

Chinese Literature

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NOVEL

Zhou Keqin

Xu Mao and His Daughters

Chapter I Fog

IN winter, the peasants of Gourd Plain Village, an out-of-the-way place, began their day before dawn.

Sunrise came slowly, the stars seeming reluctant to fade. A white fog rose languorously from Willow River, which wound around Gourd Plain. In a minute, the fog seemed to turn into a large net shrouding the ten square *li* plain. This was common in the Tuojiang River Valley.

Several old men walking along the frosty field ridges or ambling beside haystacks emerged. They were collecting dung in their baskets. Their brows and beards were spattered with tiny glistening beads of water. Before long, the villagers, men and women, shut their doors and went to work in the fields. The production brigade thus began its daily routine. Everything was

Xu Mao and His Daughters (《许茂和他的女儿们》), a novel by Zhou Keqin (周克芹), was published in 1980 by Baihua Literature Publishing House, Tianjin. We are publishing five chapters from it in this and our next issue.

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in its right place, like a note in a symphony, pleasant and harmonious.

When the women worked together, they always found something to gossip about. Very often news originated from them. That misty winter morning in 1975, in a rape field close to Pear Orchard in the south, they discussed a tiresome topic — bed-wetting by children — till one woman butted in, “I say, haven’t you heard that Xiuyun’s decided to stay? A last minute change!”

This was the most startling announcement of the day. The women immediately became silent, exchanging glances as if Xiuyun’s decision was of great importance to them. After a moment, the fast thinkers began to comment.

“How can she live in the same village as her ex-husband? Seeing each other day in, day out! How embarrassing! What’s the point?”

“Why can’t she tear herself away from this unfortunate place? Better go far, far away. Out of sight, out of mind!”

“Right! She’s no children. She can easily find a husband, can’t she? As the saying goes: It’s hard to drink alone, it’s hard to be a widow.”

“Nonsense! That’s feudalism!”

“What’s feudal about it? You . . .”

“All right, all right. Stop squabbling! What’s it to do with you? Everybody has a right to his own opinion. In my view, stay or leave, one has to live, even without a husband.”

“Just listen! So high and mighty! Wait till it happens to you!”

The debate gave rise to all kinds of comments. Some said that Xiuyun, Xu Mao’s fourth daughter, was hoping that Zheng Bairu, her ex-husband, would change his mind and make it up with her, because she was a kind woman. Others refuted this saying that Zheng Baixiang, Bairu’s elder sister, had revealed that her lucky brother was courting a girl, prettier than Xiuyun, from Yanjia Plain, twenty *li* away. Still others guessed that Xiuyun would not stay long, because her father was a rather surly character. From the very beginning, he had been against the divorce. The reason Xiuyun refused to go now must be because she was not satisfied with the man Qiuyun, her third sister,

had introduced to her as a suitor. Those in the know became worried. If this were true, there would be problems! In two weeks’ time, Xu Mao intended celebrating his birthday and Xiuyun’s suitor would call to pay his respects and discuss the wedding. “It’s no joke for a future son-in-law to pay a visit to the Xus. Always troubles! Let’s see what happens!”

From the pigsty beside Pear Orchard came a woman’s voice calling, “Piggy, piggy! Where are you?”

Hearing this, someone suggested, “That’s Qiuyun. Let’s ask her about it.”

“Piggy, piggy!” A tall, strapping, middle-aged woman, Xu Mao’s third daughter, emerged quickly from the fog asking, “Hey! Has anyone seen my piglet?”

“No. Come here, Qiuyun, we want to ask you something.”

“I’ve no time. Piggy, piggy!”

“Just a minute, Qiuyun. It’s serious! Don’t worry about your piglet. We’ll help you look for it.”

She stopped, turned her head and chuckled, “You nosy lot! Gossiping all day long.”

“Insulting us again! Is it true that Xiuyun won’t leave after all?”

“Shit! Which busybody’s been spreading that?” Her face darkened.

“You mean you don’t know?”

It was she who had tried to find Xiuyun a husband, concerned about the fate of her unfortunate sister. Yet she had no idea about such an important development! The women said, “If you don’t believe us, go and ask her yourself!”

“If you really want to help her, do everything you can.”

“OK, OK, I’ll go and see her after work.” So saying, she strode off. Again her resonant voice sounded in the early morning fields, “Piggy, piggy! Blasted fog! So thick even at this time! Piggy!”

The women gossiped some more.

“Qiuyun’s a good sort. But for her, Xiuyun would have been dead long ago. Though they had the same mother, they’re as different as chalk from cheese. One’s shrewd, the other’s weak.”

"None of Xu Mao's daughters are alike, are they?"

"True. And not one takes after Xu Mao."

"Sure. If her father wasn't so ruthless and easily flattered, Xiuyun wouldn't have suffered all these years. She was as lovely as a flower, wasn't she? Everybody took to her. But now, though she's only just turning thirty, she looks years older. How sad!"

"She's too soft."

"Well! I don't understand! Why should good people suffer, while the bad ones live comfortably? Things in Gourd Plain Village will drive people mad. I can't understand it."

"All right, calm down! It's so foggy. If anyone should overhear us, we may get into trouble again. Things are hard to explain nowadays."

"Yes. What a heavy fog! Uncle Xu Mao collects dog shit every morning. If he should hear us, he'll accuse us of 'interfering in his domestic affairs'."

"Ha!... Ha!..."

"Ha!... Ha!..."

2

In fact, Xu Mao did not come out to collect dog shit as usual that morning, because he was very cross with Xiuyun.

It would be this tall, broad-shouldered, surly man's 63th birthday in a fortnight's time. This was a respectable age for a peasant. He had nine daughters and was nicknamed "head of the women tribe", though no one dared call him that to his face. For years, he had been respected as hard-working and frugal. His spacious, bright, thatched cottage enclosed by a stone wall stood out in the village, a witness to his diligence since the days of the cooperative movement. His daughters had grown the trees and flowers they liked in the courtyard and after most of them had married and left, the flowers still blossomed all year round. Then there were ducks, chickens, pigs and sheep. Everybody agreed the old man led a comfortable life.

As he had stepped out of his door early that morning, he had seen his fourth daughter, Xiuyun, carrying stones from outside

and then noticed a small stove being made under the eaves of the firewood hut, which leant against the western wall. Standing on the highest step, he demanded severely, his brows twitching, "What's the matter? What're you doing with those stones?"

Xiuyun turned round and said smilingly, though her large eyes were filled with melancholy, "Father, I was going to tell you that I... I'm not leaving..."

"What?" the old man could not believe his ears.

"I've decided to stay." Straightening up, she stepped forward. "I've been thinking about it for some time," she continued, dusting down her coat, perspiration pouring down her flushed face. "I'd better stay."

"What are you talking about?" The old man immediately flew into a towering rage as though clubbed by someone. Stamping, he roared, "Crap! It's not that easy! Humph!" He snorted, too furious to speak.

He had all along been against Xiuyun's divorce. To him, Zheng Bairu was a very powerful cadre in Gourd Plain. One should never offend such a man let alone have a show-down with him. But the court had granted the divorce. Concerned about his public image, he had regarded it as scandalous, but was too scared to oppose it. After that, Xiuyun had got the commune's permission to move back to her father's home. He had been very upset, sulking ever since. Only two months before, his third son-in-law, Luo Zuhua, at the request of his wife, had found for Xiuyun a widower living in the Ergu Mountains through some relation. The old man went to see him before giving his consent. He had also invited him to his home to celebrate his birthday, announce the engagement before the whole family and set a date for the wedding. Then he would send Xiuyun off to the mountains and get rid of his long depression. But now that it was nearing the time, Xiuyun had unexpectedly declared she would not go. What had got into her? The old man could not stand it any more.

"Don't be upset, father..." Noticing her father's anger, she added sadly, "For my mother's sake, let me live in that hut, please. I'll stay here the rest of my life. I'll support myself. I

can work. I'm not afraid of difficulties..." She lowered her long, attractive lashes, while the tears, which had been accumulating for so long, rolled down her cheeks.

"Father!" called Qin, the ninth daughter, as she stepped out of the kitchen. "Breakfast's ready!" But his loud snort made her start. She went over to her sister, who was leaning against the small door frame, sobbing, her head in her hands. Not knowing what to say, Qin stood silently for a while, frowning.

As the fog passed over, drops of water hung from the eaves of the thatched cottage and dripped quietly from the leaves of the honeysuckle. Morning dew glistened on the young buds of the winter plum trees. Why had Xiuyun made this decision, enraging her old father?

3

After breakfast, Qin changed into clean clothes in her bedroom. Taking her pen and notebook, she told her father, "I'm going to a meeting in the commune."

The old man, pretending not to hear her, headed for his own vegetable plot by the river, a hoe over his shoulder.

Qin eased the door shut, walked down the steps and went to the lonely hut against the western wall.

"Xiuyun..." she called.

Xiuyun was sweeping away vigorously and swiftly all the bits of firewood which had been there for years. Though downcast, she had resolved to start a new life.

Twenty years old and a middle-school graduate, Qin was a Youth League branch secretary.

"Don't be so hard on yourself," she said, her voice full of sympathy. "Father's very upset, and Qiuyun will raise the roof when she hears about it."

Glancing at her, Xiuyun cut her short, "I can't think straight just now. Go on to your meeting."

But Qin was insistent. Taking hold of her sister's hand, she continued, "Perhaps I shouldn't say this to you, but... Sis,



"Don't be so hard on yourself," Qin said to Xiuyun, her voice full of sympathy.

you're just turning thirty, you're still young. You've years ahead of you. Don't rush into any decisions."

Xiuyun gripped her hands tightly to stop her from going on.

"Oh please, stop it. I can't talk about it now. Even if I could, you wouldn't be able to understand. You're too young."

Gazing at her sister's sad eyes, Qin could not help crying. Xiu-yun urged her to hurry for fear she would be late for the meeting, so Qin made to leave.

From the foggy fields came the sounds of voices or hoes hitting stones, but nothing was visible. That suited Qin since nobody would see her red eyes. She hastened through Mulberry Grove, turned towards the river in the south and hurried along a foot-path by the wheat fields. Soon she reached a small bridge. She had not met a soul on the way, but as she crossed the bridge, she suddenly saw a man leaning against it. He was in his early thirties, light-complexioned, quite handsome, wearing a greenish, patched, cotton-padded coat. He had a shock of stiff, closely-cropped hair. Though slight in build, he was wiry. His shrewd rather shifty look prevented people from trusting him entirely.

"Morning, Qin," he greeted her in a husky voice, a shy smile playing on his lips.

Qin felt very awkward, for this was none other than Zheng Bairu, the deputy secretary of the Party branch of Gourd Plain Village and book-keeper of the production brigade. Only a year before, he had been her brother-in-law.

"Wait a while, then we can go together. Long Qing hasn't turned up yet," Zheng said amicably.

Feeling embarrassed, she replied, "I've got one or two things to do, if you'll excuse me. . . ."

"What's the hurry?" Zheng asked, his foot tapping the ground rhythmically, as if relaxed. "Why has Xuiyun changed her mind about the marriage?"

"How do you know?" Qin demanded, her heart missing a beat. Annoyed by his condescending manner, she snapped, "I've no idea!" Abruptly she left and crossed the bridge.

Sneering, Zheng called after her, "The women of the second

team in the rape field are broadcasting it everywhere and you're still pretending you don't know! Ha! . . ."

Qin headed for the office of the commune at Lianyunchang, her heart pounding. She had been afraid of being alone with him, though she did not know exactly why. His aggressive look had disconcerted her. For a long time after the divorce, Zheng had not spoken a word to any of the Xus. That had suited Qin perfectly. After all, who wanted to speak to him? But today, Zheng had changed. His greeting her had made her very uneasy.

Once she reached Lianyunchang, she hurried straight to the food store attached to the local supply and marketing cooperative, where her seventh sister worked. She wanted to recount to her all that had happened at home and give vent to her anger. Entering the store, she called, "Sis!"

A woman shop-assistant looked up brightly from behind the counter.

"Qin!" she greeted her with a broad smile. "Why are you so early? What luck! You're just the person I'm looking for. . . ."

Ignoring the customers, she led Qin towards the staircase. Looking at the people, Qin felt rather guilty and whispered, "Better serve them first. I can wait." But her sister only called over her shoulder, "Just a minute, I won't be long." Then she took Qin upstairs.

This was Zhen, a well-dressed girl of twenty-four. She had been doing all sorts of jobs in the store for three years, and currently she was at the counter where salt, soya sauce and other condiments were sold. She did not like it. She seldom visited home and spent all her earnings on food and clothes. Naturally her father was very angry with her but so far he had not found an opportunity to scold her.

Zhen showed Qin into her room and made her sit down on the edge of the bed covered by a woollen blanket. Then she squeezed out a two-inch-sized photo from behind the frame on the reverse side of her mirror and said casually, "What do you think of him? He's called Xiao Zhu."

The young man in the photo was not at all handsome. He had high cheekbones, a snub nose and a small moustache. His long

hair was carefully combed and looked permed. Qin glanced at the photo and said with a frown, "What about Xiao Liu? Where has this Zhu emerged from all of a sudden?"

"I'm through with Xiao Liu," Zhen answered self-righteously. "He despised me for selling salt and soya sauce. Huh! Who does he think he is? A primary school teacher! What's that nowadays? Tough luck! But Xiao Zhu's a worker."

Qin, an innocent girl, was in no mood to share her sister's happiness. She was only concerned about Xiuyun. She had come here hoping for sympathy, but obviously she had picked the wrong time. She rose to her feet, ready to go.

Then Zhen clutched her and said, "Put in a good word for me with father."

"You'd better tell him yourself."

"You beast! Don't you want to help me? One day you may need my help!"

"Rubbish!" Qin said to herself as she ran down the stairs and out of the store. Her sister was shouting after her, "Have lunch here after your meeting!"

Qin slowed down now. She felt terribly depressed for the first time in her life.

"So selfish!" she spat out. But whom did she mean? Zhen? Father? Zheng Bairu? Was there anyone else? She did not know herself. But something was weighing on her mind, making her feel miserable.

As she approached the commune headquarters, the old postman called to her from the post office on the other side of the street, "Hey there, is that you Xu Qin? Come over here quickly! There's a letter and a big parcel for you. They only arrived yesterday."

Qin got the letter and found that it was from her eighth sister, who had joined the army the year before last and who was studying in a military academy in the northeast. She had written:

Dear Qin,

How's life with you? Are father and our sisters well? Your letter reached me last month. I've learned that your crops aren't doing well. I am as worried as you about it.

Has Gourd Plain Village taken any action after the National Conference on Agriculture? Agriculture is quite a problem. You have to fight to overcome many difficulties. As a Youth League member, you must do all you can to help our cadres and people.

Yesterday I bought a fur for father with some money I'd saved. I'm not sure if it will suit him. Please ask Xiuyun to make a good coat for him. She's the best needlewoman amongst us. You must be very kind to her. Encourage her in her studies and help her to understand our policies when you've time. These last few years, she's had a rough time. I've been wondering whether or not people's unhappiness has some connection with the current upheavals. Will people regain their happiness when things are better? Xiuyun's a very good person. One day she'll be happy. It won't be long. The situation's better than last year. . . .

"Xu Qin, who's your letter from?" The voice of Zheng Bairu suddenly interrupted Qin. She quickly stuffed the letter into her pocket.

"My eighth sister," she replied as she moved towards the commune headquarters.

"Don't forget your parcel!" the postman reminded her.

"I'll fetch it after the meeting," she called over her shoulder.

4

The meeting hall was too large for only the production brigade leaders, commune cadres and school leaders, who had been summoned to attend.

Qin entered the room, joining those girls who were Youth League organizers from different villages. As always, they huddled together chattering in a corner, while plenty of seats in front were vacant. They would carry on like this even after the start of the meeting.

But this day the atmosphere was a little different. Qin sensed it immediately. Seated on the stage were a few strangers in-

stead of the commune leaders. There was a woman in her early forties, with bobbed hair, who seemed perfectly relaxed despite all the eyes upon her. She was deep in thought, hardly aware of the audience.

"That's Yan Shaochun, head of the work team sent by the county Party committee," a plump girl, who had arrived earlier, informed Qin. "She's come to help us with our work." She seemed to know quite a lot about her. "See that tall man. He's Qi Jiangming, from the county's public relations department. He studied in the county middle school and graduated in '72. He was a classmate of my elder brother."

Instead of listening, Qin was still thinking about her letter.

"...Xiuyun's a very good person. One day, she'll be happy. It won't be long." Is such a day really coming? Why can't I see it? "The situation's better than last year." Perhaps Gourd Plain is so remote that changes for the better occur later. Father grows more selfish, more bad-tempered. Third sister used to be helpful and considerate, but now she's cynical and doubts everything. All Zhen cares about is enjoying herself. It's disgusting! What about Xiuyun's happiness? Zheng Bairu treated her like a dog. Though she's out of that now, she's lonely and miserable. Where's her happiness? I really can't see such changes happening in Gourd Plain Village! Take Zheng Bairu! He made Xiuyun's life miserable. Everybody says he's talented and capable. But he behaved like a bastard at home! Now there are problems with Youth League members. What's got into everyone?

Warm claps interrupted her confused thoughts. The work team leader went towards the dais. Qin shook her head and forced herself to concentrate on the meeting. She strained her eyes to have a better look at the team leader: her roundish face, straight nose, smiling eyes, crow's-feet and grey hair at her temples... Qin seemed to have met her somewhere before. But where? She could not remember. Instead of reading her speech, she chatted to them about a production brigade in a mountainous area of the province, which she had just visited less than a month before.

"The mountains there are high and steep, not like the hills here. But their crops are doing fine. The cadres never worry about them.

What are you laughing about? I think, cadres here are afraid of having good crops. Isn't that so? They're afraid that if the crops are good, the peasants will get richer and then 'capitalism' will inevitably emerge. What nonsense! The mountain people don't think that way. They're getting richer. Each brigade owns several tractors. Life is improving day by day. Every one of them gets five hundred catties of grain each year. Each gets one and a half yuan for a day's work. Still, they're not satisfied. They want to work harder and get more! Comrades, how many catties does a peasant from Lianyun Commune get each year? Yesterday, I looked at your records. Half of the seventy production brigades lack half the grain they need. Each one gets less than three hundred and sixty catties a year! How can a peasant live on that? How much extra grain can we expect from the state? In some villages, a peasant gets less than thirty cents a day! Is this one of the benefits of socialism? People are right to complain. As cadres, we're the servants of the people. What do we feel when we see such misery? Shouldn't we do something? Shouldn't we examine ourselves, our mistakes and faults? Shouldn't we work harder to promote production so as to give people confidence in socialism?"

The cadres on stage clapped first, and then the whole room resounded with laughter, comments and loud applause. They clapped hard to show that the team leader had voiced what had been in their minds for a long time.

Qin flushed with excitement. The speaker held this simple, enthusiastic girl spellbound. Huddled among the other girls, her face turned slightly upward, she focused her eyes on Yan Shaochun. Gradually tears blurred her vision. The reason for this was complex. Her mother had died soon after her birth. In her young heart, she had imagined the tender image of a mother. As she grew up, this longing for a mother was replaced by her love of life, her desire for a better life. But unfortunately the times were chaotic. The people around her were wary of or even fought each other. Her sisters, once married, stopped reading any books and abandoned their ideals. All year round, they were busy making meals and clothes for their children and themselves. Sometimes they quarrelled and wept. The wonderful life described in the

books had nothing to do with the reality of Gourd Plain. Her neighbours complained that the grain they got was less than before, and life became harder. Father was no longer so enthusiastic about the collective. He worked all day long on his private plot and accused people behind their backs. He became lonelier, more selfish and incomprehensible.

