wanting blood,
So the movement was crushed, nipped in the bud.
But I'd better stop and hold myself in check,
Talking too freely will surely risk my neck!

(*The curtain rises revealing the teahouse, into which Silly Yang enters.*)

Beating my clappers, into the teahouse I go,
Hoping that somebody some interest will show.
Would you like a story to cheer you up
Of heroes and heroines, while you enjoy your cup?

(*Wang Lifa comes over to intervene.*)

Manager Wang, for you these seem profitable times,
Don't be hard on poor old me, living by my rhymes!
(*Exit.*)

Act Two (*Before the curtain rises*).

SILLY YANG (*recites*):

Beating my clappers, here I am again,
Life's hard for a rhymester, so a beggar I remain.
The Republic was set up and we all did acquiesce,
Our pigtails were cut off, but the country's still a mess.
Manager Wang, reforming, all the tricks did play,
To give his teahouse a new look in every way.
(*Sotto voce*) But all his efforts, alas, are looking pretty
thin,
For with heads he lost, nor with tails did win.
Warlords were rampant, civil wars routine,
One warlord hardly ousted, another on the scene.
Zhao would fight Qian and Sun would fight Li,
Wars involving thousands for no reason one could see.
In order to fight, one must buy guns,
So to foreign countries went silver by the tons.
And warlords are encouraged in their careers,
While China is carved up into many spheres.
When armies appear, poor peasants are squeezed,
Since their grain and beasts are always seized.
Now, Manager Wang, his reformer's zeal burning,
Has turned his shop into a seat of learning.
With well-spoken students as lodgers in the place,
The teahouse has acquired a more educated face.
But pray to Heaven no brutish soldiers come,
For wrecking the teahouse is their idea of fun.
But I'd better not go on in this gloomy way,
I ought to wish him luck on his opening day.
With the crowd of well-wishers, I'll now mingle,
After all, I'm great at making up some jingle! (*Exit.*)

(*At his second entrance*)*

SILLY YANG (*recites*):

The old Yutai now looks brand new,
I hope all your dreams will come true.

WANG LIFA: I'm not dealing with the likes of you today.
We're not opening till tomorrow.

SILLY YANG:

Ah, tomorrow'll be beautiful, tomorrow'll be fine,
For you gold and silver, come rain come shine.

(*Cannon-shots are heard.*)

Cannons in the distance, something of a blow,
For your grand opening they may spoil the show.

WANG LIFA: Oh, get out of here!

(*Exit Silly Yang.*)

Act Three (*Before the curtain rises*)

SILLY YANG (*recites*):

When trees are old, their sap is spent,
When men are old, their backs are bent.
Needless to say, I'm done for altogether,
Even Manager Wang's at the end of his tether.
Worn down by age, his money gone,
His shabby winter jacket is all he's on.
The Japs held old Beijing for eight long years,
Those were the days of blood and tears.
For those who survived, life was hell on earth,
The Eighth Route Army's victories, the only source of
mirth.

* In the 1958 production this scene was inserted after Wang Shufen's first exit and the entrance of the refugees, cf p.40 above.

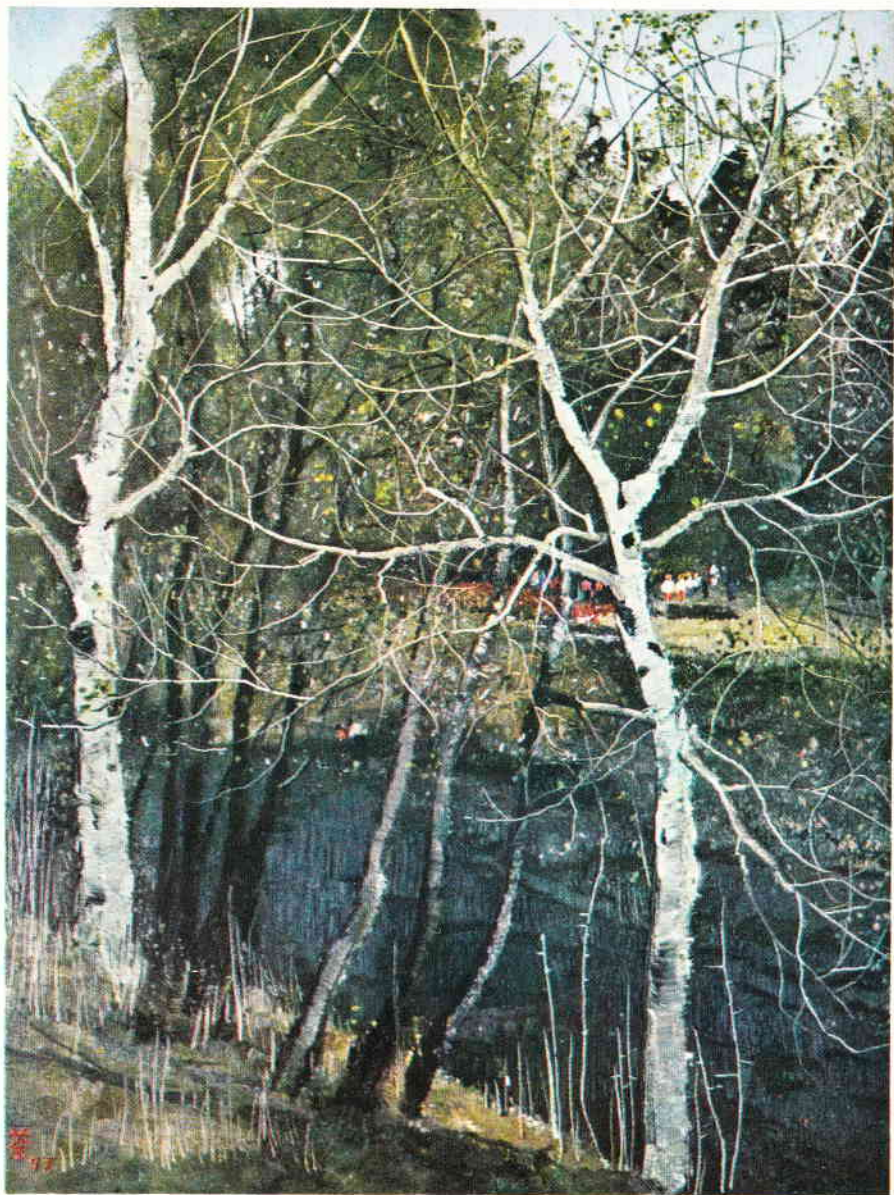
Hoping against hope such days would soon be past,
Till the day came when the war was won at last.
Then to old Beijing came the KMT!
As cruel a tyrant as the Japs could ever be.
Poor old Wang, disillusioned through and through,
Keeping alive is all that he can do.
His teahouse collapsing before his eyes,
Won't perk up, no matter what he tries.
What in the heavens above or the earth below,
Can stop the officials from having all the dough? (*Exit.*)

(At the end, after Wang Lifa's death, Silly Yang enters once more, to find Ding Bao weeping.)

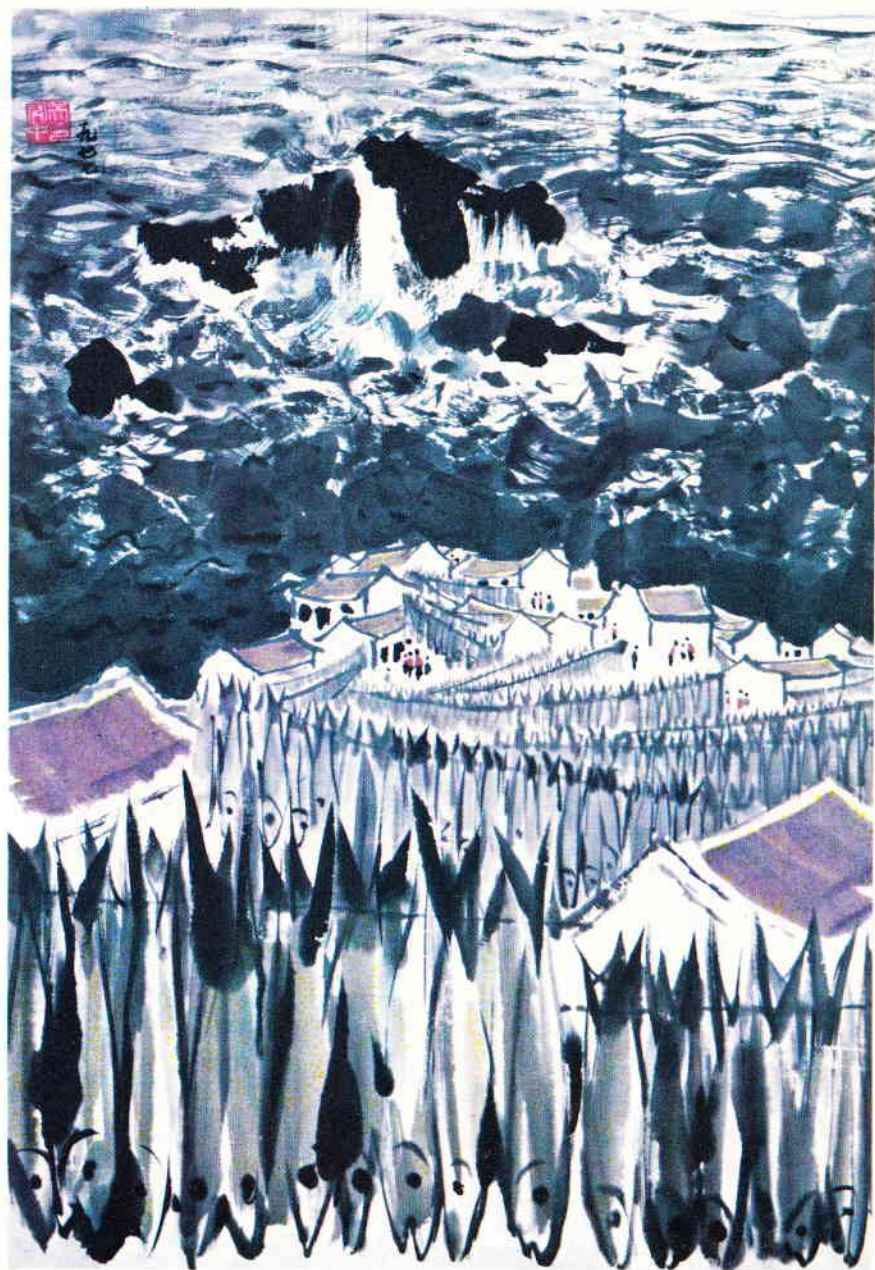
Now, little girl, don't be so forlorn,
It's always darkest before the dawn.
Now, little girl, don't let it haunt you so,
Water from the Western Hills to the east shall flow.
That water is sweet, not the bitter stuff of yore,
And all who drink it will be slaves no more.



A Mountain Village After Rain



Early Spring



Fish



Zhang Anzhi

The Art of Wu Guanzhong

Wu Guanzhong was born in 1919 in a village of Yixing County, Jiangsu Province, the eldest of nine children of a poor primary school teacher. After finishing primary school, he entered a teachers' school in Wuxi which provided board and lodging. On the eve of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937, he was enrolled in the National Hangzhou Art Academy, moving with the academy to Yunnan and Sichuan as the war expanded. Despite the difficult conditions, he persevered in his studies. At first he studied both traditional Chinese and western painting, but later concentrated on oils. After graduation, he became an assistant in the art department of Chongqing University. In 1946 he sat and passed an examination for a scholarship to study abroad. In the summer of 1947, he left China for France.

In the early autumn of 1949, I met Wu Guanzhong in London where he was spending his holidays. Although it was an unexpected encounter, we had a friendly chat, as both of us were art students and had much in common. At the beginning of 1950, I visited Paris and met him again. After showing me around his college, we went to his room, where he took out a lot of drawings which he had done in the last few years. I liked particularly his

Zhang Anzhi is an art theoretician, now teaching at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.



Wu Guanzhong

sketches and oil landscapes. He told me he had twice saved up to spend his holidays in Italy, travelling to Rome, Florence, Milan, Venice and Naples to see the masterpieces painted by the celebrated Renaissance and post-Renaissance artists. He also visited places of historical interest and beauty-spots, where he sketched the scenery. He also often went to the outskirts of Paris to sketch. Once a fellow student and he embarked on a one-week sketching tour, sailing down the Seine on a small boat, carrying their tent and other things. Unfortunately their boat capsized on the very first day. Unable to swim, Wu clung to the boat for about an hour until he was rescued by another boat which happened to

pass by. He recalled humorously afterwards, "I nearly sank to the bottom of that beautiful river, which had often been painted by the impressionists."