A person's thinking is determined to some extent by his experiences. Poor Qin had had little experience and had never left her small circle. As secretary of the Youth League branch for the past two years, she had worked hard in the fields, helped others and organized youngsters into study groups. But when certain vital questions were put to her, she was unable to answer them. Whenever some youth asked her, "When shall we have a happy life?" She did not know what to say and only smiled or repeated the same old cliché, "Aren't we much happier than the older generation, who were worse off than animals before Liberation?" Her third sister would counter loudly, "You're merely repeating what a Youth League branch secretary said twenty years ago. Who are you kidding? Just stop all that meaningless talk!" On such occasions, Qin was at a loss, for she could not convince her. How she wished that people would join together to improve their lives! She longed even more for a good leader, who could realize their desire for change!

This simple, innocent girl saw a ray of hope in Yan Shaochun. When the meeting ended, she was still excited.

As soon as she got outside, she spotted Zhen talking to Zheng Bairu, who was ahead of her. She promptly turned round and asked an old man behind her, "Uncle Long, are you going back for lunch?" Long Qing was the brigade leader and the Party secretary of Gourd Plain Village. A cheerful character, he had poor eyesight, but on hearing her voice, he raised his eyes and replied, "You've somewhere to eat here, but I haven't. My belly will rumble in protest if I don't get home soon. Ha!... Ha!..."

"Please tell my father that I won't be back for lunch."

"OK. Isn't that your sister waiting for you?"

Zhen came up and said, smiling, "Uncle Long, come and have some lunch with us."

Long replied with a grin, "Thanks but my eyes are bad and my wife's got some medicine ready for me. I've got to go back." With that, he hurried away as fast as he could.

Zhen smiled politely unable to detain him. Then turning to Qin, she said, "Come with me. Lunch is ready."

As Zheng Bairu was beside her, Qin guessed he had been invited too. Embarrassed, she excused herself by saying, "I'm having lunch in the commune dining-room."

Zhen's face fell, as she pretended to be offended. Despite Qin's refusal, she gripped her arm and led her away.

Qin looked over her shoulder and saw Zheng Bairu following them. Zhen whispered to her, "Zheng's turned over a new leaf. He told me just now how good Xiuyun was to him. If only they can make it up..."

Qin shrugged indifferently.

"You're as stubborn as Xiuyun," Zheng scolded. "He's one of the village leaders after all! A man of influence! Could I have come to work here without his help three years ago? He's got the power and you can do nothing about it. If Xiuyun and he should get together again, he might even find you a job in town or send you to university. Wouldn't that be wonderful? He's very sympathetic, you know." She slowed down deliberately so Zheng could catch them up. When he was abreast with them, she smiled and said in a charming, tactful way, "You're a difficult man to get hold of, Zheng, but I'm afraid I've nothing good to offer you."

Zheng replied, smiling too, "It's been more than a year now since I last bothered you."

"Bothered me?" Zhen chuckled. "You're too important to visit nobodies like us! We've really seemed like strangers this past year and a half. You look down upon us Xus, don't you? Ha!... How about doing us a little favour? Qin's stuck here and she's already twenty. You ought to let her stop farming."

Qin pinched her sister's wrist hard, as the blood rushed to her face. Zhen cried out in pain and stopped abruptly.

Zheng smiled smugly and said cautiously, "As for a recommendation, I can't decide that alone, you know. Well, we'll see what we can do."

Qin could not bear it any more. Seeing a girlfriend approaching she grabbed her chance to escape and hailed her, "Suhua, what good books have you just borrowed? Let me have a look!"

Suhua was the eldest daughter of Zeng Derong, head of the commune's women's association. She and Qin had been schoolmates. "I've got two books," she answered. "Let's go and have a look at them. You can choose which one you want to read first."

In relief, Qin wrenched herself away from Zhen's grasp, took Suhua's arm and fled.

Zhen shouted after her, "Hurry up! We'll be waiting for you."

"Don't bother!" she yelled back.

"I saw Zhen's new boyfriend this morning," Suhua whispered. "He was dressed to kill and had a moustache! Ugh! I've just borrowed *The Song of Youth*.^{*} Take it. It's a wonderful book! But don't let anyone see it. Nowadays..."

Qin had heard it was an exciting novel, a best-seller for several years. But it was now banned, and she had not been able to get it. She grew cheerful again.

5

The fog dispersed shortly before noon. Gourd Plain took on its old familiar look as the blue mountains and green water emerged. Bamboo groves and cypress trees, which never withered, not even in winter, kept the place green and young. The bare mulberry and pear trees looked mysterious in the distance. With Willow River winding across the plain, it was really a picturesque place.

Xu Mao worked at his private plot from dawn till high noon. The crops in his plot grew particularly well. Stripes of green wheat shoots, big, fleshy cabbages, tender bean shoots, dark green spring onions and fragrant celery were interwoven like a beautiful tapestry. The arrangement, the full use of every inch of land and meticulous cultivation showed the ingenuity of the owner. Only those who had carefully studied farming could plan a patch

^{*}A novel about the Chinese student movement in the thirties. It was banned by the "gang of four" during the "Cultural Revolution".

so economically. It was his pride, an exquisite piece of work, the result of all his efforts. While the brigade's crops were getting worse each year his private plot flourished. For this alone, he was justified in despising those who neglected agriculture. Some thought him politically backward, but he did not care. Why did they mess up the collective's fields? Who had given them the right to neglect the crops? Look at the brigade's wheat fields. Huge clods of earth and no fertilizer! How could they grow good wheat? Was a peasant with a big family "advanced" if he let the weeds overrun his plot?

The old man spread another layer of fine soil over his seeds, hoping they would turn into white tender chives the following spring, which could bring him a profit when the Spring Festival approached. He worked meticulously as if he enjoyed what he was doing. Surveying the plump, tender bean shoots, he calculated how much he would be able to pick at first. At the moment, there were no fresh vegetables like them on sale in Taiping Town or Lianyunchang. He could sell them at a higher price in the county town. But that meant a whole day to cover the hundred *li* there and back. Besides, he would have to eat lunch out. Considering the amount of time and money, it did not make much difference if he sold them in Lianyunchang. Busy calculating, he forgot for a moment his unhappiness over Xiuyun.

The women weeding the rape fields stopped work and passed by Xu's private plot, laughing and talking. When they spotted him squatting there, they quietened down. Some regarded him with awe; others eyed him disdainfully.

"Uncle Xu," Wang Guizhen, a woman team leader, smiled and asked on purpose, "where's Xiuyun? Why didn't she come to work?"

"Well, well..." he replied evasively. "She's got something to do."

"What? She's never been absent before." Wang commented casually.

Xu Mao took great pride in his family's reputation. He never washed their dirty linen in public. To avoid mentioning their

quarrel, he muttered, "Well, well..." and shoed the women away.

The women smothered their giggles, covering their mouths with their hands.

Now the old man really grew concerned. He knew each daughter's temperament. Though soft and kind, Xiuyun would never budge an inch once she had made up her mind. She was not like Qiuyun, who flared up easily and just as easily calmed down. What worried him was Xiuyun's intransigence. No matter how you yelled or swore at her, she would not open her mouth. She would only lower her head and sulk. In the past, he had always lost every battle with her.

"What's to be done?"

He gazed blankly at the vast, quiet fields of Gourd Plain. The dazzling sun made him squint. While working he had not been sweating, but now he found his cotton-padded coat stifling.

He suddenly thought of his birthday party. He had never taken it seriously when he was younger, but in recent years, he had regarded it as an important event. He did not quite know why himself. Perhaps it was old age. He was mean, except on his birthday when he became very generous. He began preparing for it long before, buying alcohol, pork, vermicelli and all kinds of delicacies. Then he invited his daughters, their husbands and children and other relatives to a feast, which usually lasted for a couple of days until all the food was gone. These were his happiest days. Normally abstemious, he would indulge in a few cups of wine himself. After that, he would chat with his sons-in-law about farming. His daughters, some of whom lived quite far away, would crowd round him and feel moved by his accounts of how he had struggled to boost production as a team leader in the early fifties. In those days, his daughters had all lived at home. Life was full of fun. Their father, his face glowing, had worked hard for the collective. This had been their most prosperous time. They were also the best days of Xu Mao's life. His second, fifth and sixth daughters and their families, who lived on Chuanxi Plain, brought him magnificent presents. Their children, neatly dressed, reminded him of lovely plump piglets. The old man was

most satisfied with them. Though he could not be called snobbish, he did not treat his three married daughters living in his poor village as warmly.

For instance the mention of his eldest daughter Suyun and her husband made Xu Mao unhappy. The year before last, a political storm had swept Gourd Plain Village and Xu Mao's eldest son-in-law, Jin Dongshui, the Party branch secretary, had been suspended from office. Soon afterwards fate had struck again, when his house caught fire and was virtually burnt down. Long Qing, the brigade leader, came to ask Xu Mao if he would let them stay with him temporarily. Though he had enough room, the old man said nothing but only turned and went inside. After weighing the pros and cons, this usually clever farmer reached a rather short-sighted conclusion. He was sure that Jin would never regain his position. He did not really dislike him, however. After he had got demobbed, Jin had become the Party secretary. Like Xu Mao, Jin had worked hard. But what had been the result? Jin had got a bashing. Who could predict what lay ahead? This made him decide to refuse Long Qing's request. Everybody was shocked. Jin and his family had to live in a shed. Then his wife fell ill. Jin sold everything that had been salvaged from the fire to pay for her medical costs. Unfortunately she died. Jin could not afford to buy a coffin for her. On hearing of his daughter's death, Xu Mao wept. After all, she was his daughter! But when his youngest daughter Qin and a few neighbours came to ask him for some planks to make her coffin, he stopped them at the gate. Qin cried bitterly, but it was no use. Incredible! Who could understand him? How could a working man be so heartless? But Long Qing seemed to understand. He persuaded the people to disperse, glanced at Xu Mao and left too. Afterwards, he asked a few friendly cadres and neighbours to give some money for the funeral. Since that day, her husband and children were no longer regarded as part of the family.

What a ruthless old man! But he had not been born cruel. He was a peasant who loved the land after all! As a young man he happily joined the cooperative movement and had many dreams about the future of Gourd Plain. He had built his large thatched

cottage, and his daughters had often heard him laughing. But now, in the seventies, China was in chaos. The fields were choked with weeds. How could he laugh? How could he live without first considering "number one"? Of course it was selfish, but Xu Mao had never pretended to be otherwise. While many threw themselves into the political struggles shouting revolutionary slogans, ignoring the land, he had devoted his energies to making money. He had even gone so far as to collect waste paper despite the sneers of others. Walls were always covered with big-character posters, so every evening, Xu Mao walked over ten *li* to tear down the old ones and store them. He later sold them to a salvage station attached to the supply and marketing cooperative. He did this work in a self-righteous manner. He never thought it degrading. When the posters grew fewer, he felt it a great pity.

Xu Mao was ostracized by everyone at that time! Those in power never gave a thought to petty things like food or firewood. On the contrary, they issued all kinds of rules and regulations to make life more difficult. No one cared about Xu Mao's interests. No one bothered to warn or criticize him. But people did talk behind his back, accusing him of becoming a "capitalist". Even Qin was too engrossed in her political work to notice him.

Xu Mao carried on his daily life, untouched by the movements. However, that morning, his orderly life had been disturbed by Xiuyun. She had messed up his plan and depressed him. This, of course, would affect his birthday festivities. Very annoyed he cursed, "Shit! Looks as though she's determined to stay. Bah! Fending for herself isn't as easy as it sounds."

Since he only listened to himself, he could never imagine a woman managing without a husband or children. He did not care a fig for a woman's feelings or ideas. All he cared about was himself. If he gave in, there would be no end of trouble for both Xiuyun and himself. She must leave! What was so wonderful about Gourd Plain? He had no room for a divorced woman in his home.

Long Qing, the acting Party branch secretary, passed by not far away. In the glare of the sun, he could not see very well, but he knew that Xu Mao must be around somewhere.

"Old Xu," he called out. "Have you had lunch? Qin asked me to tell you not to wait for her. The meeting's continuing this afternoon."

Xu rose to his feet and said, "OK." Then he swore, "The little witch! Running around all day long!" He doted on his youngest daughter and, of course, there was a practical reason behind it. His late wife had had nine children, each one a girl. He had been anxious to have a son. Her death after Qin's birth deprived him of this chance. There was no son to inherit his estate, and this made him extremely frustrated. However, he did not become cynical. As time passed, he gradually came to look upon his ninth daughter as a son, and carefully planned her future. First she must have an education, so he did his best to send her to school. Finally she graduated from senior middle school. Though he never opposed her taking part in social activities, he thought it a waste of time. But he reckoned that it was not a bad thing to have someone from his family involved in public life. As Qin grew up, he kept his eyes open for an eligible young man. He was looking for a son-in-law who would live in his house. The requirements for such a young man were naturally very strict. He would not entrust his large cottage and courtyard to a loafer.

Since Qin was not coming back for lunch, he was reluctant to go home. Instead, he carried on with his work, lost in thought. Sometimes he even talked aloud. He would thus come to a decision without consulting anyone.

By the afternoon his stomach was rumbling with hunger. As the sun dropped and the breeze blew in from Willow River, his coat felt too light. He thought of the pigs in the pigsty. They needed feeding. However, he worked on determinedly.

The sun was setting, but he was still at his plot. Thinking of the admiration and surprised looks the next day at the market in Lianyunchang, he bent double, skilfully picking the bean sprouts.

As he stood up, about to leave, his basket on his back, he spotted Zheng Bairu coming towards him. Incredible!

It was already dusk. His former son-in-law had come straight from the meeting, taking the trouble to skirt the river instead of his normal route home. There was no sign of his usual reserve.

On the contrary, there was an apologetic look in his eyes. Totally unprepared for this, the old man was puzzled. However, he tried not to show it. Gluing his eyes on the young man, he waited, leaning on his hoe. Zheng beamed and said, "Father, just going home? It's dark now."

It was years since Zheng had called him "father" with such respect. That was when he had just married Xiuyun. This puzzled Xu Mao even more, but he said nothing.

Averting his eyes, Zheng spoke in a slightly husky voice, the smile disappearing from his face, "I'd like to talk to you when you've a moment. About the past. . . I'm very sorry. It was all my fault. I was too young, too foolish. After the divorce, I realized I was wrong."

A feeling of satisfaction and joy swept the old man, but he still kept silent, so that Zheng would speak out everything.

However, Zheng stopped there. He said he had a meeting that evening and had to go. He promised to see him again in a few day's time to "report" to him what was on his mind and that he would "welcome criticisms and suggestions". He gazed at the old man as if pleading for a minute and then turned to go along a path across the wheat field.

Xu Mao snorted as he slowly walked home. When he reached his courtyard, he still could not figure it out. Plumping down his basket on the high step in front of his house, he muttered to himself, scratching his head, "What's it all about? Haven't you had enough fights?"

It was very quiet in the courtyard. The winter plum trees exuded a fragrant smell. The light in Xiuyun's lonely hut was on, but the house was dark. Qin was not back yet.

6

Luo Zuhua, a thirty-six-year-old, scholarly-looking peasant, was one of the few talents in Gourd Plain Village. He had finished primary school and had been a deputy team leader of the second team for almost ten years. Everybody thought highly of him. He was a jack of all trades, good at building, carpentry, weaving

bamboo, braiding ropes, as well as farm work. Fit and strong, he could tackle any difficult job. But everyone has his limits. Luo was not a sophisticated man of the world. But what did that matter? He had a clever, capable wife, who dealt with people.

This was Qiuyun. A large woman, she had a healthy appetite, worked like a horse and never felt tired. Because of her sharp tongue and blunt manner, she was nicknamed "Hot Pepper". She was the shrewdest of her sisters. The marriage between her and Luo was considered a "modern" one by the old-fashioned peasants. Though an arranged marriage, there had been a period of courtship. Despite their different natures, they made a very happy couple. Within ten years, they had had five children, so life was hard. Whenever he had a moment to spare, Luo made baskets, small stools and other goods on the side, which Qiuyun sold. People said that the reason they hit it off so well was because Luo let Qiuyun be the boss. Even so, what was wrong with that? Few women were as capable as she at running a family. To her husband, every single word she said was right.

One autumn day, Qiuyun had said to Luo, "It's not right for Xiuyun to live with father. You're going to fetch timber for our brigade from the Ergu Mountains, aren't you? Go and see your aunt and ask if there's a suitable man for my sister." Luo felt unequal to the task; he had never done anything like it before. His wife instructed him, saying, "As long as the man's good-natured and about the same age, that'll do. We're not asking for anything else. It doesn't matter even if he's a widower with one or two kids." Helped by his aunt, Luo did find such a man who agreed to the proposed marriage. Luo had not expected it to go so smoothly, and he was praised by his wife when he returned home. Xiuyun said nothing. After all Luo meant well. Everybody took her silence for consent. The widower would come to visit Xu Mao on his birthday. Then he and Xiuyun would marry and start a new life.

This was the first time Luo had succeeded in such an important undertaking. People were surprised and glad that he could be so helpful. Luo himself was elated and eagerly awaited the birthday celebrations. There were only a dozen days to go, he calculated.

But on that very day, he learned that Xiuyun had refused the man. At first he could not believe his ears when he heard the women chatting about it in the field. After work in the afternoon, he went with his youngest child to his father-in-law's courtyard on the pretext of picking winter plum blossoms.

He looked around the courtyard glumly. Like those of little experience, he was easily elated by success and deflated by failure. When he imagined how furious the man would be, he hardly dared think of the consequences. He frowned all the way home.

His wife too was upset by this shocking news. After her work in the fields, she was now noisily banging around in the kitchen. On seeing her husband entering with his child in his arms and blossoms in his hands, she snapped, "Nothing seems to worry you! Where have you been fooling about? Everything's a mess, and you pretend you don't know!"

How wrong! Blaming Luo who had been worrying himself to death. However, on such occasions, he never answered back.

Then she began accusing Xiuyun, "What a silly fool! Wants to be stuck in Gourd Plain all her life? Why didn't she tell us she didn't like him? Now she's landed us all in the shit!" She was so angry that this kind-hearted woman cursed her poor sister, "Damn her! Ungrateful girl! Let her find herself a husband!"

Luo sat by the stove in dismay tending the fire. But he was confident his wife would know what to do even though she was creating a big fuss. She always had lots of ideas.

Having had supper, Qiuyun said to her husband, "I'm going to have it out with that girl. I won't be back tonight! Lock the door." As she was about to leave, she added, "Don't sleep like a log and forget to wake the children up to go and pee!"

Luo said he would and felt relieved when she had rushed away. He respected and admired her abilities. She would be able to avert a disaster. Having washed up and fed the pigs, he urged and cajoled the children to get ready for bed. After this, he sat down at their square table. Sighing with relief, he got a paper *The Sichuan Peasant*, ten days old, to read by kerosene lamp, looking for information on pig-breeding. Very soon, he was engrossed in it.

A sudden knock at the door brought him back to reality. Looking up, he thought for a moment and said to himself with a smile, "You said you wouldn't come back, but here you are!" He hurried to the gate and shot back the bolt.

Before him stood a man with a light complexion, in an overcoat with a fur collar and a cadre's cap on his head!

Luo's smile froze at once. He was stunned by this unexpected visitor.

It was Zheng Bairu. Since the divorce, they had stopped seeing each other. Even before that, Zheng had not taken Luo seriously. But today Zheng of all people was here looking humble! There was no sign of his usual arrogance. He seemed almost like another man.

"How are you, brother?" Zheng asked warmly as though they were still related. "Is Qiuyun asleep?"

"Well . . . she's not . . ." He did not know what to reply without Qiuyun to prompt him. "He's a brigade cadre after all," he thought to himself. "Perhaps he's come to find out about our team's work."

Sure enough, on learning that Qiuyun was away, Zheng began to relax. First, he inquired about the second team's pig-breeding and if any more building material was needed for the pigsty. As Luo was in charge of this he knew all about it. Then Zheng changed to ask about the fields.

"We've a lot to do this winter and next spring," he said. "We mustn't take it easy. Have all the men in your team temporarily working elsewhere come back? No? That won't do! This year's different from last. The higher-ups are demanding more from us. You and I are cadres. We must carry out instructions from above, do whatever they say."