Many of the works he did in Paris depicted narrow lanes, solitary lamp-posts, buildings proudly straddling the two sides of a street, row upon row of roofs and large stretches of greyish walls in the slanting sunlight. All these paintings are characterized by their soft tones, and gentle brush-strokes. Though tranquil, they are imbued with enthusiasm and their simplicity is full of imagination. When I first saw his works I detected a profound influence of Utrillo, which he admitted readily. We can still see traces of his early European works in his paintings of black-tiled roofs over white walls in south China, or the soft sunlight on the mountain village courtyards in the north and southwest. All his works have a lyrical style that is lively, fresh and harmonious.

At the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, he received instruction mainly from Professor J. M. Souverbie, whom he held in great esteem. He considers that among his teachers Souverbie in France and Pan Tianshou in China had the strongest influence on him. He tried through their works and teachings to grasp the laws of artistic creation as well as the feelings, individuality and the spirit of the times which art expresses.

Returning to Beijing in October 1950, Wu Guanzhong first taught at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and then in the department of architecture at Qinghua University. From 1955 he taught oil painting at Beijing Normal University and Beijing Art Academy until he was transferred in 1964 to the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts. Being colleagues for ten years afforded us the chance to get to know each other well. Wu was an earnest and friendly teacher, loved by all his students. As a leader of the teaching and research group, he made many contributions. Yet, however busy, he always found time to paint.

His experiences taught him to despise difficulties and devote all his energies to art and the people.

From 1950, when he came back from France, until 1956, he painted many landscapes of Beijing and of his birth-place south

of the Changjiang (Yangzi) River. From 1957 he has travelled to many places in the north, southeast and southwest. Almost every year he spent several months carting his easel, paints and brushes up mountains or along beaches, painting many of China's beauty-spots such as the Changjiang Gorges, the Emei, Taishan and Huangshan Mountains, and the primal forests in Yunnan. He even stayed for five months on the Tibetan Plateau, where conditions are very difficult for painters. His paintings both convey his passionate love for his country and portray the beauty and inspiring sights of New China.

Whenever he arranged with friends to go sketching, he was always the first to set out and the last to return. For food, he only brought some steamed bread to eat. If he forgot to bring water with him, he would do without. One day his friends, who had returned, were waiting for him to join them in a meal together. When he did not turn up, they went to fetch him, and found him carefully pinching with tweezers the insects stuck on his canvas. Another story tells how he went to paint on the top of a hill near Guilin on a cold day. As the wind was too strong to put up his easel, his wife, Zhu Biqin, volunteered to hold it, becoming a living easel for him! A librarian, Zhu Biqin works at the same institute as her husband. She not only works hard but also runs the home. She has done much to encourage her husband, and is greatly admired by their friends.

Since returning to China, Wu has tried to develop oil painting with Chinese characteristics. He has said, "I groped my way forward, step by step. Starting with landscapes, I have applied myself to conceiving ideas and images and using forms loved by the Chinese people."

When he sees an attractive object, he first works out the composition of a painting, thinking how best to express his idea, to highlight the main image, and to portray the background and the secondary objects as a foil, or as he puts it, "I'm tempering steel while dressing ore!" In his painting in Chinese ink, *Lijiang City at the Foot of Yulong Mountain*, there are quaint cypresses dominating the foreground with the city's overlapping roofs and the distant snow-covered peak visible through the trees and some

clouds at the top sailing across the sky. These convey successfully the atmosphere of the mountain city. In his oil painting *Spring Bamboo Shoots*, a grove of slender young bamboo stands erect, with innumerable fresh shoots at the bottom. In the background, only a glimpse of a green mountain and rays of light peeping through an expanse of dense shrubs are visible. This simple but fresh composition is nevertheless arresting and thought-provoking. In *A Fishing Village by the Lijiang River* done in Chinese ink shows a riverside village and distant hills. Cormorants on the sandy banks bring the whole picture to life. All these are among his recent works. His ingenuous composition and artistic maturity make them more imaginative than his earlier works.

The Fishing Harbour, though in oil, is similar to Chinese impressionism. At the first sight, Wu seems to have drawn it freely. On closer examination, however, the visible and invisible are carefully balanced. In appearance, its composition may seem rough, but in fact it is well thought out. A limpid river's colours are applied so lightly that the texture of the canvas is exposed. In contrast, to emphasize the charm of the rape flowers, a thick layer of lemon yellow was applied. With these methods he sought to create a poetical atmosphere.

In recent years Wu Guanzhong has endeavoured to modernize traditional Chinese painting. In his impressive *A Mountain City by the Changjiang River*, he blended the Chinese art of composition with western techniques of perspective like the panning of a camera to secure a panoramatic effect, with the whole mountain city in view. He has a unique view which has not been fully understood by others. He regards his oil paintings as well as those in Chinese ink as essentially Chinese, both regarding content, including subject-matter and sentiment, and methods of expression. The mediums used, in his opinion, are of secondary importance.

What he has said and what he does in practice show that he has never mechanically borrowed the forms and techniques from traditional Chinese painting or from oil painting. Instead he has used different mediums to achieve different effects. In his *A Mountain Village After Rain*, in Chinese ink, the distant mountain was painted with a big brush and ink washes were applied

so that its outline was diffused to convey humidity in the air. In painting hills, houses or foliage, he combines the methods of dotting and applying washes, lines with planes and colours with ink to achieve harmony and a strong colour effect. With a fine weasel-haired brush, he draws twigs on a canvas to make them as stiff and vigorous as he does on rice paper in Chinese ink. At the finish of an oil painting, he sometimes highlights the gleam on twigs or bamboos by scraping the surface with his palette-knife, as in *Spring Bamboo Shoots*. These many assimilated techniques, Chinese and western, modern and ancient, have to conform to one aim, to show China in all its magnificence and to express the painter's true feelings.

As far as his style is concerned, in the fifties and sixties he painted mainly emerald fields, mountains covered with azaleas, children playing at the threshing-grounds, women in red washing at the riversides, sparse woods with yellowing leaves, or pale sunlight in autumn. His paintings seem spontaneous, but they reflect reality and the atmosphere of early spring and autumn. Wu Guanzhong greatly admires the Italian Renaissance painter Botticelli's masterpieces, the *Allegory of Spring* and *Birth of Venus* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*. In his paintings we can detect traces of Botticelli's lucidity, while his brush-strokes and intense use of colour seemed influenced by Van Gogh. Years of practice and study have varied his composition and broadened his vision. With age, his style has become deeper and more solemn. Yet his solemnity is touched with brightness and his simplicity contains rhythmical variations.

With forty years' experience as an artist behind him, Wu Guanzhong has made remarkable successes in creating a new type of Chinese painting and exploring ways to develop oil painting with Chinese characteristics. In his own words, he has traversed a road that is "from Chinese to foreign, and then from foreign to Chinese". This means that he began with studying traditional Chinese painting, assimilating western technique. In the final analysis, however, his roots are Chinese. Now that our art is flourishing again, I hope that this vigorous old painter will produce more and better works.

Ai Qing

Poems Written During a Visit to West Germany

The Wall

Like a knife the wall severs
The city in two:
One half to the east,
The other to the west.

How high is the wall?
How thick?
How long?
However high and thick and long,
It cannot surpass China's Great Wall.
It's merely a historical relic,

The poet Ai Qing visited Germany in May this year. These poems were written during his tour of the Rhine valley.

A nation's wound,
Which no one admires.

What if it's three metres high,
Fifty centimetres thick
And forty-five kilometres long?
Even if it's a thousand times higher,
A thousand times thicker,
A thousand times longer,
It cannot blot out the clouds in the sky,
The wind, the rain and the sunshine.

Nor can it stop
The wings of the birds,
The song of the nightingale.

Nor can it stop
The water flowing and the air.

Nor can it stop
The thoughts of millions
Freer than the wind!
The will of millions
Stronger than the earth!
The wishes of millions
More enduring than time!

Bonn, May 22

Marx's Old House

Trier, an ancient, small town
In a green valley.

In Trier
Are many Roman relics;
The town has been invaded
By foreign aggressors.

The Moselle's green waters
Flow through the town,
Flow to the Rhine.

On its banks
Are vineyards.
Moselle is famed for its wine,
And Trier is a hospitable town.

People from Asia, Africa,
America and Australia,

All visit Trier;
They do not come to drink Moselle,
Nor see the antiquities and sights.

They come because here
Was born
The greatest man of modern times.

Trier, May 23

Munich

The city of Munich
Is like a Bavarian barmaid,
Robust and charming,
For whom all men fall.

But the city
Has a bad name.
Everyone curses her,
As a symbol of calamity.

For she was once
Involved with a pyromaniac,
An utter gangster,
The devil himself.

There was also an Englishman,
Carrying an umbrella,
And a Frenchman with a narrow forehead;
These three drank beer together
And sold out their neighbour.

Then the whole of Europe
Was enveloped in flames;
Even Munich herself
Was caught in the conflagration.

She crawled out
From the ashes
With tears in her eyes.
She complained,
Yet how could she blame others?

The wounds of war were only healed
Thirty-five long years later.
Though she has lost her youth,
Her Bavarian beer
Still draws visitors from everywhere.
The second generation of Munich
Is prettier than her mother and warmer.

I only hope she won't make friends again
With the devil,
That she will be on her guard,
Learning the lesson of her mother,
And live more wisely. . . .

Munich, May 30, after a banquet in the Townhall

Huang Yongyu

There Was Such a Time

People cursed in secret
Shedding silent tears,
Sighing alone at night,
Hearing their neighbours
Weeping quietly.

Every trainload was full of calamity;
Every home was filled with foreboding.
Even the most law-abiding citizens swore in anger,
While those who sang well lost their voices.

When people heard the truth, they had to keep it secret,
While blatant lies printed in the newspapers were holy gospel.
All people old and young became good actors,
While all professional actors' faces were expressionless.

There was such a time,
But, thank Heaven,
It is good that such a time
Will never come again!

Huang Yongyu, the well-known artist, also writes poems. These three poems were written recently. The first poem describes the time when the "gang of four" was in power. *Flowers of Hope* describes the spring of 1976 when people went to Tiananmen Square to mourn for Premier Zhou Enlai.

Flowers of Hope

In hundreds and thousands of nightmares,
Young girls were planting flowers of hope,
Their tears falling like rain in spring,
Sacred white flowers covering the square.

It is such a true story,
Showing the devil's desperation;
At night
It stealthily crushed in its claws
All the flowers in the square.
But in the morning
All the flowers bloomed again more wildly
Like a boundless ocean.

The girls' tears and flowers
In those days of mourning,
Cold and heavy like iron,
Were dedicated to one person
In whom,
In his voice and smile,
Lay the hope of all these girls.

To Our Wives

If they were not good daughters,
They would not be such good sweethearts;
If they were not good sweethearts,
They would not be such good wives;
If they were not such good wives,
They would not be such good mothers.

I am proud to have such a wife,
A wife whose hair is turning grey,
A wife who has stayed with me all these years.

Once we were both young,
Running, chasing after dreams.
Now we together grow old;
Our lined brows reveal our sufferings.

People remark
I always look so cheerful;
I reply
I have been spoilt by my wife.

People ask
Why I didn't weep when I was injured;
I answer
Because my wife was at my side.

I am proud of my motherland;
With so many fine, steady wives,
Some young,
Some middle-aged,
Some whose hair is turning white,
Wives who have fought side by side with their husbands.

Sun Yuchun

In Vino Veritas

A few dishes, a wine cup and a pair of chopsticks were laid out on the red sandalwood table. Erxi had just poured himself out some wine when a man entered. Raising his head, he said in surprise, "Ah, Secretary Guo!"

Guo Shichang, the commune's Party secretary, stood with a foot either side of the doorway. Surveying the scene, he chortled and said, "Ha! You're in a good mood today. Drinking by yourself, eh? Where's your wife?"

"Gone to see her mother." The worried frown on Erxi's face vanished, as he went to the kitchen to fetch another cup and pair of chopsticks. Filling the cup with wine, he remarked, "You're a rare visitor, Secretary Guo! Have a drink."

Guo did not refuse. Plumping down in a chair, he picked up the wine bottle to examine it and said, "Whew! So even your tiny village has famous wines like this. That's good!" He drained the cup in one gulp. "A fine wine! Excellent!" he praised, as he wiped his mouth with his plump hand. Then he popped some fried peanuts into his mouth. "I've come to apologize to you,

Erxi. You know me well. I've been a cadre too long How old are you now?"

"Twenty-seven, going on twenty-eight."

"Of course! When I became a cadre, you were still a twinkle in your father's eye! With the years it's hard to avoid becoming bureaucratic. Take now. I don't mind your putting up big-character posters criticizing me. After all, it's in the constitution. Everyone can speak out his views and argue. It was wrong to have you locked up, especially when you had just got married. I didn't know about it then. But that doesn't matter. Still, however you look at it, I was responsible. These few days I've been thinking it over. I realized that your criticisms are fair. You were quite right."