"Yes, sure." Luo was much calmer now. The man before him had often been arrogant when speaking at mass meetings, never so much as glancing at this honest deputy team leader. But Zheng was very warm today, talking to him as an equal. Luo took the pouch from the cupboard and offered him some tobacco.

The deputy Party secretary appointed the year before last

produced a packet of cigarettes and offered it to Luo. He did not smoke himself.

"Why don't you smoke?" Luo asked in surprise.

"Can't afford it. I've given it up," Zheng said matter-of-factly. Then he asked Luo, "The loans to be repaid to the brigade will soon be announced. Will you be able to pay back all yours?"

"No. Bit by bit. I'm pretty quick at clearing my debt whenever I borrow money from the brigade fund," Luo replied with a guilty conscience. Then he mentioned the peasants on the Ergu Mountains whom he admired very much. "A family of seven with two people working up in the mountains doesn't need to borrow anything. On the contrary, they rake in the money. But in our village. . ."

Zheng interrupted him, "Look, yours is a big family. So many children. It should be considered as a poor one. I'll ask them to look into your case and give you a subsidy."

"No, no. We'll manage."

Luo had never dreamed of getting money from the brigade fund. He was deeply moved by Zheng's concern.

Waving his hand, Zheng said, "I know you're a stubborn man. Even when you've difficulties, you never ask for help. But as brigade cadres, we must attend to it. Of course, if it's not convenient for you to apply, I'll have a word with them."

His words were simple, but sincere. For the first time, Luo found his former brother-in-law a kind, frank man. However, Luo insisted that the brigade should never write off his debt.

"No, no, brother," he refused, "don't do that. We know you mean kindly. We're all grateful. . ."

"That's all right. Nothing more to be said." Waving his hand, he continued, "We'll talk about it later. I know what I'm doing. But there's something else I want to talk to you about, brother."

"Something else?"

"Yes. We're in-laws, but we're always too busy with work to find time to have a chat. You know, I've many faults. You must help me."

"Well, this. . . ." Luo was touched again.

"Brother, what do you think of me?"

"You?"

"Yes."

"Well. . . ." Luo puffed on his cigarette, racking his brains. But in fact, he was quite undecided what he thought about a prominent man like Zheng. Was he good? Or bad? Or mediocre? It was hard to know. If he were good, why had he and Xiuyun led such a miserable life? No question, Xiuyun was a very good woman. If he were bad, how could he have joined the Party and become a branch secretary? Luo understood little of the importance of "connections". Suddenly he remembered a mass meeting in which Zheng had condemned Jin Dongshui. Jin was one of their in-laws too, older than both Zheng and Luo. Zheng had treated Jin as an enemy and toppled him, but Luo had never thought Jin was bad. He could not fathom Zheng.

"Brother, I've many faults!"

Luo awoke from his reverie. He repeated a cliché which was true for everybody, "No man's perfect!"

Zheng elaborated, "Of course. As long as you live you'll make mistakes and offend some people. I know myself. When my leaders point out my mistake, I correct it. I've been trying to improve myself this way. So I've no worries. But, brother, I've done a very stupid thing. What an ass I was! Whenever I think of it, I can't eat or sleep. But it's too late for regrets!"

The lamp flickered revealing Zheng's troubled face, his eyes grew moist. Luo's soft heart was filled with compassion.

"Don't feel too bad. Take care of yourself," he consoled him, though not sure what Zheng meant by a "stupid thing". However, he added sympathetically, "As people say, 'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip!'"

"Many a slip. . . ." Zheng repeated bitterly and continued, "A single slip can cause a lasting sorrow! I'm afraid there's no way to end it."

"Why not?"

"We're old friends. That's why I want to confide in you."

"What is it?"

"It's Xiuyun," Zheng said at last. "It was all my fault. I gave her a hell of a life. Why did we get divorced? . . . On an impulse."

But we were husband and wife after all! Love's eternal. We'd been together for eight years! Thinking of her kindness to me, I feel like killing myself! What a fool I was!"

Hearing Zheng's words and seeing him covering his face with his hands, Luo was also moved and wiped a tear from his eyes.

Looking at the lamp, neither of them spoke any more, so they sat in silence for quite a long time.

Zheng finally rose to leave, dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief. Luo insisted that he should stay a bit longer. Zheng refused, saying he had to see the other team leaders. With a heavy heart, Luo saw him off.

A crescent moon hung high in the cloudless sky. The cold wind swept the night fields. Luo thought as he turned back, "Yes, it's right to correct your mistakes once you realize them. Now he knows he treated Xiuyun badly and regrets it. 'Love's eternal.' That's true!"

Chapter II A Crescent Moon

The solitary small, low hut had been there for a long time, Xiuyun remembered, unchanged since her childhood, when she and all her sisters were packed into it like chickens in a coop. When they grew up, they had worked hard and life had improved. Aided by the advantages of the cooperative system and the income his daughters earned, Xu Mao had built a smart new cottage. Delighted at moving into their new home, they suddenly found their old hut terribly shabby! But for their father, the girls would have pulled it down. Xu Mao, a frugal fellow, decided to use it as a store-room for firewood and other junk. So who would have imagined that after twenty years Xiuyun would return to it to spend the remainder of her youthful years unhappily.

Xiuyun was an optimist at heart. However depressed, she would always try to improve her lot. Not wishing to sleep in such squalor, she spent a whole day scouring it both inside and out, plastering the peeling walls and papering them with white paper. She even added a small window and hung a piece of light green

cloth for a curtain. Since the stove was outside, there was no smoke or soot in the room when cooking. At last it looked really spick and span. When darkness fell and the kerosene lamp was lit, the little hut looked warm and snug.

Xiuyun had a bath after supper and changed into some clean clothes. Since her childhood, she had liked to make herself neat and clean. When combing her dark hair in front of the mirror, she noticed how drawn her face was. Its fullness had gone and it looked sallow; her shining eyes were now dark and hollowed. She shivered. Her eyes began to fill with tears at the memory of the past sad years. She dared not look at her reflection any more. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she began plaiting her luxuriant long hair and then wound it into a bun.

What was troubling her? Though her still lovely face looked melancholy, there was a flicker of hope in her eyes. Sometimes she brooded. Whether doing a domestic chore or farm work, a tough or skilled job, Xiuyun was always patient and meticulous. People said that she had a good head on her shoulders. It was true. All her love and hatred, grief and hope were buried deep in her heart. Like an ocean, the surface was calm. She was not a sentimental city girl. Actually she had never left Gourd Plain. Having only finished junior middle school, she had hardly read any great novels. She knew little about the outside world. But this did not prevent her from becoming a kind, honest and self-possessed woman. Was it the influence of the green mountains and fields? The murmuring water in Willow River? The white clouds in the blue sky? The spring breeze? Summer storms? No one could tell. She was like an orchid in a ravine, lovely and noble by nature.

Xiuyun began her evening routine — sewing and mending. She was making a child's cotton-padded coat. The silk cover with a little red flower design on the white background had been one of her old blouses. She had been busy sewing it several evenings. Now it was almost ready. After sewing the last stitch, she bit off the thread with her teeth. Just then, she heard the sound of steps in the courtyard. Someone was approaching! She quickly hid the small coat beneath her pillow.

"Xiuyun!"

When she opened the door, Qin entered cheerfully, looking round the bright room and exclaiming in surprise, "You've really given it a spring-clean!"

A faint smile flitted across Xiuyun's face. "You're late home today," she said. "Look at you, soaked with sweat!"

Qin had a thick book in her hand, a big parcel under her arm. Putting down the parcel on the bed, she said, "This is a fur sent by eighth sister. She wants you to make it into a coat for father. Here's her letter, have a look." She fished out the letter. "According to her, things are wonderful! She says she is sure your life'll get better and better! Oh, read it yourself. I'll be back in a moment." Then she turned and left.

"Where are you going? It's late!" Xiuyun asked, her hand on the door frame.

"Just to have a word with Changquan. I won't be long!" Qin explained. Then turning round, she added, "The work team's come. The leader's a woman. She seems very nice. After the meeting I talked with her for a long time and she sorted out most of my problems. She told me that she would come to live in our village in two days' time." Having said that, she rushed out.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Xiuyun opened the letter and began to read carefully in the lamplight. When she came to the words "Xiuyun's a very good person. One day, she'll be happy..." she felt her heart thumping. She quickly closed her eyes, savouring their meaning. However, she was not easily moved like Qin. After a short while, she resumed her sad look. Shaking her head, she examined the neat handwriting on the envelope. But when she thought of Qin's words "The work team's come", her face suddenly lit up. What would it be like, she wondered?

Just then, Qiuyun sailed into the courtyard. Though she was only at the winter plum trees, her voice reached the hut first. "Isn't that great? You've decided to remain here!" Her sarcastic tone hurt Xiuyun and grated on her ears.

The big brown dog guarding the house barked at her, not recognizing her voice. Swearing, Qiuyun gave it a kick. The dog retreated, whining. Perhaps the kick reminded it who she was.

She halted at the door, staring silently at Xiuyun, her mouth

slightly open gasping for air as though she could swallow her sister. Xiuyun glanced at her and greeted her, lowering her head, "Qiuyun, please come in!"

Flopping down on the bed, Qiuyun looked round until she finally rested her eyes on Xiuyun, who was standing in a corner. All the abuse she had wanted to hurl at her suddenly, unaccountably, stuck in her throat. It was only after some time that she managed to say, "Oh hell! Why don't you speak? I'm not afraid of anything but your frown!"

"But you didn't ask me anything," replied Xiuyun with a sad smile. "What should I say?"

"You're the limit!" Qiuyun snapped, slapping her plump thigh. "What — what on earth are you up to?"

Xiuyun looked up but remained silent.

Qiuyun was too full of compassion to swear any more. With a deep sigh, she gave in helplessly. "You're impossible!"

Now that her sister was calmer, Xiuyun went over and sat beside her. Qiuyun turned to face her and asked her gently, "What's the matter?"

Xiuyun shook her head.

"You're not going to live alone like this all the rest of your life, are you?"

Xiuyun nodded.

"Because of you, I'm at the end of my tether! Isn't that man from the Ergu Mountains good enough for you?"

She shook her head again.

"Then why stick in this place?"

Tears filled her eyes.

"Oh, blast! Can't you open your mouth and talk?"

Xiuyun tried to remain calm. Checking her tears, she said falteringly, "I know it's not easy for you, sis. You're as kind to me as a mother... I'm sorry. I just don't want to leave. I can't bear to tear myself away from Gourd Plain. That's the honest truth. I simply can't..."

Qiuyun became silent. Tapping her forehead vehemently, she racked her brains to work out the real reason. Not a single person in the village knew what was weighing on Xiuyun's mind.

Qiuyun, who had come ready for a fight, was disarmed by her tender, frail sister.

After quite a while, Luo appeared unexpectedly at the door. Seeing her husband looking so cheerful, Qiuyun was puzzled at first and then vented all her exasperation on him. "Looking for trouble, eh? You big baby! Didn't I tell you I'd stay the night? What the hell are you doing here?"

Flushed with joy, Luo beckoned her to come outside. "Come here a minute. I've something important to tell you. Come out here!"

Impatiently, Qiuyun stepped out of the hut. Taking hold of her sleeve, Luo whispered something to her under the eaves. Xiuyun remained sitting on her bed. Before long, the whispers grew louder.

"Is it true? Really true?"

"Of course! Don't you believe me?"

"No, you can't trust him!"

"Oh! If only you'd been there! He even wept. As the saying goes, 'Men only weep when deeply hurt.' I think, he's realized his mistake and wants to make up for it. After all, it's an affair between a man and his wife. You must have heard, 'Love's eternal!'"

"Oh, stop your sob story! Let me think. . . . Well. . . ."

"Xiuyun doesn't want to leave. Who knows why? Perhaps . . . there's still hope. A reconciliation."

"You go and cancel the engagement."

"We must ask her opinion first."

Qiuyun returned to the hut, clapping her hands in glee. "Bah! At last, that son of a bitch Zheng Bairu did something human tonight! Ha, ha! . . . Guess what he said to Zuhua? He said he was sorry, that it was all his fault and now he regrets. . . ."

At this, Xiuyun sprang up, her face ashen. But she looked away.

"What's the matter? What is it?"

Xiuyun had overheard the conversation and was deeply hurt by words like "reconciliation". The mere mention of Zheng made her stomach turn. She almost screamed as if seeing a snake crawling through the thick undergrowth by Willow River.

Standing there for a while, she regained her composure. Suddenly she realized what was really going on. She had never imagined that Zheng would resort to such a mean trick. She was not prepared for this new harassment. All of a sudden, all his rottenness to her during the past years, all the bad things he had done to her and the village people, flashed back into her mind.

Zheng, who had been expelled from senior high school after half a year, was a scoundrel who had disgusted every decent girl. Ten years earlier he had dragged Xiuyun to the reedy bank from the river where she was washing and raped her in the summer twilight. She was too weak to openly protest about this outrage, too ashamed and nervous to tell her parents or the local government.

After their marriage, she had a baby. New hope rose within her. The dream almost destroyed revived, and she longed for a happy family life. But this was shattered when her child died of illness. What was worse, Zheng, who rose quickly to power in the "Cultural Revolution", brought a slut home and slept with her in their house.

Zheng frequently gave parties. He and his cronies abused the Party and did everything they could to topple Jin Dongshui, the secretary of the Party branch. They stole grain from the brigade and sold it on the black market. . . . Zheng had then tied Xiuyun up, and threatened her with a knife if she talked.

Then, once Zheng was firmly in control of the village, he wanted to get rid of Xiuyun. So he divorced her.

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To Xiuyun, the divorce was a release, an escape from hell. She still had her dreams. She wanted to forget all her past sufferings and turn over a new leaf. A peasant girl without much education, Xiuyun did not know much about revolutionary theories. Even her wishes were rather vague. Still, they warmed her heart and encouraged her to live on. She had been living like a hermit the past year, supported by a glimmer of hope.

Who would have foreseen Zheng taking such a step! How had he thought up such a scheme? What was behind it?

How could Qiuyun know her sister's scars? How could she

understand her? Noticing her pale face, Qiuyun asked, "It's good if you can make it up. But I'm afraid that son of a bitch will change his mind again. You might not be able to control him."

Xiuyun bit her lips and said, "Qiuyun, forget all about it. Don't tell a soul what Luo has said. It's out of the question!"

"Come on!" Qiuyun said in a self-righteous tone, "Do you take me for a fool? I'm not like him. I know what I'm doing. Don't just throw yourself at him! We must make clear our conditions. He must approach you first! We can force him to behave in future. He can't just do as he likes."

Xiuyun shook her head.

"All right. Let's go to sleep" Qiuyun said abruptly. "Forget that bastard! We'll talk it over in bed. He can go to hell!"

Luo pretended to cough outside, but Qiuyun did not hear him.

"Lou's still waiting for you," Xiuyun reminded her sister.

Luo, a little bolder, asked at the door, "If you're not coming back, I'll go now."

"Damn it!" Qiuyun shouted. "No, I'm not! Let's wait and see what happens!"

However, she made for the door. Before she went out, she turned and coaxed Xiuyun as if she were a child, "Go to sleep now. I'll always back you up. Nobody can sneer at the Xus for not having any guts."

Knowing her temperament well, Xiuyun ignored her useless boasting.

2

Long Qing had not yet gone to bed, though there was no light in his room. It was not that he wanted to save kerosene, but the light hurt his sensitive eyes. He sat on an old rickety chair, holding a charcoal heater in a basket. He was lost in thought, his eyes closed.

The commune cadres disliked this long-tested Party branch secretary. They regarded him as a peacemaker and rather confused old man. But in fact he was not like that at all. Though he appeared confused, he was quite aware of what was going on. The

commune members who liked him said that his heart was in the right place.

When another political movement had started the year before, Jin Dongshui had become a "negative example". It was no joke being labelled that. Jin had been suspended from office and forced to make a self-criticism. The commune Party committee then appointed the brigade leader, Long Qing, to be acting secretary. Long was sick at heart. He told the commune leaders, "Jin opposed Dazhai's ways of calculating work and pay. He restored the practice of allocating land and production quotas to each household and bringing back bonuses. I agreed with him. We discussed it together. Now you've dismissed him and promoted me. People will say I'm ambitious and that I plotted to bring him down! Future generations will curse me!" He was firmly against taking over. Later, Jin advised him in private, "I'm no match for them. I must step down. If you don't take over, all the power will fall into Zheng's hands. Then our village will suffer even more!" This persuaded Long to accept. Whenever there was anything important, he would go and consult Jin.

Because of Long, the brigade carried on slowly, and production was not too bad. The yield dropped, but not drastically. Most people, including Long himself, led a hard life. Though the land was not well looked after and weeds grew among the crops, there was no piece of land lying waste. The brigades on the Ergu Mountains had been competing with Gourd Plain Brigade for years. But their barns, either collectively or privately owned, were bursting with grain. The peasants on Gourd Plain had to rely on relief grain in winter and spring. They bitterly resented it, and Long grumbled too. But one thing consoled him. He never stole from the collective. He was always honest and fair and as poor as the others. This brought him some comfort.

Sitting in the darkness, he was busily thinking over the work for the next couple of days. The work team would soon arrive. Two things needed attending to urgently: where they would stay, and the arranging of a meeting to introduce all the cadres to them. Then he would wait for the work team's instruction and do what

he was told. Like always when a work team came, he stood aside. It seemed very natural to him.

Where could the work team stay? He thought of each home until finally he remembered the Xus' cottage. It was spacious, bright and neat with a stone wall and flowers in the compound. At least two or three of its rooms were vacant. More important, the Xus lived quite well, even their food was better than average. Though thrifty, the Xus were the best off in the village.

"So that's settled," he muttered to himself.

The dog outside suddenly barked, warning its master that someone was coming.

The quiet winter evening was rather eerie. The peasants seldom visited one another at this time unless in an emergency. In this biting cold wind, some were still hurrying through the fields on some business for the collective, while others only cared about their own interests. Tonight, under the dark blue sky, a few hurried over the patchwork fields.

An energetic young man was walking towards Long's cottage, the pale moonlight shining on his broad shoulders. Wu Changquan was a middle school graduate and book-keeper of the fourth production team. If the entrance examinations had not been discontinued, he would surely have entered a university to study radio technology. But instead he was here. His mother was all he had in this world. Both were greatly respected by the villagers. If the moonlight had been brighter, his square, handsome face and his honest, shy expression would have been visible. If you asked a person like him what his ideals were, he would not know what to say. But his hard work demonstrated that he was a real man. As soon as he graduated from senior middle school, he returned to his village and without hesitation began to work in the fields. Pretty soon, he was involved in agricultural experiments. The first year, he had tried out "Hormone 920" on a cotton patch in the fourth team's experimental plot. It helped to prevent the flowers and bolls from falling and so increased the yield. In his excitement, he dreamed of applying science to agriculture. Having had a taste of success, he resolved to do more. His scientific group's experimental plot was so successful

that it attracted the interest of the young people and shocked the old experienced peasants.

Long Qing was delighted to see him. He showed him in and offered him his chair, while he sat down on a bench.

"Light the lamp, Sanwa. Hurry up!" Long called to his child in the next room. A boy appeared immediately and struck a match to light the kerosene lamp, made from an ink bottle, on a square table.

"How are your tiny golden wasps getting along?" Long asked. "Not died of cold, I hope? Oh my eyes! So sore, I haven't been to your team for a couple of days now."

Wu leaned nearer and took a close look at his eyes. Then he said in earnest, "Uncle, you must sleep more."

Long agreed.

"You'd better stop burning the midnight oil. Have a few days off. A good change is what you need!"

"Impossible! Perhaps I'll have to suffer for forty-nine days."

Wu grinned and asked, "Why forty-nine days?"

"I'm forty-nine this year."

The young man could not help chuckling at this unscientific explanation.

But tonight, Wu had not come to lecture him on his health. He wanted to ask his opinion about the annual grain figures.