Erxi was simple and naive. He had no idea about flattery and hypocrisy. When he spoke he was rather shy. His mother thought him inarticulate and his father-in-law disliked his reticence. His wife often reproached him, "What's the matter? Have you lost your tongue?"

Hearing Guo's words, Erxi didn't know how to reply but he felt certain that he meant what he said. Since the land reform Secretary Guo had been very powerful in this part of the country. Every word he said counted. No one could challenge his authority. But now he was personally apologizing to a humble team leader. That was the style of an old cadre. When the Party called for more democracy, he dropped his pretentious airs. With these thoughts, Erxi poured out another cup for Guo and said respectfully, "Drink another cup, Secretary Guo!"

Guo drank three cups in a row and then took out a cigarette to light. Suddenly he chucked it at Erxi and took out another for himself. Flurried and blushing a little, Erxi pushed it back, saying he did not smoke. Then seeing Guo relax, puffing at his cigarette, Erxi began cautiously, "Secretary Guo. . . . My mother said I had too many opinions and my father-in-law felt I was just showing off. But in fact they both supported the posters. You can't plant rape on low-lying land. Last year we lost everything, including the seeds. This year again you've given instructions about planting it. Isn't it as clear as day that we'll suffer?"

Guo chewed a piece of meat and mumbled, "Yes, we only paid attention to class struggle these past years. Not enough to production. We made arbitrary decisions and gave orders blindly. Even used coercion where. . . ." Suddenly he spat with disgust, for he had chewed some aniseed by mistake, and took a gulp of wine. Erxi apologetically searched the dish for the aniseed. Seeing the secretary intent on drinking, Erxi took up the thread of the conversation, "Yes, the commune members have suffered a lot. Dried sweet potatoes are our staple food. We used to sell eggs to make a little pocket money on the side. When rearing hens was forbidden, that put a stop to that. Life was even harder. I often asked myself if we would have to eat sweet potatoes all our lives. I wondered why we couldn't plant rice on the low ground. Now it will be better. Everyone's happy that the production teams have the right to decide what to plant. Next year if we don't get a bumper harvest, I'll crawl on my hands and knees backwards round Toad Canal three times. . . . Cheers! Secretary Guo!" As he was speaking his mind, Erxi became more eloquent.

Another three cups later, Guo's face had turned red and his forehead shone with perspiration. Unbuttoning his jacket, he felt talkative and began slowly, "Erxi, I don't want to criticize you again, but after two cups of wine, you wouldn't know that a pan is made of iron. You young people don't care if you make fools of yourselves boasting. How can you be sure of getting a bumper harvest next year if you decide what to plant? Thirty years I've been a leader, yet I still haven't got rid of our poverty. But you brag away. Don't you have any respect for us old cadres? Of course you're young still, only in your twenties. When I was your age, I didn't fear anything either. I was like a rebel in the *Heroes of the Marsh*.^{*} Even the earth trembled when I stamped!"

He paused for a while and then pointed at the table. "Take this table, for example," he continued. "It was me who distributed it during the land reform, wasn't it? A hero doesn't brag about his past though. Now the Party tells us to be more democratic.

* An ancient Chinese novel about a peasant uprising.

You think I don't know what that means? But you've got some queer ideas. You think it means putting up wall posters against your leaders and kicking up a fuss! That's all wrong! You may have democracy, but I have centralism!" The more he spoke the angrier he became, banging the table with his chopsticks. Erxi became more and more bewildered as he listened, wondering what the commune Party secretary was driving at.

Seeing Erxi's puzzled look, Guo again remembered the purpose of his visit. He lowered his voice. "I don't want you to land in trouble, so I'm warning you. A handful of trouble-makers are using the word democracy to stir things up. Don't let yourself play into their hands. It will be too late to feel sorry if that happens!"

He helped himself to another drink, and then filled his cup again before Erxi could pour one out for him.

Clutching his chopsticks, Erxi was in a daze, as he gradually realized that Guo had not come to make a sincere apology, and that the right to decide about production was an illusion. Frowning, he said nothing more.

After finishing that cup, Guo hiccuped three times. His face turned from red to yellow. Erxi, afraid Guo was getting so plastered that he would do something stupid, suggested, "You've had a lot to drink, Secretary Guo. Why not lie down on the bed and have a rest?"

"Not yet." And just to prove that he wasn't drunk, Guo lifted his head and downed another cup of wine. After holding the cup to his lips, he took it away, wanting to refill it. But as the bottle was empty, he threw the cup on the table. It rolled along the edge and smashed to the floor before Erxi could catch it.

As if he'd been slapped, Erxi's face grew hot and he stood awkwardly at the table, staring at Guo. The secretary hiccuped again and scratched himself. He was really tipsy. "In Vino Veritas," as the saying goes. Now Guo struck the table and spoke out what was on his mind.

"You really think I came here to apologize to you, Jiang Erxi? Shit! I wouldn't give you that honour! But Secretary Zhou of the county Party committee criticized me strongly and forced me

to come. Otherwise I wouldn't touch your bloody wine! Hell! You think your little posters scared me? What crap! I don't give a damn about ten thousand posters, let alone your eight or ten! During the Cultural Revolution, there were posters everywhere, but no one touched a hair of my head. You're too eager to get the right to decide. Too big for your boots! You demand this right and that right. That means seizing power from the working class! But if you get all the power, what about me? I know what'll happen if I give you the right to decide today. Give you an inch and you'll take a mile! . . . Democracy? Shit! Yes, I mean it. You can go to the county Party committee and tell Zhou Yun what I, Guo Shichang, said. If you want . . . power, go . . . and stick up your po—posters. . . ."

Erxi was choked with anger while tears welled up in his eyes. He thought, "You often said fine words, but in fact your ideas stink!" Now he realized it would not be easy to achieve democracy. One simply could not rely on democracy bestowed as a favour. In fact, democracy was not yet within his reach. Swallowing his wine in one mouthful he replied decisively, "Yes, I'll certainly write more posters!"

His quiet defiance sobered Guo up a bit. Shooting a sidelong glance at Erxi who refused to be intimidated, Guo lost his temper and bellowed, "All right! Just you dare stick up another poster and sabotage the country's stability and unity. I'll have you arrested! Go ahead and try it!" Then supported by the table, he rose unsteadily to his feet and staggered out, muttering, "Don't think I can't squash you. Otherwise being a cadre for th—thirty years means nothing. J—just wait and see, you snotty little twerp!"

Erxi sat motionless at the table strewn with empty dishes and chopsticks. "There is no use in getting angry," he thought. "What was to be done now?" He began thinking seriously.

Yang Shuxin

Some Chinese Cartoon Films

Cartoon films are a foreign art in China with a history of only a few decades. By the middle thirties the Wan brothers began making cartoons in Shanghai, copying their foreign contemporaries in style and form. In the late forties, however, on the eve of Liberation, Changchun Studio in the northeast, which was already liberated, made two cartoon films, *Catching the Turtle in a Jar* and one with puppets, *Dreaming to Be Emperor*. The former showed how the People's Liberation Army annihilated the Kuomintang army, while the latter was a scathing satire on Chiang Kai-shek. These were the earliest cartoons made in liberated China. After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 our cartoon film industry began to thrive. The early cartoon films, however, were influenced by American and Soviet styles and lacked a distinct national flavour. Now, after thirty years, our cartoon film industry has begun to develop its own Chinese style. The long colour cartoon film *Monkey Makes Havoc in Heaven** made in

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1978.

the middle sixties is an outstanding example. Zhang Guangyu, the distinguished artist, created its special artistic style by adopting traditional Chinese painting techniques and by assimilating aspects of local operas, folk art, sculptures, New-Year pictures, shadow plays, papercuts and cultural relics. Since 1949 we have produced more than one hundred cartoon films.

Cartoon films open up a marvellous and wonderful world for children, stimulating their imagination, increasing their knowledge and giving them a moral education in a lively way. Not long ago I took my children to see the cartoon films *Tadpoles in Search of Their Mother*, *The Cowherd's Flute*, *The Magic Brush*, *The Golden Conch*, *The Panda's Shop* and *One Night in an Art Gallery*. Sitting among the children, listening to their happy laughter, I felt like a child myself, fascinated like them by the magical world appearing on the screen.

Tadpoles in Search of Their Mother was an interesting film using traditional Chinese ink and wash for the first time, based on the paintings of the great artist Qi Baishi (1864-1957). The tadpoles who did not know what their mother looked like became green with envy when two little chicks were called by their mother. The chicks left the riverside, where they had been playing, and ran over happily to her. This determined the tadpoles to look for their mother. Swimming along, they came across Grandad Shrimp and asked him what their mother was like. "Your mother has two big eyes," he replied. The tadpoles went on their way, and soon, seeing Mother Goldfish they rushed over and called to her. She told them, "I'm not your mother. She has a white belly!" Then they mistook a crab for their mother, who told them that their mother had only four legs. When they met a turtle and called her mother, the baby turtle beside her became so jealous that she quickly climbed on to her mother's back and said, "Mothers and children look alike." A catfish taking a nap at the bottom of the river was approached next. Very angry at being disturbed, she was about to tell them off, when their mother, the frog, appeared. Examining her carefully, the tadpoles saw she had two big eyes, a white belly and four legs. "Could she be our mother?" they wondered, but she wasn't like them at all. Then their mother

dispelled their doubts telling them, "When you grow up you'll be just like me!" This charming story teaches children to examine problems from all sides and not be led astray by certain facts.

Another cartoon in Chinese ink, *The Cowherd's Flute*, is based on the painting of Li Keran, the well-known artist. One day, a boy who was looking after a buffalo for a people's commune dozed off while he was resting in a tree. He dreamed of losing the buffalo and of searching for it, until he finally found it. Attracted by the splashing of a waterfall, the buffalo had plodded over and lingered there. The boy made a bamboo flute and lured it back by a delightful tune. When he awoke from his dream it was dusk, so he returned to his village on the back of his buffalo. Without any dialogue, the cartoon uses music and sound effects to praise children who care for collective property.

The Magic Brush is a cartoon film using puppets, describing how a cowherd, Ma Liang, opposed a corrupt official. One day, Ma Liang with his buffalo passed by the official's home, where he peeped in at the window and saw an artist painting a picture for the official. Ma Liang longed to have his own paint-brush. A kind immortal gave him a magic one, so that everything he painted became real. The greedy official heard about this and ordered Ma Liang to paint gold ingots for him. When Ma Liang refused, he was thrown into jail. So Ma Liang drew a door on the prison wall and escaped with all the poor peasants who were imprisoned there. When he was captured later, the official confiscated his brush and planned to have him killed. The official then ordered that a money tree should be painted using the magic brush, but when it did not become real, he had Ma Liang brought back from the execution ground. He then forced him to draw a gold mountain. Ma Liang drew one on the horizon across the sea. Ma Liang was made to draw a boat so that the official could ship the gold back. Then he and his men scrambled into it. At once Ma Liang added some huge waves, so that the sea became rough. Thus the wicked official and his men were drowned.

The Golden Conch, a film made from papercuts is also based on folklore. An industrious young man used to go fishing every morning. One day, all he caught in his net was a golden conch,

which he brought home and put in his water vat. Magically the conch turned into a beautiful maiden. She was actually a fairy princess who lived on an island in the Lanhai Sea. She cooked and sewed for the young man, and they lived happily together. Three years later, the conch maiden's mother, the Sea Goddess, found her daughter. Refusing to believe she could be happy with a poor fisherman, her mother ordered her to return to their fairy island before daybreak, or else she would cause the village to be flooded. Three times the young fisherman braved the high winds and towering waves to reach the fairy island to plead with the Sea Goddess, who tried to seduce him with jewelry and beautiful girls. Then she threatened him by turning her daughter into a white-haired old woman. But the young man's loyalty and courage finally convinced the Sea Goddess to give her consent to the marriage. The film praises true love.

One Night in an Art Gallery is a satirical cartoon film about how the "gang of four" and their followers attacked and framed innocent people with false charges and labels, or, as the Chinese say colloquially, with "rods and hats". In the film Rod and Hat are two negative characters. The story tells how they were opposed by the figures in the paintings, after they had sabotaged a children's art exhibition. The film attempts to expose the "gang of four's" dictatorial rule in culture and show the indignation and opposition of the people to them. As there is no dialogue, the story relies entirely on animation.