At supper time, Zheng Bairu had called on him and told him to sort out the annual grain figures with the other teams' book-keepers the following day. He stressed that everything possible should be done to surpass the quota. Zheng even gave him a few tips: "For example, the net weight of grain allocated to the peasants was calculated at seventy per cent of the gross weight. Raise the percentage a bit to eighty or ninety. Then there's the stalks. Aren't there one or two cattles of wheat in a hay stack? Isn't there any grain left in the hay? Take all these factors into consideration, and we'll surpass our target this year!" Wu could not work out what Zheng was up to. He asked Long nervously, "Is there any new instruction from above?"

"No. Nothing like that!"

Wu was somewhat relieved and then asked, "In that case,

I feel better. Mother said if what Zheng was suggesting really came from above, we would all suffer terribly again."

If people started playing such dirty tricks in Gourd Plain, Long, as the brigade leader, would have to take all the responsibility. If the peasants opposed it, and an investigation was ordered, Zheng might lie and lay all the blame on him. Long was dreadfully worried.

"Zheng's the deputy secretary and book-keeper. Hasn't he discussed it with you?" Wu inquired.

"No," Long said, gesturing with his hands. "Not even a note."

"Ridiculous!" the young man said angrily. "The yield's from the land, not the abacus!" We're not going to do it! Our team's failed to reach the target. So we'll work harder next year and try to surpass it then."

Young and innocent, he did not understand fully the complicated political situation.

"All right. I'm going now." Wu rose to leave and then added, "I just came to clarify the matter."

Long saw him off, and then, blowing out the light, with a heavy heart sat down again on his battered old chair.

3

"I must go now, aunt." Qin got to her feet and added, "Don't forget to tell Wu what I just said."

"It's still early," Jin Shunyu, Wu's mother, replied, trying to detain her. "Do stay a bit longer. He'll be back very soon. We see so little of you."

Blushing, Qin resumed her seat, feeling strangely self-conscious. She looked round at the walls and the furniture as if for the first time. In the middle of one wall was a framed colour portrait of Chairman Mao. The other walls were covered with pictures and charts on cotton, rice, wheat and fruit. Hanging from a beam were bags of samples of good strains. On the table was a large kerosene lamp. She had seen all these umpteen times before.

Jin moved her chair closer to Qin and asked abruptly, "Some

people from your team told me that Xiuyun's changed her mind. Is it true?"

"Yes." Qin nodded, her expression slightly worried.

"But why?"

"I don't know," answered Qin, "but I think it's not such a bad thing. She's so soft, she could easily be bullied again. If only she were like Qiuyun. No one dares bully her!"

Smiling, Jin said shaking her head, "It's not just a matter of character. Now, you go and tell her she must stick to her decision. What a shame! She's such a good girl! Ten years ago, she looked just like you. You two are so alike. The only difference is that she was shy, she always looked down, while you're open and easy-going. I'm sorry your mother died when you were a baby.... Tell Xiuyun to drop in whenever she's time, Qin. She'll find a sympathetic shoulder to cry on."

"Thanks." Qin nodded in gratitude.

Wu's mother had been very active during the land-reform movement when she joined the Party, though she had not been a cadre in the past few years. She was a warm, honest woman, who knew Qin well. Besides, Qin's mother and she had been bosom friends and neighbours for many years, so her words soothed Qin.

Now Jin suddenly turned the conversation to her son again. As an old Communist, she could analyse the political upheavals. However, she worried about her son. Though he was a very decent boy, he seemed to be hiding something from her. She tried in vain to find out what it was. So she asked Qin, "You're a Youth League branch secretary. Do you know what's going on in your members' minds? Take our Changquan for instance. I really don't know what he's thinking about. I can't help worrying about the way people behave these days."

Qin said with a smile, "I can't vouch for the others, but I'm sure he's alright. Don't worry so much."

With a lighter heart Jin wondered if perhaps Qin knew the answer to her question.

"Not worry?" Jin continued. "Nowadays, you young people

don't confide in your parents, not even a word to your own mothers. How can I help it?"

Qin grinned and added, "He's very bad to keep a secret from you."

"You often go to meetings, so you know him quite well. I don't suppose you know his secret?" Jin tried to sound her out.

"Me?" Qin blushed, feeling rather awkward.

"After all, you're the secretary of the Youth League branch," Jin went on.

This saved Qin from further embarrassment. She explained, "Neither I nor the branch are doing so well. Changquan's far more able than I. Everyone admires him. But he..."

"Yes?"

"Something seems to be troubling him."

"Yes, it certainly does."

"But I've no idea what's the matter."

"So you don't know either."

Jin looked disappointed. Then she came to the point, "Changquan was born in May 1951. He'll be twenty-five in a few months. Several of his relatives and neighbours wanted to introduce some girls to him, but he refused. Then he said to me, 'Mum, tell them that I've already got a girlfriend.' When I asked him who the girl was, he wouldn't say. Once when I pressed him hard, he defended himself. 'Don't be angry with me, mum. To tell you the truth, I'll never marry!' Imagine! What's wrong with him? In fact, I won't mind so much if he does remain single all his life. I'm just scared to death he might marry the wrong sort of girl. Then there'll be no end of trouble!"

After a short pause, Qin said, "I'm completely in the dark. But you needn't worry. He's not a fool. He knows what he's doing." Though she tried to cheer Jin up, she was wondering herself what was wrong with Wu. For such an intelligent and honest man, he was very clumsy in his personal affairs.

She felt that he must be very disturbed, and her sympathy for him unconsciously made her biased in his favour.

Noticing this, Jin thought, "What luck if Changquan married her." But she said nothing to save Qin from any embarrassment,

while inwardly resolving to go straight to Xu Mao herself and propose the match. It could not be delayed any more, not even two or three days. She would go looking for the old man the following day. Qin was the only girl in the world who could suit her son.

They began chatting and got on well together, seeing eye to eye on many topics such as the fight between factions in Taiping Town, the county's tractor factory's not having been operational since its establishment, the way of calculating workpoints which benefited the lazy and so on.

Wu returned in the middle of their lively conversation.

He started when he saw Qin sitting there. Nodding slightly in greeting, he went into his bedroom.

His mother quickly asked, "What did Long say? Did you see him?"

"It's neither an instruction from above nor a decision of the Party branch. It's all Zheng's idea!"

"Did Long say anything else? What shall we do?"

"He didn't say much, but our team's definitely not going to do it."

Qin was puzzled. She was about to ask when Jin changed the topic calling to Wu, "Come here. Your secretary's got something to discuss with you."

Wu ambled in and, pulling over a stool, sat down at the far end of the room, looking rather aloof.

"There was a meeting all day today," Qin explained. "In the afternoon, the Youth League committee was assigned some work. We've to help eliminate illiteracy, set up scientific groups and encourage public hygiene. For the public relations work, all the brigades' branches are asked to start up their spare-time song-and-dance groups again. I want to discuss with you the setting-up of a scientific group in each production team. The Youth League members should take the initiative in this. The county's work team is now at the commune headquarters and will soon visit the production brigades. Team Leader Yan is keen for us to act immediately. She suggested making a plan first, with the

League members and young people doing most of the work, while the older peasants act as advisers. I told her about you and your scientific experiments. She was delighted and said she would like to meet you. Well, Changquan, what do you think we should do now?"

"We ought to have done it long ago," said Changquan. "But I've no idea how to start it. It's up to your Youth League branch."

"Come off it!" Qin cried, laughing. "How can you talk like that? Aren't you a member?"

"I'll soon reach the age limit."

"As long as you're a member, you should do your bit."

"Well, but I'm afraid...."

"Of what? Making public the results of your scientific experiments? Don't you think that's a bit selfish?"

Qin certainly knew how to persuade people. Her laughter, her little barbs, her lively manner, her soft, clear voice, which could be severe when necessary, could charm anyone.

"All right, all right. Tell me what I should do," Changquan gave in.

They got down to work. As long as it was scientific research, and not giving a performance, he was ready to help in every way. Finally they both agreed that the Youth League branch would call a meeting to discuss the matter the next day, and Changquan would be an adviser.

Having got what she had wanted, Qin started to say goodbye to Jin.

"What's the hurry?" Jin asked. "You hardly ever come here. Stay a bit longer. Don't worry about it being late. Changquan can see you home."

Despite her protests, Qin remained where she was. She did want to stay, though she did not know why.

The three of them carried on chatting, until Jin, afraid that Xu Mao might blame her for keeping his daughter out so late, told Wu to see Qin home. By then, the crescent moon was almost at the ridge of the Western Hill.

It never rains but it pours. The fate of forty-year-old Jin Dongshui seemed to have proved that.

It was only after Liberation that Jin, for the first time, wore shoes and went to the village school. He had no worries, no anxieties. When he grew up, he joined the army and, after his demobilization, began working like everybody else. Marriage meant he had to work hard to keep up the family, but life was happy. Then he began to do Party work, shouldering the heavy load of building socialism in Gourd Plain.

An ordinary peasant, he had never dreamed of this. Just when his son was old enough to join the Young Pioneers, Jin landed in a terrible fix politically.

Was it fate? No, Jin did not believe in that. As a Communist, in the army he had carefully studied the history of the Communist Party. That winter night of 1975, he was reading a book by the lamplight and helping his eleven-year-old son to do his homework in their isolated shed. There was no trace of suffering or resentment on his square, calm face. It was as if nothing had happened to him or his children.

That spring, the decisions of the Fourth National People's Congress reached even a backwater like Gourd Plain. In the summer, there was the good news of the Central Party's call for a rectification campaign in every area of work, and then the agricultural conference in late autumn was all the more inspiring to the peasants. A taciturn peasant, Jin had the habit of thinking things over by himself. He stubbornly believed life, with its ups and downs, would one day inevitably improve! Jin had no belief in fate like the older generation.

The wind from the cypress woods on the Ergu Mountains noisily blew the thatched roof of the little shed. The water in Willow River lapped against the stones with an urgent rhythmic sound. There came an occasional dog's bark from Pear Orchard, half a kilometre away. Amid those accustomed noises, light steps could be heard on the path leading to Pear Orchard.

"Dad, it's Grandpa Long!"

The boy looked up from his textbook. Jin listened and then shook his head, around which he had wrapped a blue towel. "No, it's not him," he replied.

Blinking, the son said again, "Uncle Changquan?" "Hardly."

Who was it then? Who would come to this lonely place so late at night?

The light, quick steps stopped outside the shed. No knock, no voice. The alert boy asked in a tense high voice, "Who's there?"

"Me. Haven't you gone to bed yet, Changsheng?" a young woman's voice asked.

The boy darted a glance at his father and then jumped down to open the door, but Jin caught him by the arm.

The surprise visit and the past made Jin hesitate. He frowned as the blood rushed to his face. But how could Changsheng understand the past? The boy explained, "It's Aunt Xiuyun. Don't you recognize her voice?"

The steps sounded again outside and then vanished.

The boy was so upset that he almost cried. He struggled free from his father's grip, dashed to the door and wrenched it open. But there was no sign of Xiuyun except for a parcel on the threshold. As he was about to pick it up, there came the woman's voice from the dark path.

"Changsheng, come over here quickly!"

Dropping the parcel, the boy dashed towards her.

After Jin's home had been burnt down and his wife had died, the family had got a lot of help from Qiuyun, Xiuyun and Qin, especially with the sewing and mending of the children's clothes. Sometimes they brought them grain and other food. The little girl, Changxiu had only been two years old when her mother died. Xiuyun, who had no children, adopted her, a common practice among relations. However, her husband had started the vicious rumour that Jin was having an affair with her. The rumour spread like wildfire. To smooth over the situation, Long Qing, without investigating the facts, warned Jin in a roundabout way,

"Think before you do anything. Don't let others tarnish your reputation!"

To save his face, Xu Mao bellowed at his daughters, "Think of your father's reputation, or I'll give you a good beating!"

As Zheng wanted to be rid of Xiuyun, he beat her up and demanded a divorce on the grounds of her supposed adultery. Xiuyun, who was only too glad to leave their intolerable home, complied by printing her finger on the divorce certificate. She returned to live with her father, though she had had to take a grip on herself to swallow the insult. Indignant, Jin took back his daughter from Xiuyun. When working in the fields, he carried her on his back. At criticism meetings in the evenings, he carried her in his arms. He never spoke again to Xiuyun, ignoring her if they happened to meet. He was sure his political reputation would be cleared one day, but not the rumour that he had had an affair with Xiuyun. It was disgusting!

Jin paced the little room in frustration. It was too small for an energetic man like him.

Presently, the boy returned, the parcel in his hands. Joyfully he stood before his father and cried, "Aunt Xiuyun said that the county's work team is coming to our village!"

Ignoring him, Jin kept pacing up and down. But his son continued, "She asked if you were going to grandpa's birthday party. She said that his health isn't so good and that you must go and see him. She'll get some presents for us and send them over in a couple of days."

The message was clear. Jin was stunned for a minute and then scolded his son, "Shut up! We're not going!"

Changsheng, puzzled, stared at his father and then opened the parcel. There was a small silk-covered cotton-padded coat. It was not brand-new and had obviously been made out of old clothes. Jin looked at it blankly, his eyes misting over.

The excited boy ran to the bed and shook his sister awake. He helped the little girl, still rubbing her eyes, to try it on. How kind of aunt!

If not for Changxiu and a vague hope in the future, Xiuyun would never have gone there.

Unable to see her path clearly, Xiuyun tripped and once or twice fell into the safflower field by the roadside. Then she stood up, carefully dusting the petals and leaves from her clothes. Finally she slipped and landed in a wet paddy-field. Her trousers were soaked. She clambered out and carried on. The tears well-ed up and she began to sob.

After Qiuyun and Luo had left her hut, she had gone with the parcel, despite the great risk of being seen. But why had she taken such a risk?

For Changxiu! One evening ten days before, after she and a few women had finished work and were walking along the road linking Mulberry Grove and Pear Orchard, she heard a girl's voice from behind, "Aunty!" She turned to look and spotted Jin with a shoulder pole. In the front basket was an oil can; in the back one Changxiu, wrapped up in an adult's worn-out cotton-padded coat. All Xiuyun could see of her was her little rosy face and hands gripping the basket ropes. It seemed ages since they had been parted. The child called in delight, "Aunty! Aunty!"

In surprise and joy, she replied, "Changxiu!"

Heads turned. Some women warmly greeted Jin, now the pump keeper. Others called to his daughter. Jin smiled and greeted them, but did not give so much as a glance at Xiuyun. Changxiu cried out again and again, tugging at the basket. . . . Xiuyun wept, her heart aching.

"What a pity! No mother! If her mother saw all this her heart would break!"

"Yes. Look how she's still wearing the little jacket that was made for her when she was a baby. And that huge old cotton-padded coat. . . ."

"Look at her little hands, red with cold!"

These sad comments seemed to stab Xiuyun.

"If she were still with me," Xiuyun thought, "she'd be better off." But Jin's cold, stony look and the thought of all the



Jin was carrying a shoulder-pole, with his daughter Changxiu in the back basket.

rumours about them made her shiver. That night, unknown to her father and Qin, she rummaged in her suitcase and found a blouse which she had worn when she was a girl. Having ripped it apart, she began to remake it into a child's cotton-padded coat. Every night after Qin had gone to bed, she sat alone, sewing it, thinking about Changxiu and herself, about the present and the future. Many times, she dreamed beautiful dreams. Many times, her eyes filled with tears. Her fingers were often pricked by the needles. Stitch after stitch, her dreams, grief and tears were sewn into the coat. Vaguely she sensed that her fate linked her to Changxiu! Yes, they were inseparable! What would life be without her? Without hope? Though only a peasant with a pair of calloused hands, she had great self-control. No matter how emotional she felt, she would never reveal it. She buried all her feelings deep in her heart. That morning, she had shocked her father, her sisters, and almost everybody in the village by announcing her decision to stay. People were guessing, talking. But those careless people did not know that even withered winter grass had roots which were still alive!

.....

Xiuyun felt extremely sad! Rising to her feet, she shivered, her shoes wet and cold from the muddy water. She trudged along, feeling washed out. Though she had withstood all past agonies, she felt Jin's cutting her dead harder to bear than all the beatings Zheng had inflicted on her. She had wanted so much to confide in him tonight! Zheng's sudden change and his desire to make it up with her had put her on her guard. She sensed that there must be something which made Zheng scared, and that he was pretending to regret his wrong doings so as to involve her. But she would never be taken in, never return to that living hell! Luo's news had determined her to tell Jin that Zheng was up to something! She would also tell him what was on her mind: She wanted to give him hope, an outcast like herself, and encourage him to look forward and start a new life. But unfortunately all her wishes had been shattered. He had refused to see her! How sad she was! Wiping away the tears streaming down

her cheeks, she trudged homewards. But was that little hut her home?

It took her quite a while to reach the cottage.

She quickened her steps at the gate. Before she had left, she had tied a straw round the two door-knockers, a sign to Qin that she was out, so Qin would not bolt the gate if she returned first. Otherwise, Xiuyun would arouse her father, and that would be asking for trouble. If Qin inquired the next day where she had been, Xiuyun was going to tell her she had been at Qiuyun's.

At the gate, she noticed that the straw had disappeared. She reckoned Qin must have been home for some time. She stepped forward to give the gate a light push, but just then came the sound of steps from behind. Her hand trembled a little and she shrank back lest she drew the attention of the passers-by. Hidden in the dark doorway, she held her breath and peered at the two figures, one tall, one short, walking in her direction.

"Oh! Who can they be?" She held her breath, her nails digging into her palms. They were not going past.

The two figures stopped by the pear tree ten metres away from the gate.

"Here's your home," sounded a man's voice.

"Thanks for your kindness. See you tomorrow," Qin replied.

After a short pause, Qin said, "I'll come back part of the way with you, so we can walk a bit more."

"Better not," the man said. "It'll be dawn if we keep on like this. You'd better turn in. I'm going now." He turned and hurried off.

Qin did not move but gazed in his direction, though it was too dark to see anything.

Having witnessed this, Xiuyun became calmer, a wry smile on her face. She turned and went towards Qin and asked in a small voice, "Qin! Who ... who's that young man?"

Astonished, Qin came back to earth, and, seeing it was her sister, threw herself into her arms, her hot face against her sister's cold cheek. Xiuyun, realizing what had happened, asked urgently, "Who is he?"

"Changquan."

"Oh!" Xiuyun's taut nerves relaxed.

As an elder sister, she was delighted that Qin had at last fallen in love. She had been worried that Qin might be courting the wrong person, blinded by love. On learning it was Changquan, she felt relieved. He was one of the finest young men in the village.

The sisters stood facing each other for quite a while in the cold wind. Xiuyun felt happier. Holding Qin's hands, she wanted to tell her something important. But what was it? She couldn't find the words. But Qin did not notice any change in her sister. She was so overwhelmed by her own joy that she did not even ask where her sister had been.

They made for the gate, still holding each other's hands. Qin asked suddenly at the gate, "Tell me, sis, why should one get married?"

Xiuyun stared at her blankly, not knowing what to say. Qin asked foolishly, "Well, if it's wonderful to remain single, what's the good of getting married?"

Xiuyun averted her eyes and looked up at the dark sky, musing, "So she's still too young." But she could not help uttering, "Didn't you say it's wonderful to remain single? But surely everybody wants to have a home of his own. Even an ant has an ant-hill to go to, hasn't it?"

Then she gently pushed the gate open. Excited with her own hopes for the future, she forgot about the missing straw tied to the door-knockers.

Having noiselessly bolted the gate, they separated. Qin headed for her own bedroom.

Xiuyun opened the door of the hut and stepped in. As she was groping about on the window-sill for a match, a dark figure suddenly jumped up from the bed and knelt down at her feet!

Xiuyun screamed and fainted instantly. But the dark figure kept pleading piteously, "Xiuyun, where have you been? You didn't even shut the door properly. I've been waiting for you for a long time. Please forgive me."

Qin heard the scream just as she reached the doorstep. Think-

ing Xiuyun must have fallen over something, Qin turned back and ran towards the hut.

"What is it, sis?" she called.

When she got there a figure appeared from the darkness and dashed across the courtyard, wrenching the gate open and disappearing. Qin almost fainted herself. In panic, she cried at the top of her voice, "Thief! Stop thief!"