The Panda's Shop, a cartoon film using coloured papercuts, is set in a bamboo forest, where panda runs a store with his son to assist him. On opening day a giraffe, hippopotamus, elephant and squirrel came to shop. The giraffe, who was going on a trip, wanted a scarf. The hippopotamus wanted an extra large face mask, as he had a cold. The elephant needed a belt, while the squirrel required a pair of dancing shoes. The longest scarf in the store was too short for the giraffe's neck, while the largest mask covered only half of the hippopotamus' mouth. The belt almost squeezed the elephant to death, while the squirrel could make a nest in the smallest boots. Panda, not wishing to disappoint his customers, sent his son to find the correct sizes. Little panda first

went by bike to the shoemakers for a pair of small shoes for squirrel. At the sports shop he found a long leather strap of a hand ring for the elephant. Then he went to the knitting co-op when he ordered an extra long scarf to be made at once for giraffe, before dashing off to the mask factory. While crossing a bridge made by a single plank he suddenly saw a hen with a basket of eggs coming his way. Braking abruptly, he tumbled into the river. When he came to, he was lying in a hospital bed, his eyes focussing on Dr Horse who wore an extra large mask. Overjoyed, little panda begged Dr Horse to lend him a spare one so that he could provide his customers with all their goods. This film teaches children to help others.



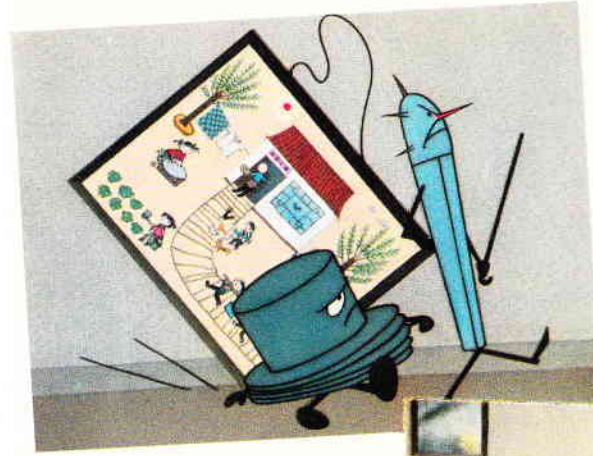
Monkey at Water Curtain Cave

MONKEY MAKES HAVOC IN HEAVEN

Cartoon Films



Monkey Fighting One of the Gods



A NIGHT IN THE GALLERY



THE PANDA STORE





Tadpoles Making Friends
with the Little Chicks



Tadpoles Calling Goldfish
Their Mother



Tadpoles Finally Found
Their Mother

TADPOLES IN SEARCH OF THEIR MOTHER

INTRODUCING A CLASSICAL PAINTING

Tian Xiu

“The Connoisseur’s Studio” by Wen Zhengming

It was commonly believed that landscape painters lived to a great age because they found spiritual sustenance in hills and streams. Giving free rein to their fancies and enjoying nature among mountains, forests, bamboo groves, limpid brooks, racing currents, gauzy mists and rosy clouds, they seldom worried about personal gains and losses. Thus among the famous landscape painters of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Wang Jian lived to the age of eighty, Wang Hui to eighty-six, Wu Li to eighty-seven and Wang Shimin to eighty-nine. But the man who impressed people most was the Ming-dynasty painter Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), who lived to be nearly ninety, retaining his exuberance and continuing to work right up to the time of his death.

Wen Zhengming was born in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. His ancestors had all held official posts but his father, a prefect, died when he was only sixteen, leaving his family not very well-off. He

studied hard, hoping to become an official, and, after passing the examination in Beijing, he was assigned to the Hanlin Academy to help compile historical material.

While still a boy Wen Zhengming had enjoyed painting, and he continued to paint and practise calligraphy in the academy, so that his colleagues sneered at him, "Our Hanlin Academy is not a painting academy. Why should we allow this dauber to paint here?" As Wen Zhengming disliked the restrictions of life in official circles, these taunts made him resign from his post in a rage. He returned to his old home in Suzhou and from that time onwards devoted himself to painting.

Wen Zhengming had worked hard at school where he used to sit in the classroom practising writing while the other boys played outside. He wrote ten thousand characters every day and cultivated the habit of making strict demands on himself. Later, when he wrote a letter, he would re-write it again and again if he was dissatisfied with his handwriting. He did his utmost to learn from celebrated contemporary men of letters and artists and made friends with many of them. This had a good influence on his own work. Later, he and three others — Zhu Yunming, Tang Yin and Xu Zhenqing — were praised as the "four literary geniuses" of Suzhou, while he and Shen Zhou, Tang Yin and Qiu Ying were famed as its "four gifted artists". But though they were close friends, Wen Zhengming's character was quite different from that of Zhu and Tang, both of whom were frivolous and pleasure-loving in their youth, whereas he frowned on dissipation of any kind.

Later generations admired Wen Zhengming even more for his moral character than for his calligraphy, painting and poetry. Originally, Wen Zhengming made a living by selling his poems, essays, calligraphy and paintings. But after he had made a name for himself, many people came to ask for his works. He refused, however, to sell any to aristocrats and eunuchs, for in the Ming Dynasty such men abused their great power and rode roughshod over the people. Sycophants who hankered after wealth and rank fawned on them shamelessly. Wen Zhengming despised such behaviour and was not afraid of offending the rich and great; but

he granted all the requests of the common people who really loved his works. Many forgers are said to have imitated his paintings and tried to pass them off as originals. Zhu Lang, one of his students, made a practice of this. Once a man came to Suzhou to buy paintings and, knowing that it was not easy to get a painting by Wen Zhengming, he sent a boy servant to call Zhu Lang with some presents and ask him to paint a fake under Wen's name for him. The boy went by mistake to Wen Zhengming's home, and when he had explained his errand Wen burst out laughing. Then, saying that he would give him a genuine painting by Wen Zhengming to be passed off as Zhu Lang's counterfeit, he painted one then and there. Later artists liked to recount this anecdote.

Wen Zhengming was versatile and painted landscapes, figures and flowers, but most of his works that have come down to us are landscapes. Thus in the history of art he is known as an outstanding landscape painter. Wen Zhengming belonged to the literary school of painting. The literati artists broke fresh ground by combining poetry, calligraphy and painting in one organic whole so that their works were more evocative, enabling connoisseurs to have a deeper insight into the meaning and artistic conception of their paintings. The inscription or the calligraphy on a painting reveals the artist's intellectual level. He can generally gloss over any inadequacy in his painting, but he cannot hide a single faulty stroke in his calligraphy. Wen Zhengming inherited and developed the traditional method of painting of the literati. His calligraphy is vigorous yet graceful, in the same style as his painting. The impression created is fresh, powerful and charming.