Then she squatted beside Xiuyun. She hardly seemed to be breathing.

(To be continued)

*Translated by Wang Mingjie
Illustrated by Wang Weizheng*

Xue Ling

A Peasant Writer Zhou Keqin

ZHOU Keqin has become a well-known writer in China since the publication of his novel *Xu Mao and His Daughters* in 1979. Journalists, TV reporters, film makers and playwrights have been flocking to the mountain village where he has quietly lived for over twenty years.

Three young people, after reading *Xu Mao and His Daughters*, wrote to Zhou, "You must have visited our village, or you must be a peasant." They were quite correct. Before 1979, Zhou Keqin was a peasant, writing only in his spare time. Like every peasant, he lived on what he earned. If the harvest was good, he got more money, but if it was bad, he could hardly make ends meet. During the "Cultural Revolution", the system of paying royalties was stopped so he could not get any money from his writings.

At the end of last September I, too, went specially to Jianyang County, Sichuan Province, to visit Zhou. At our first meeting I studied him carefully. He is much taller than the average Sichuan male. He seemed eager, yet thoughtful, speaking slowly about everything imaginable.

Xue Ling is a staff writer for *Chinese Literature*.

The next morning we left the county town and went along a winding mountain path by a small river. After a dozen *li*, we reached Zhou's home. Originally, I had wanted to experience the mysterious fog described in the novel, but, unfortunately, I came in fine weather, seldom seen in central Sichuan. The red soil had been poor, but the hardworking peasants had transformed



Zhou Keqin

it into fertile fields. As we walked along the mountain path, we found the rice in the paddy-fields in the valleys had just been harvested. The sugarcane on the slopes was growing well. Sweet potatoes and corn were covering the tops of the hills. Vegetables in the private plots were dotted around the cottages surrounded by green bamboo groves.

Zhou Keqin's cottage consisted of three rooms: one was used as a kitchen as well as a storeroom and two as a bedroom and living-room, simply furnished with an old fashioned double-bed and two tables. Nothing superfluous.

"Did you write your novel here?" I asked.

Nodding, he answered, "I wrote part of it here. There's no electricity in the mountains, and it hurt my eyes writing by kerosene lamp. There are lots of mosquitoes in the summer, so I had to burn two mosquito-repellent incense coils whenever I wrote."

The incense was made of sawdust and benzene hexachloride. I thought burning that could be harmful to one's health, although it would certainly keep the mosquitoes away!

Around his house there was a courtyard about 50 metres square, in which stood a pigsty and a fold for sheep. Some hens alighted on the trough to peck the leftovers from the pig swill. The hungry

pigs were grunting for food. The sheep were still in the fold. After a while, Zhou's wife returned with a bamboo basket on her back. She had left early that morning for the market ten *li* away to buy meat for us. A typical, honest peasant woman, she greeted me, then, putting her bamboo basket down, she began to feed the pigs and let out the sheep to graze on the slopes. This done, she went to the kitchen to start cooking.

"I was told that after the publication of your novel, you gave the first copy to your wife. Is that true?" I asked Zhou.

He replied, "Yes. We have four children. Our eldest daughter, aged seventeen, is a temporary worker, while the other three are still at school. We leave all the housework to my wife. But for her, I could not have completed my novel. She was a middle-school graduate. After leaving school, she came to work as a branch secretary of the Youth League and chairman of the Women's Federation in our production brigade. When we got married in 1962, she stopped all her social activities."

When we talked about Zhou's life, he told me, "I'm forty-four this year. I'm from Sichuan. Before Liberation I only had three years at primary school and over one year at junior middle school. My father had seven children. I was the eldest. Unable to support such a large family, my father sent me out to work as an apprentice in a sugar refinery in Chengdu, but I was too small to do the job. So, in 1953, I passed the examination to study at an agricultural technical school where I remained for six years.

"But I had no intention of studying agriculture. I wanted to study Chinese literature at university. But my family could not afford to send me there. The agricultural technical school could offer me tuition free, so I went there instead. It had a very good library, so I read lots of Chinese and foreign books.

"After my graduation in 1958 I applied to return home, for in that year the government asked all cadres to go and work in the countryside. Unable to assign any work to us graduates, the school sent us to labour for a year in a people's commune in the suburbs of Chengdu. At that time I was just over twenty and physically strong, but the school only paid us nine yuan per month, just

enough for our food. Since my large family needed my help, I thought I would rather work at home.

"Besides, during the 1957 anti-Rightist campaign, I stated that what the Rightists said was correct, when I read their views in the papers. So I was accused of having sympathized with them and was criticized in 1958.

"Being a stubborn peasant, I refused to admit I was wrong or make a self-criticism. As a Youth League member, I was first criticized within the Youth League organization. I was so angry that I quit the League. The teachers said my attitude was very bad, so I did not pass politics although I got top marks in other subjects.

"I was very depressed. In the Youth League, I had been an advanced member and council member of the students' federation often writing articles and making speeches. I was not convinced when they said I did not pass politics. Secondly, I did not like the job assigned to me by the school as an agricultural technician in a county or in a people's commune. I preferred literature, and what's more, I was greatly influenced by Gorky's autobiographical trilogy. My application to return home perhaps agreed with the ideas of the authorities and was soon approved.

"Back home, I felt very happy despite the hard conditions. The neighbours had seen me growing up. They understood me, not complaining that I was bad or could not pass politics. As a matter of fact, they were pleased I had returned.

"I worked as a production team leader, a book-keeper and a technician. It was not until May 1978 that I became a state cadre working in the district office and a year later I was transferred to be a professional writer in the provincial federation of literary and art circles."

"When did you begin writing?"

"In 1955 I published my first short story *Grandpa Yuan, the Salt Miner* in a Chengdu paper, occupying a space no bigger than my palm," he replied, stretching out his hand. "Anyhow, that was my first published work. As for when I first began to write, that was much earlier. But it's difficult to say the exact year.

"I remember, when I was still a boy, the main cultural activity

in our area was story-telling. All the stories were about how chaste women endured unbearable hardships to be praised by certain emperors or high officials, who ordered memorial archways to be built for them. The main part of the audience consisted of women, who wept while listening. I liked to listen too. We children sat at the feet of the story-teller. These stories excited my imagination and I wanted to make up some of my own.

"Through my education, I came to distinguish different literary styles. I immediately liked the writings of Xiao Hong and Bing Xin, who wrote in the thirties. After I began to write, of the contemporary Chinese writers, I admired most Sun Li and his realistic style. During the ten chaotic years of the 'Cultural Revolution', there were only slogans and false reports in the papers and magazines. Creative writing was stifled. If we want to develop literature, we must follow realism.

"I think there are two kinds of writers at any one time. One group describe the most urgent problems that exist, which concern politics and life, acting as a voice for the people; the others write movingly about everyday life to arouse their readers and leave a deep impression on them. I prefer the latter.

"The story *Grandpa Yuan, the Salt Miner* was based on real people and real events. Encouraged by the success of this story, I wrote more realistic stories. But later I felt I could not fully express all my feelings in this way. So I began to write fiction. In 1963 I published *At the Edge of the Well*. This was the first fictional story I wrote. I published about twenty stories, all of which dealt with how ordinary peasants sought a better life by overcoming various difficulties. *Xu Mao and His Daughters* was my first novel."

Zhou then made me a cup of tea. While smoking and enjoying the tea, we discussed his novel in detail.

Zhou told me, "I began to form the plot in the winter of 1975. In the latter half of that year, the magazine *Sichuan Literature* had asked me to help them. At that time since nobody wanted to write for it, the editors had to write themselves. At the end of that year I was sent with an old editor to Hualin Production Brigade in Jiange County to write a series of reports.

"Hualin Production Brigade was an advanced unit in the province; the peasants harvested much grain and raised many pigs. The children were healthy, the women were rosy and sturdy. Although the cadres there were also influenced by ultra-Leftist ideas, they knew how to protect the peasants and their interests. The brigade Party secretary, who is now the first Party secretary of the county, also often mouthed slogans such as 'learn from Dachai and surpass Xiyang', but in reality he knew what to do, just like my hero Long Qing. When he was ordered to organize a campaign to build terraced fields at night, he just planted some red flags on the slopes and asked some old men and children to beat drums and gongs to pretend that people were working, while in fact letting them rest at home. But such a kind peasant cadre had been criticized as a Rightist. This made a deep impression on me.

"After returning to Chengdu, I wanted to write, but the political atmosphere did not allow me. Later I wrote a short story, *The Hope*, about how two honest county cadres worked hard to promote production. My purpose was to indicate that only when production was boosted could we have hope. Who could have foreseen that after this story was published, the editing committee of *Sichuan Literature* received more than a dozen letters criticizing me? Fortunately, the editing committee firmly supported me and did not publish the letters.

"After the downfall of the 'gang of four', I edited a collection of short stories entitled *The Brother and Sister of the Shi Family* in 1977, and then I got ready to write my novel. Starting in 1978, I began writing it, completing the ten chapters a year and a half later. I was still not a professional writer."

I remarked about the heroine Xu Xiuyun, "She is a vivid character. She epitomizes the best in our society, and left a deep impression on me."

Zhou was silent. It seemed I had touched something in him. He tried to control himself. After a while he began slowly, "Xiuyun has all the sterling qualities of a Chinese peasant woman: gentle, virtuous, hardworking and self-sacrificing. But she is also influenced by feudal ethics — the ideas of Confucianism. On the other hand, she has been educated and influenced by the socialist

women's liberation movement. These three irreconcilable forces make her helpless.

"Xiuyun is drawn from life. She is the spirit of our nation. Ours is a great nation. But there are many things which restrict us; our economy is backward, and feudal conventions weigh heavily on us. We can't do the things we want to and achieve our goals easily. Our times, while giving us hope, also bring agony and anxiety. . . . If not for this, there would not have been the tragedy of the ten years during the 'Cultural Revolution'."

About another main character, Xu Mao, Zhou said, "Characters like Xu Mao I haven't described in my stories before. It's not that I wasn't familiar with such a person, but rather that I didn't want to write about him. In the works I read, peasants like Xu Mao were always treated in a negative way. Some writers wrote sympathetically but critically; some depicted such characters as selfish, conservative and backward, always overshadowed by positive characters. These positive characters are none other than their own relations. I felt that it was unfair to treat Xu Mao that way. It wouldn't give a fair portrayal of him. So I decided to depict him with more space in a fairly long novel.

"Those who are familiar with country life know that the Chinese peasants in the early fifties had a very strong sense of emancipation both politically and economically. Indeed, those were good times! But the situation changed in 1958. Peasants were forced to join the advanced cooperative and criticized at random; their personal freedom suffered. About the decade of chaos from 1966, I need say no more; nothing was worse than that. This upset Xu Mao and his like. They became estranged from the Party. I think it is sympathy, not reproaches, that we should give Xu Mao.

"I do not mean that my political understanding is good. But I do understand such people."

When I began to discuss his writing style, Zhou told me, "Strictly speaking I haven't yet formed a unique style. Not long ago, when my novel was adapted into an opera and TV play, people remarked it was a drama about girls. They were right. Since I began to write, most of my stories are about peasant women. This may limit my themes and characters."

Xu Mao and His Daughters is set in Gourd Plain Village in the winter of 1975. I asked Zhou if he chose that year because the political struggles were particularly acute, complicated and dramatic then.

Zhou Keqin took exception to this. "Some articles say that the success of *Xu Mao and His Daughters* lies in the fact that it reflects that period. Such a view is too superficial. It's true that the struggle in that year was very complicated. Comrade Deng Xiaoping was rehabilitated for the first time after he had been criticized at the start of the 'Cultural Revolution' in 1966. Although he only presided over the work of the Central Committee for a very short time, he made great efforts to put things right and promote production. Thus the 'gang of four' hated him and began to attack him again at the end of that year. I wrote about this to show that despite the ten years, the Chinese people never despaired. Whenever conditions improved, they felt hopeful."

When I asked Zhou about his views on literature today, he said frankly, "I think we must restore realism in literature. We must look at reality and reflect it. On this point, I have the same opinion as other young writers. I oppose whitewashing reality, while disagreeing to negate everything. Writers must reflect life truthfully; black is black, white is white. What deserves praise must be praised; what needs to be criticized must be criticized. The most important thing is that we must stand on the side of the people, pointing out life's problems.

"I agree with Sun Li's view that literature and art must be kept a bit separate from politics. I feel that the duty of a writer is to discover beauty in life. No matter how brutal and bloody the facts you write about, you must show through them the beauty that exists in the inner world of the people."

Finally, I asked, "Do you have any ideas about a sequel to *Xu Mao and His Daughters*?"

Zhou answered, "I'm now writing a novelette and several short stories. After finishing them, I'll begin to write the sequel to *Xu Mao and His Daughters*. It will concentrate on the young people like Zhen, Qin and Wu Changquan."

By the time we had concluded our interview, Zhou's wife had

prepared a meal for us of cold rabbit in a sauce, pig's liver, leeks with shredded meat and cabbage with sliced meat. . . . This was a typical peasant meal. To each dish was added hot pepper, particularly liked by the Sichuanese.

After the meal I bid farewell to the mountain village, remembering Zhou's interesting talk as well as his wife's hospitality.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

In July and August last year, the editorial department of *Poetry* held a course for seventeen young poets. Most of the participants began writing in the past two years. Six were workers, one was a commune member, three were cadres and seven were college students. Older poets and critics were invited to give lectures, and the young poets themselves wrote poems and exchanged views. *Poetry* published some of the poems composed during the course in No. 10, 1980. Here are a selection of those.

— The Editors

Liang Xiaobin

My Monthly Season Ticket

When I got on the bus heading for the future,
The conductress asked me to show my monthly season ticket.
A man of gentle disposition,
I was pondering over some newly-composed lines
For a suitable implied message.
So I took out from my breast pocket
A 1980s calendar.

Liang Xiaobin (梁小斌), a young man of 24, is a worker from Hefei, Anhui Province.

Lifting it high,
It looked like a sheet of metal,
Which I waved slightly.
Then, the bus suddenly caught its splendour.

A 1980s calendar
Is my monthly ticket,
Is my identification card.

I can prove with that
I am an ordinary passenger,
A citizen of the People's Republic of China
Who ardently loves the future.

A Golden Apple

The young manager of the factory,
Smear'd with grease,
Goes round the entire workshop.

A newly-recruited worker,
Who doesn't give a damn,
Is eating an apple beside his machine.

Quietly the manager steps over,
And, like plucking a flower,
Removes the apple from his mouth.

Then, the manager strides onward,
His steps firm and vigorous,
And the pretty apple is squashed underfoot.

Squashed into pulp,
While the workshop is filled with its sweet smell,
Its delicate fragrance.

From the open door,
The odour of machine oil,
Strong and stimulating.

Squashed into pulp,
But please don't blame the manager
For his ruthless attitude!

He walks straight to the door;
As if gazing into the distance,
A gloomy expression on his face.

But along the silent assembly line,
Slowly the new electric machines go past;
Ignoring the little incident.

Modern collective labour
Requires the workers to observe strict discipline;
Here there are no such idealistic feelings.

I praise the heroes of our time;
My pastoral songs are in a crisis.
Because of this, I am always reflecting.

Ye Yanbin

Lamp, a Burning Heart

The treasure of the poor mountain hamlet is a long night,
The greatest pleasure of the poor villagers is an early sleep.
But to me, a long night means more nightmares,
So I sit reading by an oil lamp made from an ink bottle,
Greedily absorbing the brightness as big as a bean!

Today, there is a brand-new kerosene lamp on my *kang*,
So bright that it lights up my heart.
You shouldn't have spent one yuan twenty cents on me;
That cost you three days work,
Thirty work-points, my foster mother!

Lying on the *kang* in the night, my eyes open,
I think of my real mother, locked up in the "cowshed"*...
"To run thirty *li* for a lamp in such a snowstorm, you crazy
old woman!

Ye Yanbin (叶延滨), a young man of 32, is a college student in Beijing.
* The slang name given to the rooms where people were illegally detained during the "Cultural Revolution".

I'll admire you if you don't complain about your aching legs!"
"Be quiet! You'll wake the boy with your noise.
Youngsters like light; they're afraid of dark graves."
Foster mother's voice is low, her sigh suppressed...
Along the mountain path in a snowstorm,
An old woman with bound feet is holding a lamp in her
hands...
Young people, to illuminate the road for others,
You must have the courage
To offer your burning heart!

Two Towels Hung on the Wire

With the irritating smell of tobacco,
The stinking smell of sweat,
The foul smell from the sheepfold,
And what was wiped away from the neck of the old man —
Soil, sweat, dirt, dung, dust, grass, ashes...

In a few days, my snow-white towel turned grey,
For the old man used it.

Silently, from my little trunk,
I took out a fresh one and hung it on the wire.
They looked like two people,
One old,
The other young.

But in the evening, there was only on the wire
One towel, washed clean.

My foster mother
Tucks the other towel back into my trunk:
“Don’t be angry with your uncle.
He’s worked with dung and dirt all his life,
But, his heart is clean. . . .”

Then, I dare not meet the eyes of my foster mother,
For fear this mirror will reflect my unclean soul.

Night, the Quiet Night

Fatigue, like a long rope binds my hands and feet,
Fatigue, like thick paste glues my eyelids,
Fatigue, like a big ball of cotton stuffs my ears;
An exhausted body on the warm *kang*,
A fleecy, floating cloud.
Is that a sparkling star? No, it’s the oil lamp.
Whose is that grey hair? My foster mother’s.
I awake in the quiet night,
To see her, with her bark-like hands,
Searching along the seams of my shirt. . . .

Perhaps it’s coarse to voice this in a poem,
And I’ll not be a poet all my life,
But, I’m not ashamed —
I’m crawling with disgusting lice
And my foster mother is fumbling for them.

O mother, my dear mother in the “cowshed”,
You can never imagine how lucky your son is,

Like Antaeus, who found his Mother Earth!
I dare not disturb my foster mother,
But silently two streams of tears roll down. . . .

“He must have dreamt about his mother, poor boy!”
Gently she wipes the tears from my cheeks,
Softly I call “mother” in my heart.
I’m like a fleecy cloud on the warm *kang*,
A fast beating heart wrapped in the fleecy cloud!

Shu Ting

Love to the Earth

I love the earth, just like
My love for my reticent father

Warm earth with exuberant sap
Oily earth fermented in sweat
Is panting slightly
Under the powerful plough-share and bare feet
Rising and sinking
Propelled by the immense energy in the heart
Shouldering bronze statues, monuments and museums
But with the last judgment written on the earth's fault
My

Icebound, muddy and parched earth
My

Worried, generous and severe earth
The earth that gives me colour and language
The earth that gives me wisdom and strength

Shu Ting (舒婷), a young woman of 29, is a worker from Xiamen, Fujian.

I love the earth, just like
My love for my gentle and tender mother

Buxom earth printed all over with the kisses of the sun
Generous earth that gives away her milk freely
Taking in layer upon layer of fallen leaves
And giving birth to generations of new sprouts
Being forsaken by the people time and again
But never once disloyal to them
Producing all the sounds, colours and lines
Though she herself is called poor soil
My

Black, bloodstained and silky white earth
My

Lush, lonesome and rough earth
The earth that gives me love and hatred
The earth that gives me agony and joy

Father gives me a boundless dream
Mother gives me a sensitive, sincere heart
My poems are
A grove of rustling trees
Pouring out day and night to the earth
A never-failing love.

Wang Xiaoni

A Pair of Shoes at the Edge of the Field

At the edge of the field,
A pair of cloth shoes are placed carefully. . . .
To which thrifty old man do they belong?
Perhaps the man only hopes to get closer to the earth?
— There is the scraping sound of hoeing in the field.
A stretch of green, lush corn meets the eye.

All the corn stalks are sturdy,
And will certainly bear corn like beads of gold.
That pair of shoes is still new,
With thick, neat stitches.

— Who is that man over there,
Singing an aria in a deep, resonant voice?

As the whistle sounds for the mid-day rest,
A young man rushes out of the field,

Stocky, with regular features, not very handsome.
The sun looks like his earring.
— He laughs, shouts and dashes about:
“My precious shoes are still over there.”

Patting the dust off his shoes,
He glances at his muddy feet,
Then, tucks the shoes under his arm.
The road is burning hot in the sunshine.
Thud, thud, thud!
Bare feet treading on the bronze-coloured land!

Wang Xiaoni (王小妮), a young woman of 25, is a university student from Jilin.

Sun Wujun

My Song

My song
Is a cicada
Singing in chorus with the autumn leaves
Is a wisp of gentle breeze
Squeezed past thick foliage
In the summer evening
My song
Is water with determination flowing
Under solid ice
In winter
Is a skylark
Soaring up to the skies from the soft green grass
In spring. . . .
The world
Will not lose its vigour
Without my song
But I
Will fade and lose my colours
Without this song
My song
Is a gigantic wave in the sea
Pounding the rocks

Sun Wujun (孙武军), a young man of 23, is a college student from Zhejiang.

Smashed and healed again and again
Is a wild goose hit by an arrow
Flying towards the warmth
With its last drop of blood

Life
Will not lose its splendour
Without my song
But I
Will fade and lose my colours
Without this song

My song
Is the bow
On the head of a girl
Who pins her joy on the game she plays
Is the long beard
Melting in the morning sunlight
Of that old man doing shadow boxing
My song
Is the water stirred up
By the mother bathing her infant
Is the hot breath
Hanging over the lips of a child

People
Will not feel hopeless
Without my song
But I
Will fade and lose my colours
Without this song

Translated by Hu Shiguang

Wang Bomin

Huang Binhong's Paintings

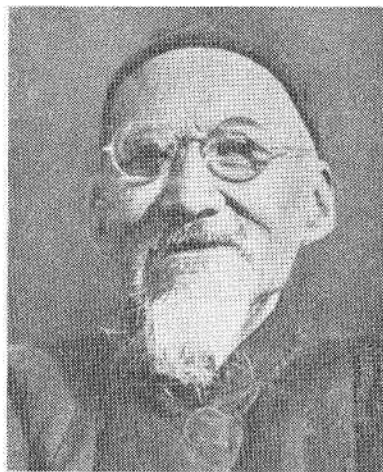
A painter, apart from presenting the scenery, should summarize its beauty and create something new. Otherwise, his paintings are merely reproductions of nature. China's landscape painters, opposed to copying nature mechanically, have always stressed the need to "absorb the subject" then "ponder over it" so as to "use it to convey their own sentiments". The modern Chinese landscape painter Huang Binhong was celebrated for his skill in "creating nature".

The saying "the landscape is as beautiful as a painting" implies that natural scenery is not as beautiful as a landscape painting. Huang Binhong once said, "Landscape painting not only depicts natural objects but also conveys their spirit." Otherwise, "famous mountains and rivers are there before you to be viewed at leisure so why take the trouble to paint them?" This is a general law of landscape painting. However, genuine artistic creation is difficult. Yet it is just in his "superb works of art excelling nature" that Huang Binhong showed his remarkable talent.

Huang, who was born in 1865 in Jinhua, Zhejiang Province and died in 1955 in Hangzhou, lived to a great age and matured late. His ancestral home was in Shexian, Anhui Province.

He began to learn painting at the age of five, and at six started copying famous paintings in his family's collection. His first tutor

Wang Bomin, an art critic, is a professor at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts.



Huang Binhong

Zhao Jingtian was a versatile scholar good at music, poetry and landscape and flower-and-bird painting. At the age of forty-one, together with Xu Jitang and Jiang Wei, Huang Binhong organized the Huang Society in Shexian to commemorate Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) who opposed the feudal regime of the Qing government. When a warrant was issued for his arrest, Huang Binhong fled in disguise to Shanghai where he support-

ed the 1911 Revolution. He settled down there for thirty years, working as an editor in various big printing-houses. Having joined the National Resurgence Society, he took part in the publication of the *Collection of the National Resurgence Society* and the *Collection of Famous Chinese Paintings*. At the same time he served on the editorial board of the monthly magazine *Chinese Painting*. This enabled him to see many well-known paintings, ancient and modern. After he left the printing-houses, he was invited to teach Chinese painting or the theory of painting in different art schools. In 1930, the Chinese Art Academy was established and he took up the post of principal but soon relinquished it. At the time when he taught in the Shanghai Art School headed by Liu Haisu, he was nearly seventy. Later he taught in other art schools in Beijing and Hangzhou. After forty years' teaching he had former pupils in all parts of the country as well as abroad.

In his spare time Huang took an active part in academic activities. When in Shanghai he initiated the Institute of Inscriptions, Calligraphy and Paintings and compiled and printed collections of paintings by his colleagues. In 1935, his works were also displayed at the Modern Chinese Painting Exhibition held in London, and

were favourably reviewed in all the papers. He was always ready to give his paintings to his admirers, but very seldom held one-man exhibitions.

In his youth Huang learned horsemanship and fencing and how to play various musical instruments. He kept up these hobbies for several decades. He did not normally drink, but when he had visitors and was in high spirits he could down three or four catties of Shaoxing wine. "Muddling along gets you nowhere" was his motto, so he lived a regular life and drew up a strict time-table for himself. Still healthy and vigorous in his seventies, he climbed mountains as if on wings. He never wasted time, studying and working indefatigably. He often told his students, "To study is like ascending a mountain. You should have your feet planted on solid ground and take every step carefully." He did this all his life. He was widely read, having studied poetry, calligraphy, theories of painting, inscriptions on ancient bronzes and stone tablets, and even books on the art of war and astronomy. He studied these subjects one by one, first reading extensively and then endeavouring to deepen his knowledge. In painting, he copied masterpieces by Song and Yuan artists, but even more by painters of different schools in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Sometimes he copied the whole work, sometimes only details or the artistic conception. He had an exceptionally deep understanding of the Xin'an School.* In eighty years he filled whole crates and cases with sketches, nearly ten thousand in number. In the spring of 1955 when he was confined to his bed, he still kept brushes and paper at the bedside. Twenty-nine days before his death, he still stubbornly sat up on the edge of his bed to paint a little landscape. Everyone admired his stamina and fortitude.

Huang loved nature. He once said, "Every hill in China is beautiful, every stream clear." He wandered all along the south and north banks of the Changjiang River. He climbed mountains

* One of the schools of landscape painting in the early period of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). With the exception of Hong Ren who was from Zhejiang, its representative painters Zha Shibiao, Wang Zhirui and Sun Yi were from Shexian or Xiuning, Anhui Province. These two counties had been merged into Xin'an Prefecture in Sui and Tang times. Hence the name of the school.

not just to enjoy the beauty of nature but to improve his work. He not only watched mountains by day, but delighted in doing so at night and in the rain. He observed each flower and tree, each rock and peak and the changing clouds and mist, paying special attention to the relations between mountains and trees, mountains and clouds and mountains and streams as well as their particular essence. In 1931, during a trip to Mount Yandang, he rose before dawn one day and sat quietly facing Tianzhu Peak. When he had looked at it for a long time, he said, he felt the mountains around him had the vitality of dragons and tigers. Later he told a friend, "The trip made a deep impression on me. Now I understand the meaning of 'ten thousand ravines charging ahead'." It is because he went deep into the mountains and observed them so carefully that his landscape paintings with all their mounds and gullies are extraordinary in conception.

It can be said that all his life Huang went deep into nature both physically and mentally. The painter Pan Tianshou said wittily, "In order to learn from nature, Old Man Binhong finds himself a tutor every ten *li*. Now that he has travelled ten thousand *li*, he has as good as a thousand tutors. That's why, with his worn-out brush, he can make these wonderful pictures tallying with nature."

Huang's artistic career can be divided into three periods. The first, before he was fifty, was when he studied traditional paintings and modelled himself after ancient masters. During his second period from fifty to seventy, he went deep into mountains and hills, making sketches from nature. From seventy on he began to evolve a more distinctive style of his own. "We should learn to master the strong points of the ancients," he said, "but preserve our own individual style." Most of his best work was done between the age of eighty and ninety.

Huang, a serious and conscientious artist, said, "I think three times before I act." That is, he had conceived the composition before he took up his brush; then, to avoid rash work, he thought again before making each stroke and then reconsidered the composition while painting. This enabled him to paint a better landscape. Sometimes he painted hills before trees; sometimes boats

before hills, streams and trees; or he might paint at random, making dots now on the left now on the right, now above and now below. Sometimes before he had finished a hill on the upper left-hand side, he would paint the rocks on the lower part to the right. But this seemingly random daubing actually observed certain rules; thus when he finished a work it was a well-integrated composition. He said this method of reflecting while painting was not a matter of technical skill, but required the artist to have "made good friends" with streams and hills. He also compared it to visiting a famous mountain when new vistas appear with every move ahead. However, not all these distant views are to the artist's liking. By thinking things over he can paint what he considers the most suitable scenes. As a result, the landscape under his brush is more beautiful than that under his feet.

He explained that when a painter first visited mountains and rivers, he might have two possible reactions. Either everything might strike him as new, superb, more than he could take in; or he might find the scene disappointing and after surveying it want to turn away. In such cases he should be more level-headed and self-controlled. According to Huang's experience, in the first case a painter should restrain himself; in the second he should try to be warm to the landscape. Only in this way could he master it and take possession of it. Otherwise it would be of no use to his painting. This is how Huang himself dealt with famous mountains and rivers. Most travellers to barren mountains and turbulent rivers were in too much of a rush to observe them carefully. If you study mountains at leisure, you can make comparisons and analyses, grasping their distinctive features before transforming the loveliest of these scenes into works of art.

Huang's paintings, sturdy and fresh, are noted for their "blackness, density, boldness and power". Some of his works done after middle age are executed with layers of heavy black ink dots, others have a strikingly compact composition. He showed originality in the use of brushwork, ink and colour, and excelled in his handling of ink tones. Sometimes he used the setting-off method, applying darker tones to accentuate the outline; sometimes he used ink-splashing; but his favourite method was dotting. Once the out-



Zhixing Mountain

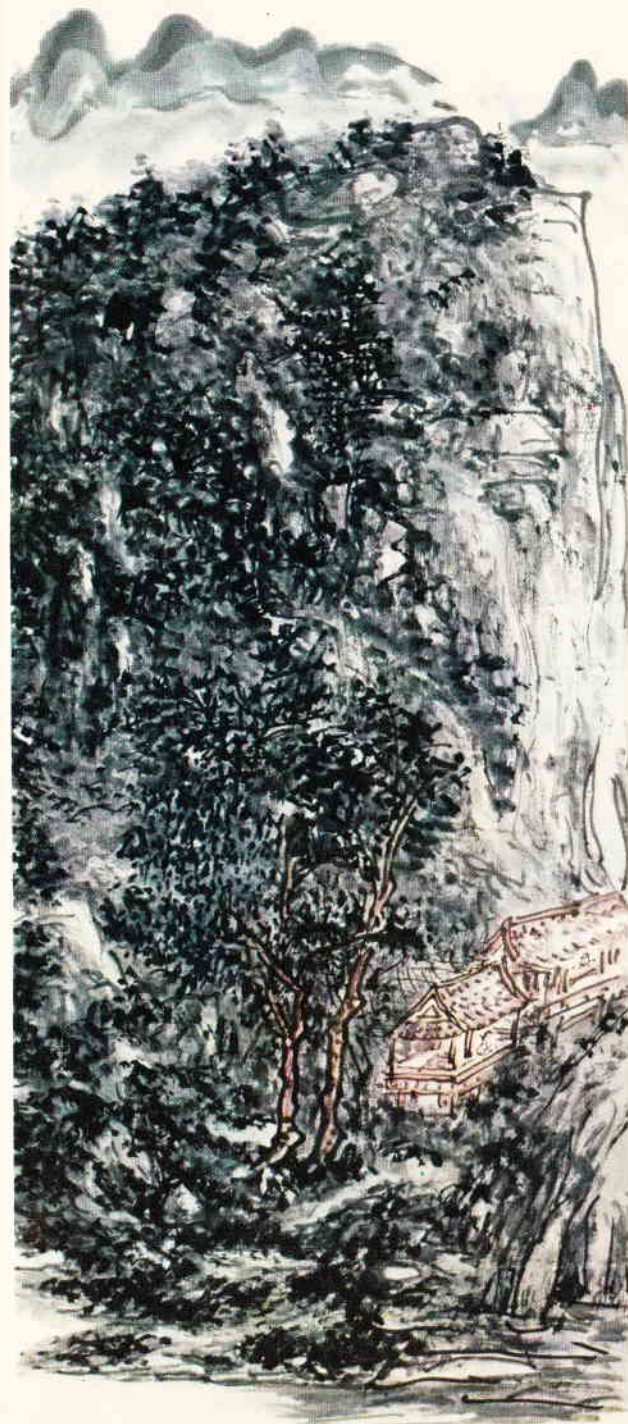
Paintings by Huang Binhong

黄山松谷白
起潭上即
景曾以此
足成之
丁巳
年
月
日
画



Huangshan Pines

廣西北流
勾扁山傳
葛仙翁
采藥處
宣統二年
月
日
畫



Goulou Mountain



Mountains in Sichuan

宋畫刻刻元人
空虛千變萬化
先由實論者
謂新法羅求
朕本早未免
粗疎之論
莽拙巨薄原
意以川蜀山水
寫之
癸巳三月二十

lines of mountains, rivers, trees or rocks had been painted, he used dry brush strokes to depict veins and wrinkles, then added ink dots. He applied thousands of black dots, often using these in place of brush strokes to present rocks. This method results in fresh, lovely washes and the effect is heightened by the use of dots in thick ink left to stand overnight.

It is true that the salient features of Huang's landscapes owe something to his rules and principles, but even more to his mastery of ink. Sometimes he used the massing ink method, that is, applying dots upon dots. He said: "Brush strokes still can be traced from tens of thousands of compact dots." That is to say, the painting should appear to have brush strokes and to be an integral whole. Since he paid great attention to this all his life, Huang accumulated rich experience. Once he described a new method of "shiny black" painting. He said, "Chinese ink is black, so we call it ink-black, but if properly applied, we can turn it into a glossy black." Later he added, "I always apply another ink wash or dots of extra concentrated old ink to the black parts of the picture, so that when dry, this pitch black forms an effective contrast to the blank spaces. This is what is called shiny black. A skilful use of it enhances the whole composition." It is true that at first sight many of his works seem a mass of black. But on closer examination you will find that the composition is clear and logical, resplendent against the black background. *Mountains in Sichuan*, done when he was ninety, shows magnificent, precipitous mountains in all their majesty after a night of rain. This masterpiece is representative of his later work. He used such methods as delineation, dry brush strokes and effective use of ink. In addition, by means of dotting, he fused the washes, ink and pigments into an integral whole which is subtle, well-balanced, varied but not confused. This landscape, with its expressionistic brushwork and use of ink, seems as if executed on the spur of the moment but such is far from the case. He applied the pigments by dotting, achieving a harmonious blend of colour and ink. In general, he used these different methods of expression alternately, to complement each other, and it was not until his later years that he fully mastered these original skills.

Translated by Kuang Wendong

Jin Shui

Our Corner

FORMERLY our corner was different with its blotched walls under the low cobwebbed ceiling. But we liked that corner, because it was on the lee side, as Tiezi put it, and Kejian said it was cosy. As to me, I just wanted to keep away from the window, from which you could see a college, the gate of a song and dance troupe and the chimneys of some regular factories. We liked that corner, because it was the technicians' corner to which our whole neighbourhood production team attached the greatest importance. There Tiezi designed graceful ladies of old which the women workers in the team copied painstakingly on furniture modelled after antiques. But only Kejian and I could give the finishing touches — give the ladies features expressing tenderness and love. The women were loud in their praise: "You're young fellows after all!" "Our team couldn't do without you."

Jin Shui (金水) is a 29-year-old Beijing worker. This story (《就是这个角落》) has been translated from *Fiction Quarterly* (《小说季刊》) No. 3, 1980.

Pleased with himself, Kejian began to whistle while Tiezi contentedly lit a cigarette.

"But what about free medical care?"* I grumbled. "And our pay is still only eighty cents a day!"

"How you do grouse!" remarked one of the women. "There'd be no problem if we had any say. We all have children..." She choked with tears.

We started humming *The Bodhi Tree* without looking at each other.

Before the gate a bodhi tree
Is standing by the well,
And in its green shade I have had
More dreams than I can tell.

We found the plaintive melody comforting. Tiezi and Kejian must be like me, I thought, recalling my dreamlike childhood and our life in the countryside of Shaanxi, the northeast and Inner Mongolia where we had gone to work on the land after school...

But what had become of us? Hm...

In the morning, at noon or in the evening you could see the three of us making our way together along the quiet alley. What we dreaded most was meeting naive children.

"Look, mama!"

We all hung our heads.

"Those uncles have bad legs, so..."

Tiezi speeded up his wheel-chair while Kejian and I tried in vain to put on a spurt.

"Are they cripples?" the child asked.

The mother's slap seemed a blow on our hearts.

What could we do about an innocent child and a kind-hearted mother? If it had been anyone else, we would have stopped to fight. What had we to lose? Those cadres in the office for finding jobs for school graduates tried to console us; those factory recruiters eyed us superciliously — we didn't pass muster. And we

* Free medical care is not available to the workers in neighbourhood factories or production teams.

were a worry to our parents, a burden to our brothers and sisters. . . .

An elderly woman, wiping her eyes, had soothed me, "Don't take things too hard. Your little sister will take care of you. She won't neglect you. . . ." I don't know what I looked like then when she took me in her trembling arms and kept calling my name. So, that was all my life was worth. Good Heavens! But the paintings we did were not at all bad compared with those done by regular workers, and we did not produce less either. Bearing up against pain, we worked extra hard in order to be independent like normal people, to change our status as cripples.

"Forget it," Tiezi said. "Do you think we'll be so thick-skinned as to live on after our parents go west?"

"Get a pack of dynamite and we'll blow ourselves up with the next swine who sneers at us!" Kejian pounded his crutches so hard that he nearly fell down.

It is lucky that people can die. So we seemed to have nothing to fear. In the quiet alley we sang:

Today, as in the past,
I roam till late at night,
Wandering in the dark,
My eyes closed tight.

.....

She came in the season when the spring wind began to turn the willows green.

"I'm Wang Xue. Can I sit here?" She came into our corner.

"Sure."

"If you like."

"Why not?"

Each of us gave a cold reply. Then Kejian whispered to me, "Disgusting, nauseous." Tiezi's frosty eyes glinted behind his spectacles, then he lowered his head with a grunt. Taking the offensive was a defensive tactic. But what were we on our guard against?

She was quite a pretty girl.

"Have you come back too because of illness?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No, my parents need my help. Are you waiting for jobs too?"

None of us uttered a word. Waiting for jobs? Heaven knows how many more years we would have to wait!

"I'll sit here and watch how you work first." She smiled at me, probably finding me less difficult to get on with.

The radio music for exercises from that college broke the silence of our corner.

Her head was close to Tiezi's and her eyebrows almost touched Kejian's shoulder. They were like school-children holding their breath in fear, the fools! Where was their haughtiness of a moment ago? It was all I could do not to laugh. Neither of them had ever intruded into the heart of a girl. Only I . . . but that was all past.

Kejian made several faulty strokes in succession and the hair of the lady Tiezi was painting was like old wool unravelled from a sweater. Many past events flashed through my mind. What were they? They concerned that letter again. . . .

Suddenly she let out a peal of laughter.

We all raised our heads in bewilderment.

She kept on laughing.

An angry look appeared on Tiezi's face.

"I can see my own nose!" she exclaimed. "I was watching you painting and suddenly saw my own nose. I didn't realize it was possible!" She tilted her head slightly to squint down at her nose, chuckling.

We could not help laughing too. A gentle breeze blew a touch of warmth into our corner.

A flash of lightning through the fine spring drizzle aroused three atrophied hearts.