Wen Zhengming's landscape *The Connoisseur's Studio* was painted for his friend Hua Xia, who lost his official post owing to the machinations of powerful eunuchs. Returning to Wuxi, his native place, he built a villa by Taihu Lake and called it "The Connoisseur's Studio". There he kept the curios, scrolls of calligraphy and paintings he had collected. Wen Zhengming, who often visited and greatly appreciated this "private museum", painted two pictures of it. He painted the first when he was eighty and the second, reproduced in this issue, at the age of eighty-eight. The first painting shows seven figures and a wide panorama of moun-

tains in the distance. In the second, he tried to improve on the first and gave full play to his powers of expression, using vigorous and graceful brushwork. At the same time he reduced the figures to three, so that the painting seems like a close-up in a film giving prominence to the main theme — the studio and the men in it. We have a clear picture of the guests and host absorbed in conversation and the art collection in the thatched pavilion. The old cypress trees, tall parasol trees and slender bamboos in the courtyard are artistically spaced, and the picturesque rocks which occupy a considerable space are a typical feature of the beautiful scenery around Taihu Lake. The artist has used thick colours to paint the old trees on the left and the rocks on the right, leaving a large space in the centre for the thatched pavilion and the figures. This makes all who see the painting concentrate their attention on its main subjects.

On the back of this painting, Wen Zhengming wrote an account of the studio in vigorous and graceful regular script, the characters being no larger than those in the centre of the painting. This painting was done two years before his death, and it is truly remarkable that the old artist's eyesight was excellent and the vigorous strokes show no sign of his advanced age. Wen Zhengming went on painting until he was nearly ninety. He was engrossed in writing when the end came and he closed his eyes in death. He left behind many precious works of art which have been much admired by later generations. This painting, *The Connoisseur's Studio*, is representative of his later period.

The Connoisseur's Studio

by Wen Zhengming



More Literary Magazines Published

After the publication of the magazines *Harvest* in Shanghai and *October* in Beijing, more large literary magazines have appeared in China this year. They include *Zhongsban* in Jiangsu, *Great Wall* in Hebei, *New Garden* in Jilin, *Flower City* in Guangdong, *Spring Breeze* in Liaoning, *The Banyan* in Fujian, *The Changjiang* in Hubei, *Qingming* in Anhui and *Our Times* by the People's Literature Publishing House, Beijing. The contributors are both professional and amateur writers.

All these magazines aim at carrying out the policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend". Their subject-matter, themes and styles are varied. Some also publish Chinese classical and foreign contemporary and classical works.

Chinese Arts and Crafts Society Founded

The Chinese Arts and Crafts Society was founded recently in Beijing. All 494 delegates to the National Conference of Workers and Designers of Arts and Crafts in Beijing applied to join the society. Its main task will be to organize its members to carry out research related to the production of arts and crafts, promote cultural exchanges with foreign arts and crafts organizations and raise theoretical and technical levels.

A New Beijing Opera Staged

The new Beijing opera *Three Tussles with Tao Sanchun*, based on a traditional play and adapted by the renowned playwright Wu Zuguang, was staged in Beijing and Tianjin recently.

The opera is set in the tenth century. Prince Zhao Kuangyin, Prince Zheng En and Marquis Gao Huaide were sworn brothers of Chai Rong before he came to the throne. They lived a vagabond life. One day as they travelled, Zheng was very thirsty and stole a water melon. Caught by the owner's daughter, Tao Sanchun, he was given a sound beating by her. Zhao came to Zheng's aid and became a go-between for Zheng and the girl. With Zhao's help, Zheng and Tao got engaged. After Chai Rong became the emperor, Zhao sent a memorial to the throne asking for permission to finalize the marriage of Zheng and Tao. But Zheng was afraid to go and get his fiancée. As Zhao was also afraid of her military prowess, they sent Gao Huaide, a highly skilled fighter, disguised as an outlaw, to abduct her. Gao was soon defeated by Tao and was forced to tell her the truth. Enraged, Tao went to the emperor's audience hall, where she created a scene, giving her husband another sound beating at their wedding.

A historical comedy, the opera has a unique style. The playwright has characterized Tao Sanchun in a fresh way, emphasizing her defiance of feudal authority, the emperor and her husband.

A Traditional Dai Opera Re-staged

A Dai nationality opera *Ebin and Sanglo*, based on a popular Dai poem about a young couple's tragic fight for freedom to love, has again been widely staged in Dai areas of Yunnan Province.

The story tells how Sanglo, from a rich family, falls in love with a poor but beautiful girl, Ebin. Sanglo's mother refuses to have a poor girl as her daughter-in-law. While Sanglo is away from home, his mother arranges for Ebin to be injured and chased out of the house. When Sanglo returns and learns what has hap-

pened, he rushes to Ebin's home, where he finds her dying. After she dies in his arms, Sanglo, grief-stricken, kills himself.

This opera was adapted after Liberation and enjoyed great popularity among the Dais, but it was banned during the "gang of four" period.

Japan's NHK Symphony Orchestra in Beijing

Recently, Japan's Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) Symphony Orchestra with their conductors Hiroyuki Iwaki and Yuzu Toyama visited China and gave concerts of Japanese and European music in Beijing and Guangzhou. Their rendering of the traditional Japanese ballet music *Bugaku* by the composer Mayuzumi demonstrated the Japanese musicians' successful adaptation of Japanese classical music to western instruments. They performed with grandeur and passion Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major and Brahms's Symphony No. 1 in C minor.

Fu Baoshi's Paintings Exhibited in Beijing

Nearly 200 paintings by the late Fu Baoshi, a well-known Chinese traditional painter, were exhibited recently in Beijing.

Fu Baoshi, until his death in 1965, was vice-president of the Chinese Artists' Association and of the Jiangsu Academy of Traditional Chinese Painting. The paintings on display were selected from 420 works he had assembled for an exhibition planned for shortly before his death. They included sketches and paintings of his travels in China and abroad, as well as ones based on his interpretation of ancient Chinese poems and those by Chairman Mao Zedong. There were also portraits of historical figures.

Historical Relics in Sima Qian's Hometown

In Hancheng County, Shaanxi Province, the hometown of Sima Qian (c 145 or 135 BC-?), the great Chinese historian and biogra-

pher, a group of ancient buildings connected with his life will be moved to the temple dedicated to him. Some of these buildings will be enlarged. The temple was first constructed in AD 307 and rebuilt in the eleventh century. Inside the huge temple, there is a coloured figure of Sima Qian, four metres high, around which are 59 stone tablets, inscribed with details of his life.

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A Scene of Shenzhen, Guangdong (sketch)

by Xu Xi



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