From morning till night our corner re-echoed with songs: *The Bodhi Tree, The Marmot, Fate, The Boundless Grasslands*. . . . We started with soft humming then sang in low voices. Tiezi tried hard not to open his mouth too wide while Kejian, in order to sing the bass, pressed his chin as low as he could. As I stole a glance at Wang Xue, I noticed that they were peeping at her too.

Her head was swaying gently in time with the music, her plaits dangling over her shoulders. Our singing gained in volume.

Ol' man river, dat ol' man river!
He must know somethin'
But don't say nothin'

.....

"Why sing all these dismal songs?" she suddenly asked.

"What d'you like to hear then?" Kejian flushed.

"*Making Hay*. I love to hear Hu Songhua* sing that." She cleared her throat and sang:

With pitch and prong the whole day long,
We both were making hay,
And there she was and there I was,
And we were worlds away.

.....

I thought of that letter again. It had been written by a well-meaning fellow to my sweetheart. Forget it! That's past and done with.

Wang Xue was still singing softly, her plaits swinging with the gay rhythm.

The three of us simply stopped work and stared blankly at her. The defences in our hearts had been dismantled. In our mind's eye appeared a vast expanse of spring water glimmering with patches of sunlight bright as gems, gently lapping at the solitary embankment. How beautiful she was! But unlike some actresses, she didn't make eyes at the audience or put on airs to please them. No, she was her natural self. And her thoughts were written on her face: she didn't look down on us.

All of a sudden Tiezi's voice rang out:

I wish I were a little lamb,
To follow by her side.

* A famous folk-song singer.

I wish she'd take a little whip
To flick my woolly hide.

Wang Xue doubled up with laughter, nearly choking. "What rubbishy song is that! Who wants to be whipped? You must have made it up yourself." She casually took hold of Tiezi's arm and shook it.

She didn't seem like someone in her twenties, but like a little girl!

We worked together all day long, painting while singing *Making Hay*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *Aiyo Mama* and other lively songs. Our output increased with each passing day, surprising the rest of the team. Wang Xue was eager to learn, and we vied to teach her all our special skills. Soon we were talking to her in an avuncular way:

"Wang Xue, you ought to take more exercise."

"Wang Xue, you should learn a foreign language. It's not too difficult. Where there's a will there's a way."

"Or learn to play the violin. There's nothing you can't do, if you give your mind to it."

"You must make something of your life, Wang Xue. You're not like us. . . ."

What about Wang Xue? Such advice delighted her. She would fish some sweets from her pocket and quietly put a piece in front of us, or pour us each a cup of fragrant tea.

"Is this a reward, little girl?"

"No!" She was charmingly naive. "It's a punishment."

"A punishment?"

"Yes. Why should you expect so much from me, but not from yourselves?"

We fell silent again. Sweets taste sweet but we felt bitter.

"I . . . I haven't offended you, have I?" She glanced at us, then lowering her eyes, added, "What I mean is, you should live like that too. Am I right?"

Quite right, Wang Xue, but wait, we have to think things over carefully. . . .

After that, she came half an hour earlier than usual to tidy up the workshop and our corner. She was always cheerful, in earnest about everything, and thoroughly enjoyed life. Amidst her singing, the dust in our corner vanished. A beautiful calendar was hung on the shabby wall. Gradually we three, who had formerly limped into our corner only when the bell sounded, also came earlier and earlier, each trying to arrive before the others. I was not at first aware of what was happening. Only when I sensed a certain constraint among the three of us did I realize that it was due to unconscious jealousy. Every one of us hoped to stay a little longer with Wang Xue. Eight hours a day was too little. What was the implication of this jealousy?

Thereupon I gave up going to work too early. I was by no means the type of noble lover you read about in novels who makes way for his rival. It was just because I loved Wang Xue so deeply that I quite naturally rebuilt the defence in my heart. It was a trench, a deep scar inscribed with the eye-catching warning: "Impossible!" Besides, there was that letter! That letter. . . . Ah, just as my heart was seeking a little joy in life, it underwent bitter pain. All I could do was stifle that pain in my heart, turning it into an apathetic smile to conceal what my heart sought.

Later, Tiezi and Kejian stopped coming earlier too. I bet it was for the same reason!

Wang Xue was really like a little girl. She failed to see these subtle changes. One summer evening she begged us to accompany her to a film to be shown in a nearby park. Holding high four tickets she declared, "*To Make Life Sweeter*, a very nice film. Come along!"

Tiezi shook his head and Kejian said, "I won't go either. What sweeter life?"

"Will you go with me?" She turned to me. "It's very dark on the way back after the film. . . ."

"Are you scared?" we all asked together.

"Hm." She knitted her eyebrows, nodding sheepishly.

Then we all agreed to go with her. I felt rather proud because we could protect her. No doubt so did Tiezi and Kejian.

In the park the gentle evening breeze carried the faint scent of flowers. How many years now? Five! After having to walk with crutches, I had never come here again. Why should I come? It would only remind me of the past. This was my childhood pleasure-ground. I seemed to have sung and laughed here only yesterday. Here I left the hopes of my boyhood. However, I could not recognize the poplars I had planted. On that lawn there had gathered many youngsters ready to settle down in the countryside, who used their simple, heartfelt verses to express their magnificent ideals. But what had happened later?

It was not yet dark. There were only a few children sitting there quietly, looking up at the blank screen. Tiezi and Kejian were also silent.

Suddenly Wang Xue laughed.

In the grove young lovers were strolling arm in arm, kissing.

"What's so funny? You'll do that yourself some day," I blurted out.

"What nonsense! Not I!" she stammered, red in the face.

Well, better not think of such things.

However, Tiezi burst out, "Doesn't it give you the creeps being with us, Wang Xue?"

"Why should it?" She jumped up to pick two leaves and mischievously stuffed them into Kejian's collar.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked.

"Of what?"

I was tongue-tied. That letter! It read, "Don't be too friendly with him. Better keep your distance. Otherwise he will probably fall in love with you and you can only make him suffer. . . ."

"What's there to be afraid of, eh?" She gave me a punch, holding a beetle in her other hand. Oh, if only she could stay like a little girl for ever!

"Well, I mean, are you scared of the dark?"

"Get along with you!" She blushed. "Aren't we going to see the film then?"

Humming a song, we turned back along the small path. Still holding the beetle she chattered away, keeping Tiezi and Kejian in fits of laughter. All at once I felt that the world was beautiful

and sweet, and that we had become three happy elder brothers keeping their lovable sister company.

She was really like a little sister. As soon as the film started she began to chuckle, clutching at my crutches. Her laughter made it hard to hear what the actors were saying. I wished time would stand still so that she would remain a little sister and we her happy brothers, forgetting the past, the present and the future, and everything on earth. . . . In fact, I so far forgot myself that I bent down, without the support of my crutches, to pick up a ball of knitting-wool she had dropped. I fell flat on my face and cut my arm. . . . But I would gladly have fallen ten more times, because when she was on the verge of tears the casual way I passed it off made her laugh again.

One day Wang Xue was suddenly depressed, staring blankly and sighing without a word. When asked what was wrong, she hummed and hawed, glancing at us with embarrassment.

"Tell us what's up," said Tiezi anxiously. "Who's bullied you?"

"Who's tired of living? Tell me who?" Kejian clenched his fists.

"No, nobody's bullied me," she stuttered. "It's my mother. She wants me to meet that man. . . ."

There was dead silence in our corner.

"A university student. Introduced by my second aunt. . . ."

We heard the whistling of the wind passing through the electric wires.

That was something to be expected and I had already rebuilt my defences, yet I seemed to feel my heart rolling down a dry well. I am not clear what went through my mind at that instant. It seemed that I was only thinking about how to get through the coming day. I longed for a cigarette. Tiezi and Kejian had already lit theirs and handed the lighter to me. Plump! My heart hit the bottom of the pitch dark well. I wished I could stay there for ever, forgetting the world and forgotten by the world.

However, fixing expectant eyes on us, Wang Xue asked timidly, "Should I go to meet him?"

A fine girl like Wang Xue really deserved more happiness than

other people. Just because she was too simple-minded to shun us, how could we undermine her happiness? Must she sacrifice it to prove her fine qualities?

"I don't want to meet him. What's the point? . . ."

She was expecting our help; she needed our help. A moment ago I had really been too selfish!

"You should go." Tiezi was the first to return to his senses.

"Love is something that can make you happy," I said. "Then you'll work and study harder. Even the world will become more beautiful. . . ."

"That's right!" chimed in Kejian.

We held forth seriously on love, and Wang Xue listened trustfully and raptly. We could see from her shining eyes that she admired us and thought highly of us. We were prompted by a sense of pride to give our "little sister" good advice without any thought of ourselves. . . .

Still, when we left by the small alley that evening, we once again sang the song that had been banished from our minds all through the summer.

Today, as in the past,
I roam till late at night,
Wandering in the dark,
My eyes closed tight.
It seems the leaves are calling without cease:
Come back to me, friend, to find peace.

The following day in our corner there were indications that Wang Xue wanted to talk with the three of us alone. But better not, Wang Xue. I felt somewhat anxious. She smiled at us, looking so relaxed that my heart felt as if gripped by an icy hand. I kept reminding myself: You are glad of your sister's happiness, right?

"Sing a song, Tiezi," I suggested.

"Yes, let's sing, Kejian," Tiezi responded.

But we were in no mood to sing.

At the break Wang Xue finally found a chance and told us hastily, "Hey, I met that man last night and broke off with him."

We made neither head nor tail of this at first, looking at each

other tensely. The next moment Tiezi started to splutter with laughter. You silly girl! You talk of breaking off, as if you'd known him for ages.

"It's true, I'm not kidding you." She sounded anxious.

"That means she didn't agree to see any more of him. Is that right?" Kejian turned to ask me cheerfully.

The icy hand on my heart had loosened its grip. That was no good, really, gloating over someone else's misfortune.

"Why didn't you agree?" I asked her.

"He kept a straight face like a big cadre, and lectured me all the time as if he didn't even know how to smile. He said I was naive. Not just rather naive but *extremely* naive. Dear me! My head started buzzing. Oh, spare me, I'm not short of tutors." She rattled this off, her nose twitching, then dashed out, calling over her shoulder, "I'm going to find a newspaper and see if there's any film show in the park tonight!"

I found I had started humming a tune already. Why? Because I was happy? What if she were my real sister? Just the same. I'd never agree to her marrying such a man.

We went to that small park again. That summer in that small park we spent many a sweet evening together. Wang Xue told me many things about herself. I can't remember now what films we saw. What remains in my memory is the setting sun, the evening wind, the moon, the stars and little Wang Xue who loved us as if we were her own brothers. And we began to love everything around us just as she did.

As I recall them now, those memories are as precious as gold. . . .

University? Oh, yes. Wang Xue was admitted to a university later. It was in the autumn of that year when she and her mother were at loggerheads over that university student that the news spread apace: Students must be enrolled through an entrance examination.*

* During the "Cultural Revolution", students were admitted through recommendation.

The day we heard that Tiezi sat there lost in thought. I knew what he was thinking about. He had been one of the best students in a well-known middle school.

"Forget it, Tiezi," I said. "Just ignore the whole business."

"You can only deceive yourself," he countered with a wry smile.

The street lamps swayed in the wind. Tiezi and I sat face to face at the door of his house without a word. The autumn cicadas would go on chirping till midnight.

"Wang Xue!" Tiezi exclaimed as if he were dreaming.

"Where?" I looked round.

"I mean Wang Xue can go to university now."

"Sure! But can she pass the exam?"

"She told me she did quite well in it the year Zhang Tiesheng* was enrolled."

"Right!" My eyes sparkled. "You can help her with maths and physics."

"And you with Chinese, mainly composition writing."

"Exactly!"

From then on every evening the light in our corner was on while crickets chirped away outside.

Bending over the table Tiezi and Wang Xue were engrossed in points, lines, logarithms, sines, drawing and ciphering. As for me, I taught her grammar and classical prose, and wrote eight essays for her to imitate. Only Kejian sat silently outside the door boiling water for us, occasionally poking his head in with an envious grin when he heard us laughing. The kettle sang merrily over the blue-tongued flames. There was a look of depression in his bright eyes, for he could not understand what we were saying. In fact, he had not even finished primary school.

Using my crutches, I walked over to him and patted him on the shoulder. "Perhaps you have books of some use at home?"

He made no answer. He was feeling blue because he could not give Wang Xue a hand. Poor Kejian!

* The student who handed in a blank paper, claiming to have been too busy working to revise for the examinations. In 1973 the "gang of four" instructed universities to recruit students according to their political attitude, not their examination results.

The next day he limped over with a book entitled *The Absolute Discrimination of Sound*, which he gave to Wang Xue, not knowing what it was about. It turned out to be a foreign novel. Pretending to be overjoyed, the kind-hearted girl said she loved to read that kind of book.

The lamplight was peaceful and soft. I saw such lamplight when I was a boy and my mother came home from work and kissed me on the neck. Why can't we spread such a light over all the darkness around?

The light was still on when the crickets stopped chirping.

The light was still on when the leaves fell.

The light was still on when the north wind grew colder and colder.

One evening we sang *Lamplight*:

A young girl
Sees a soldier off to the war.
They bid farewell in the dark
Those steps before. . .

Wang Xue's voice suddenly broke, tears filled her eyes. "If I'm admitted to a university far away from here, we won't be able to be together again."

A shooting star swiftly vanished on the horizon.

None of us spoke, as if just aware of this problem. To be frank, we were worried about her, prayed for her every day and felt comforted when we imagined her sitting in a lecture room. . .

"You'll write to me, won't you?"

There was only the rustling of fallen leaves on the pavement in the small, dark alley.

"Anyway, I'll write to you whenever I have time."

The wheel-chair creaked, crutches thumped.

"Promise me just one thing, please. . ." She sounded choked.

"What?"

She halted and all of a sudden burst out sobbing.

"Yes, we will, Wang Xue," we chorused. "We will write to you!" We were only too pleased to say this.

"Just one thing." She stopped crying with a great effort. "Never talk about death again; never talk about dynamite packs. . ."

She knew everything. She had never brought that up before but she knew everything! She probably hadn't mentioned it because she hated to talk like that "big cadre with a straight face". However, she told us all that was in her heart. She liked to hear us singing merry songs. She liked us to go to films with her and to tell us amusing "news". All this had converged into a warm stream that thawed out our frozen hearts. Thank you, little girl! No, you weren't a little girl and we shouldn't thank you. We shouldn't let your painstaking efforts come to nothing.

"Do you promise me? OK?"

That reminded me of a fairy tale: A mother sheep told her three lambs before she went out, "Wolves have long snouts and pointed ears. Don't open the door for them. Promise me?" So we were like three little kids Wang Xue worried about.

"OK, Wang Xue, we do!" we promised her.

A street lamp flashed past, lighting up her anxious face. We had not set her mind at ease. We passed another light. Putting on an air of cheerfulness she said, "I may not pass the exam!"

Well, well, she was the first to comfort us again.

I felt something rending my heart as I said, "Don't worry, Wang Xue! We'll bite that wolf to death!"

"Wolf?" She faced me, her eyes glistening with tears. Oh, little girl, you still didn't understand!

I began to talk excitedly about Jack London's novel *Love of Life* and Lenin's comments on it. How the hero fought with a wolf; how he overcame hunger, piercing cold and weakness; how steadfast he was and how strong his will to live. As I went on Wang Xue's eyes shone, so did Tiezi's and Kejian's. We three fellows struck up a tune and then Wang Xue joined in. Our spirited, stirring singing made the quiet alley ring. . .

That winter, just as she had predicted, Wang Xue was admitted to a medical college in another province. She had always wondered why our legs could not be cured now that there were so many hospitals in our country. Clinging to the window of the southward bound train, she said seriously, "Just wait and be patient. I'm

taking your medical records with me." We waved goodbye to her as we had as boys when we saw our brothers and sisters off to school. She didn't seem to be leaving us for a remote city in the south but for somewhere so close that she could come back at any time.

Look, here is our corner. The beautiful calendar is the one Wang Xue hung there. There's not a speck of dust on it, I can assure you! We no longer sing those melancholy songs. Whenever dusk falls in that little alley, we seem to hear Wang Xue's voice and call to mind the story about the wolf. Here in this world, at this moment, a kind and lovely girl is concerned for us. She has kindled the light in our hearts. We should be her brave fighters. As to the future . . . friends, no need to remind us. We've thought of everything. We wish Wang Xue a happy life. And the warm stream in our hearts will never run dry nor grow cold. What if I could pour a warm stream into all other icy hearts as Wang Xue has done? Then, wouldn't the world in which we live turn into a better place?

Translated by Kuang Wendong

Bai Ye

An Interview with Rewi Alley

FROM the south end of Wangfujing, crossing Changan Boulevard, the largest thoroughfare in Beijing, you reach the compound where Rewi Alley lives. In front of his slate-coloured storeyed house there is a trim, fragrant garden.

Rewi Alley stepped forward to meet me. Although eighty-four, he still seems a man-mountain. Stocky and sturdy with a high nose and big ears, he has a ruddy complexion and white hair. Under his yellow eyebrows gleam pale blue, kindly eyes. His friendly smile conveys his energy, and he stands steady as a pine that has weathered many storms. When he shook hands, his grip was as firm as a vice.

Going into Rewi's study, I found the walls lined with orderly bookcases filled with handsome foreign books as well as simple, tasteful old Chinese books. Finely carved ebony cabinets displayed all manner of colourful Chinese antiques, while works of art from all parts of the world lent distinction to the room. This concatenation of culture, Chinese and foreign, is one source of its owner's dynamism.

Bai Ye is a sixty-one-year-old reporter.

Rewi Alley has many social activities yet is a prolific reporter and poet. Asked to tell me about his life and work he burst out laughing. Of course, this was too vast a subject. His life has spanned nearly a century, and he has been over fifty years in China — he came here in 1927. It would have taken too long to cover all that. And he is



Rewi Alley

a man who races against time. From all the motley volumes in one bookcase he pulled out one called *Yo Banfa!* (We Have a Way!) He told me, "Most of my life is written up here. You can take this and read it."

Yo Banfa is reportage. It hasn't yet been translated into Chinese, and I hadn't read it. So I was glad of the chance to learn more about Rewi Alley through this book.

2

Yo Banfa is written in the form of a diary kept irregularly from October 1950 to September 6, 1954. Rewi Alley's impressions of all that he saw evoked old memories. In many places he devoted more space to old memories than to new happenings. This was probably deliberate.

Rewi Alley explains the title of the book as follows: In old China, in the exploited, ruined villages and cities he often heard people say, "*Meiyo banfa!*" (No way.) But in new China, led by the Communist Party, people began to have hope, the situation began to change. He saw two young workers tackling a job. Their eyes shining, they asserted confidently, "*Yo banfa!*" (We have a way!) That gave him the idea for the title.

In *Yo Banfa* Rewi recalls an enchanting evening forty years ago when he went to Changding in Fujian. He remembers a little stream, a pool, trees and greenery in the background, women wash-

ing clothes and spreading them out on the grass to dry. The scene reminded him of a French village during World War I.

Rewi Alley is the son of a New Zealand school-teacher. He was born when New Zealand was still a part of the British Empire. In 1917, he joined the army and went to fight in France. He showed courage and fortitude although wounded twice and choked by poison gas. At the front he fought side by side with members of the Chinese Labour Corps, and saw their fearless resistance to German attacks. "But I have never seen the story printed anywhere," he said. "It is just forgotten history."

A year later Rewi left the battlefield and returned to New Zealand to raise sheep. The pastureland with its wild flowers was like a poem. But then came a slump. A truckful of wool sold for less than the cost of its transport to the depot. So he gave up his sheep farm and turned worker.

In 1926 Rewi was drawn to China's revolution. When he bade goodbye to the boss of a fertilizer factory in Botany Bay, the man fully expected the revolution to fail. He said, "Pity about that revolution in China. We ought to put in a bid for all that blood and bone and haul it here to make into fertilizer." Rewi knew what capitalists were like: they had no sympathy for the working class.

3

Rewi Alley came to China. He mixed freely with the people of Shanghai. He listened to the workers, understood their wretched conditions.

He wrote about the hard lot of rickshaw pullers, who would pull and pull their hearts out and often died. There was one man he found sobbing, for he had pulled and pulled but not brought home enough to feed his wife and children. Early one Christmas Day, Rewi went to a factory run by the Green Gang, Shanghai's biggest secret society, where a boiler had exploded, causing many deaths and injuries. The handrails of the stairway at a silk filature broke, and thirteen children were trampled to death. Four

hundred women were blasted to death in a rubber factory. . . . *Yo Banfa* describes many tragedies of old China.

In a battery works, Rewi saw many young apprentices, already old before their time. He knew they all had lead poisoning. In one factory all the work was done by children with beriberi. He took specimens of their urine for his American friend Dr Ma Haide (George Hatem) to analyse. Ma Haide told him:

"This can't be cured simply by medicine. The whole system has to be completely changed."

Of this Rewi was convinced too. When he urged the woman manager of one factory to improve safety precautions, she screamed with rage.

Rewi Alley was not only active as a factory inspector, he also went outside the city to talk with peasants. He describes enchanting scenes, canals, pagodas, sampans, village folk; but the peasants lived in misery.

In order to get closer to the workers and peasants, Rewi studied Chinese. He spoke to me in fluent standard Chinese, able to convey all the nuances of his feelings.

Rewi met Agnes Smedley, the American writer. Widening her big grey eyes, she listened intently to his accounts of the incredible hardships of workers in Shanghai. Then with a short, bitter laugh she described how she had seen a policeman in the International Settlement beating workers hauling goods, and felt that it was she herself who was being beaten. He told her how workers of a silk filature in Wuxi, suspected of being Communists, had been strung up and had their brains blown out. Carried away, Agnes Smedley gripped his wrist and cried:

"Let's go along with changing the situation!"

This was far from all that the labouring people of China had to contend with. Agnes Smedley and Rewi left Shanghai and travelled through the provinces. Rewi could not forget the horrors of the dike repair on the Changjiang near Hankou. It was one of the KMT's so-called "productive relief" schemes. Two barges of refugees from the flood-devastated areas came alongside. But the soldiers of the garrison would not allow them ashore, threatening to shoot anyone who landed. An old man stepped over the side of

one barge and into the shallow water, wading up to the bank, his arms outstretched. He cried indignantly, "Kill me and see if we have not been eating straw!" He took off his ragged jacket and climbed ashore. A soldier ripped open his belly with a bayonet. Then the soldiers lost their nerve and turned away. The other refugees landed.

We can see from these chronicles of bloodshed and tears that Rewi was an eye-witness of modern Chinese history, which he records truthfully.

4

During this period, Rewi Alley's work often brought him into contact with powerful members of the KMT. Most of them were vicious brutes. Comparing these degenerates with the workers and peasants, Rewi felt that revolution was China's only way out.

On a ship going from Hong Kong to Shanghai, Rewi leaned over the rail talking with a man who was in some KMT political job. Pointing at the dock workers Rewi remarked on their efficiency. The politician sneered, "They're not Chinese. They're just animals." And touching his chest, resplendent with three American fountainpens, he said smugly, "We are China." Rewi could only walk away in disgust.

Once Rewi went to see the KMT Minister of Finance, H.H. Kong, to discuss the industrial cooperative movement. "Cooperation?" asked Kong. "I give you money, you give me profit; that is cooperation!" He boasted of the ability of his son. The generalissimo had given him eighty million dollars to buy arms from Germany. He knew China would soon be at war with Germany, so instead of buying arms he bought gold dollars and worked on the exchange. Later, when he returned the generalissimo his eighty million dollars, he still had another eighty million in hand. The generalissimo praised him as a model son. After finishing this anecdote, H.H. Kong shouted at the people around:

"What have *you* given the generalissimo? Nothing!"

At a banquet one day, Rewi found himself next to the KMT general He Yingqin, who talked about Caesar, Alexander,

Napoleon and Hitler. He asked, "Do you think Alexander greater than Caesar? Napoleon greater than Hitler?" Challenged like this, Rewi said, "I don't know, I only know they all killed a lot of people. But with modern arms you could kill more." He Yingqin immediately changed the subject, saying that hunting was his favourite sport. In one morning he had shot twenty pheasants from the walls of Nanjing.

In 1931, Rewi went on an inspection tour along the Changjiang to Lake Dongting. In Changsha he met He Jian, the governor of Hunan. He Jian told him that China had never been free from floods. "We've such a big population, if some of them are drowned it doesn't matter." Once, during an air-raid, H.H. Kong and Rewi took refuge in the same dug-out. Kong said to him, "Japan can just kill a few dozen of our peasants, and we have hundreds of millions of them."

Rewi scornfully describes Chiang Kai-shek as an old tiger telling his beads. One day in a meeting-hall in wartime Chongqing, Chiang Kai-shek, carefully tailored, spruce, erect, with toothbrush moustache, and very like a Japanese general, was talking. He told how in his village he had boiled congee for his mother, how he had been changed by Bible teaching, and the moral help he had derived which had made him a great man. Outside, Dai Li the Gestapo man talked with that mountain of fat, General J.L. Huang, smiles on their fat, greasy faces as they whispered, leaning against the big shiny cars.

How did the colonialists treat the Chinese in those days? One of them would shout, "Never hit a Chinese, only use your boot. Use your hand to beat your wife as you love her and only beat her to show you are boss. Chinese must be kicked."

5

In that darkness Rewi Alley searched for light.

In Shanghai he made friends with Henry Baring, an Englishman who worked for an English paper. At Baring's suggestion they set up the first international Marxist-Leninist group in Shanghai. Rewi, Agnes Smedley and Ma Haide joined this group.

Rewi called on Lu Xun, and described to him all he had seen in China. Lu Xun gave him a copy of *A Madman's Diary*, which epitomized Chinese society. Both men were brilliant social analysts.

Rewi travelled widely in China. He followed in the tracks of the Red Army to see what had happened in the Soviet areas.

In Ruijin in Jiangxi Province the peasants told him, "The Communist Party is everywhere in the mountains. The Red Army's slogans are up everywhere." Rewi wrote, "The people believe in the Communist Party." In Yudu, by a derelict school, he saw on a wall the slogan: Men and women should be equal. He asked a peasant passing by, "How did that school come to be destroyed?" The man answered, "The Red Army had a school. The KMT troops burnt it."

Rewi made friends with the peasants by living as one of them. They spoke frankly to him. One peasant even said to him, "Old cousin, how do you manage to eat from a rice bowl with so big a nose?" Rewi had to explain with a smile. A peasant of Maotian Village showed him a plank bed in one corner and told him proudly, "Comrade Mao Zedong once slept in this bed!"

Rewi learned more about the Chinese Communist Party, and came to love it. In Ruijin a German missionary told him, "Do you know what the Communists did? They had a printing press where they printed banknotes. When they left, they took all the printers out to the hills. They made them bury the machines, and then they shot them all."

"Come, come," said Rewi. "We've just bought the old Red Army printing equipment, and there it is in our new printing cooperative. All its members worked in the Red Army's printing press."

That silenced the missionary. And that was the last Rewi saw of him.

Rewi longed to visit Yan'an. While in Chongqing he had a chance to go there for three weeks. One winter evening, after a long trek, he passed Twenty Li Village, and his heart leapt up at the sight of the Yan'an pagoda.

Late one night, in snowy weather, Rewi went to the cave where

Chairman Mao lived. The lamp seemed to welcome this visitor from afar. Chairman Mao, speaking quietly, made a careful analysis of the international situation which put fresh heart into Rewi. He said, "One left feeling that here was power and the ability to lead China's millions. He seemed to be the incarnation of every peasant and worker I had ever known."

6

Rewi Alley supported the people's progress, supported the Communist Party which was its nucleus.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the Chinese people launched the war to resist Japanese aggression. Rewi asked Edgar Snow what he thought was the best way to serve the Chinese people.

"China needs industry to help the resistance," said Snow. "Why not organize industrial cooperatives all over the country?"

Rewi went into action. Before long, in Hong Kong an International Indusco Committee was set up with many prominent foreigners on it. Soong Ching Ling served as the honorary chairwoman of its promotion committee. Edgar Snow and his wife Helen were active supporters. And Rewi was the secretary. In the short space of two years, from Songpan in Xikang to the guerrilla areas in Shandong, Gonghe (Indusco) set up over three thousand small factories and workshops. On foot or on bicycle Rewi covered over thirty thousand kilometres across mountains, valleys, rivers and plains. The products of these factories and workshops directly supported the front, including the Eighth Route Army in the Taihang Mountains and the New Fourth Army in southern Anhui.

Now we must revert to 1931, when there was a devastating flood in central China. Rewi had brought in relief supplies from abroad. Overcoming many difficulties, he found a way to send boats with supplies to the Red Army in the liberated areas in Honghu led by He Long. When He Long later met Rewi he expressed his thanks.

Gonghe had many difficulties to contend with. Chiang Kai-shek

accused it of being led by the Communists, and tried openly and in secret to sabotage it.

Rewi spent a long period in Gansu setting up a school to train technicians. Once he sent students out to buy wool. They were all arrested and nearly executed, just because their padded clothing was stitched with red thread; but Rewi rescued them in the nick of time.

Rewi loved the Chinese people, loved Chinese children. A woman worker in the Baoji Silk Filature fell ill and died, and her husband was arrested by the police, leaving two boys, Lao San and Lao Si, with no one to care for them. Rewi adopted them and brought them up. Between them there grew up deep bonds of affection. He says, "I have always felt that Lao San and Lao Si gave me much more than I could ever have given them." He took in and cared for six orphans altogether. Although he never married, he now has so many sons and grandchildren that on festivals his home is as lively as any big family.

7

Rewi Alley has spent half a century in China and travelled over most of the country, spending as much time as he can with the labouring people. It is no exaggeration to call him an old Chinese who has weathered many storms. He remembers all the hardships and sufferings of old China. Liberation ushered in a new society. Everything changed. And this contrast between past and present made a strong impression on him. When he came to Beijing everything struck him as fresh. And each new incident set him recalling the past. Deeply moved he recorded his impressions each day. Sorted out, they formed the material for *Yo Banfa!*

At the start of each day's entry, we see a moving scene. Alley strolls down bustling Wangfujing or through lovely Beihai Park, he lingers in the bookshops of Dongfeng Market, visits the Dunhuang Exhibition in the Palace Museum. . . . Scenes such as the evening of May Day in Beijing make so vivid an impression on him that he cannot help contrasting them with China's tragic past. This

book shows us Rewi's joy as well as his grief. It is not simply an objective diary but a unique piece of reportage.

8

But having made Rewi Alley's acquaintance through this book, let us return to reality! I am still in his study listening to his opinions.

"Some writers don't write for ordinary people. They write for the higher-ups, just wanting their approval. If the higher-ups say fine, then it's considered good writing. Who cares whether ordinary people read it or not?"

"Of course, what they write about may be good. But the bare facts are too dry. Plenty of articles are written by throwing together a lot of good material, but they don't appeal to readers.

"Snow's *Red Star over China* is still read today. Apart from its good contents it's well-written, so it appeals to readers. Good contents badly written up are too dry, and a work of that kind will soon be forgotten. It's like the old Chinese saying, 'Writing that lacks style won't live.'

"All people have heads and limbs, but they're all different. There's endless variety in human beings. But some writers treat people as all alike."

Rewi picked up a Chinese pictorial and remarked:

"Lovely scenery, and everyone looks so rich."

He pointed at some pictures of girls, saying, "They're too dolled-up; that's no good. They're all smiling in the same way and gesturing in the same way, with their heads bent like Christians praying."

Rewi threw up his hands. "So much work by thousands of people to get this stuff sent abroad. But will it sell? What use is it? But *Red Star over China* is still being reprinted."

"Serve the people is a splendid slogan," said Rewi. "We must write about bad people as well as good ones, all kinds. But they must be true to life. Once you start lying, you're done for."

9

Rewi Alley gave me a copy of *Snow over the Pines*, a collection of some of his poems. On the frontispiece was a list of his publica-

tions, fifty-five in all. If you reckon that each contained two hundred thousand words, the total comes to something like ten million. These include seventeen volumes of poetry, eight of them being translations of Chinese poetry, and thirty books of reportage about China. One year he produced as many as four books. Apart from one volume of poetry, all have been written since 1952. Most were printed in New Zealand, some in China. Poetry apart, just to introduce his thirty volumes of reportage would require a book itself! *Yo Banfa* which I have introduced was the first of these volumes, and serves as a sort of preface.

Rewi is like a tireless ox for ever ploughing the land. He exerts all his strength and never stops to rest. He races against time. If he visits a place in the morning, he writes it up the same afternoon. An afternoon visit gets written up the same evening. Or rather is typed up. For him, his typewriter takes the place of a pen. Sitting in front of it, his ten fingers fly over the keys as if playing a lute! On quiet evenings, if you tiptoe up to Rewi's window, his typing sounds like a cascading stream.

Translated by Gladys Yang

Pan Jiezi

China's Meticulous Painting

MANY people admire impressionist Chinese painting in ink and water-colours. They may not realize that this type of painting did not become popular until after the tenth century. For over a thousand years before that, Chinese artists almost invariably used a precise line technique and strong colours. It is easy to understand why the ancient Chinese described painting as *danqing*, literally red and green, because they were accustomed to use cinnabar and malachite as pigments. They appear to have delighted in these rich colours, especially as these mineral pigments could stand the test of time. Thus in all paintings honouring immortals or worthies, or in didactic works, these being the most common themes, they invariably used strong colours. Moreover they ascribed to cinnabar and malachite the quality of unswerving loyalty.

Happily, our archaeologists have now brought to light genuine paintings of this kind dating from twenty-two centuries ago. In the

Pan Jiezi, 65, art critic and a renowned painter in the meticulous style, is a council member of the Chinese Artists' Association and deputy director of the art committee of the Beijing Art Academy.

spring of 1972, they excavated a painting on silk from a Western Han tomb at Mawangdui in the suburbs of Changsha in Hunan. The central figure is the wife of Duke Dai, whose tomb this was. The painting also depicts different scenes in the heavens, the world of men and the nether regions. With a combination of realism and fantasy, it suggests that the spirit of the dead is ascending to heaven. The highly ingenious composition, extremely fine brush strokes and colours as bright as if freshly applied, reveal the high level already reached at that time in painting and the manufacture of pigments. In addition, Han (206 BC-AD 220) tombs in many places have also been found to contain wall-paintings all using this fine-line-and-rich-colour technique. It remained the dominant style until the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), as we can see from records and numerous wall-paintings and hand-scrolls. Our great writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) praised the splendour of Buddhist painting, due to its rich colouring. And this is fully borne out by the 230 Tang-dynasty murals on the walls of the Thousand-Buddha Caves in Dunhuang.

The Fairy of the Luo River (detail)



One of the finest old paintings of this kind is *The Fairy of the Luo River* (see illustration) by Gu Kaizhi (c. AD 345-406), now housed in the Beijing Palace Museum. It is based on a poem by Cao Zhi (AD 192-232) describing his longing for the legendary fairy princess Mi, who appears to be lingering above the vast river on the point of departure, while the poet stands enchanted on the bank, grieving because he is unable to reach her. His feelings are brilliantly portrayed in this painting, because the artist entered into them and conveyed them by means of his delicate brushwork and exquisite use of colours. His superb artistic technique fully brought out the spirit of this poem. It is no wonder that the genius of Gu Kaizhi has been acclaimed for centuries.

An Outing in Spring by Zhan Ziqian of the Sui Dynasty (AD 581-618) is the earliest landscape painted in this style. It shows a delightful spring scene. Excursionists on horseback and in boats are enjoying the green hills and limpid river. This work has a sense of perspective, unlike earlier paintings in which the figures were larger than the mountains, which served merely as landscape settings. This work is more realistic and true to life. Its appearance signified that landscape painting had become an independent school, no longer an appendage to figure paintings.

The Tang Dynasty provides a wealth of paintings of this kind. Along the old Silk Road we find many wall-paintings in Tang caves, while in Turpan in Xinjiang some fragments of Tang paintings on silk have been discovered. Their colours are as vivid as if newly painted. The Tang murals in the tombs of Princess Yongtai, Prince Zhanghuai and Prince Yide in the vicinity of Xi'an are large paintings with a wealth of detail depicting palace life. Some fine hand-scrolls in the meticulous style are Yan Liben's portraits of emperors, Zhang Xuan's *Court Ladies Preparing Silk* and Zhou Fang's *Ladies with Flowers in Their Hair*.

But the most outstanding painters of this school appeared in the Five Dynasties (AD 907-960). *A Night Entertainment of Han Xizai* by Gu Hongzhong (see illustration) is a series of five paintings which vividly depict the dissipated night life of a noble of Southern Tang. However, the host in the middle of his merry guests has an anxious expression on his face, disclosing the secret uneas-

iness of this nobleman from the north who, to avert the emperor's suspicion, has to make a show of dissipation. This brilliant meticulous work, so forcefully realistic, is a classic. Huang Quan's *Birds*, a small painting of insects and birds which are very lifelike, is another masterpiece of this kind.

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) saw the emergence of impressionist paintings in water-colours and ink, which challenged and rivalled the earlier school of painting. However, the mainstream of Song painting was realistic; and the academy painters with their strict rules mostly used precise brushwork and rich colouring. This dynasty can be said to be the golden age of Chinese painting with an immense variety of styles.

The four great masters of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng, Ni Zan and Wu Zhen, were all landscape painters, none of whom painted in the meticulous style. During the Song Dynasty some literati painters had put forward the theory "the highest form of art is landscape painting, and wash drawings are best". This was now generally accepted, and the meticulous

A Night Entertainment of Han Xizai (detail)



technique was disdained. Of course, it did not die out, as this fine old tradition had great vitality. This explains why during the heyday of monochrome landscapes during the Yuan Dynasty, superb murals in the meticulous style were painted in the Yongle Temple in Shanxi.

This continued to be the case in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911). Professional artists set little store by meticulous painting. Not even such great masters as Qiu Ying, Tang Yin, Lu Ji or Chen Hongshou could save the situation. However, among the people the old style of painting flourished. There were many fine wall-paintings in various temples, and meticulous paintings reigned supreme in the fields of portraiture, New-Year pictures and handicrafts.

After the founding of New China in 1949, the government fostered China's fine traditional painting and encouraged the use of the meticulous style. In New-Year paintings, too, our artists have made wide use of this old method to express a new content. They have produced not a few good works, some examples being Jiang Yan's *Testing Mama*, Wang Shuhui's *The Western Chamber*, Chen Zhifo's *Cranes and Pines* and Yu Feian's *Peonies and Doves*. But this style of painting never gained the widespread recognition it deserved. However, a change is now taking place. More painters are adopting this style. Artists of this school in Beijing have organized an association; old painters have regained their youthful vitality, and many competent middle-aged and young artists have appeared. In this issue we present some of their works. *Spring by the Lijiang River* by the senior woman artist Pan Su is in the tradition of Tang and Song meticulous landscapes with its brilliant colour contrasts; Jin Jiezhong's *A Love Letter* and the woman painter Jiang Caipin's *Going to Market* both depict the happy new life of national minorities, and the meticulous painting and bright colours are well fitted to portray the women's postures and their beautiful costumes. *A Clear Stream* by another woman painter Zhao Xiuhuan is a fresh and evocative flower painting. From these works we can see how this fine old tradition is developing and changing today. It has been given a new lease of life.

Translated by Gladys Yang



A Love Letter by Jin Jiezhong



A Clear Stream

by Zhao Xiuhuan



Going to Market

by Jiang Caipin

趕街

庚申五月信了言南機尼地江景





Spring by the Lijiang River

by Pan Su

Min Ze

Realism in Chinese Classical Literature

THE term “realism” appeared in European philosophical works in the Middle Ages, but it did not occur in literary theory until the 18th century, when Schiller, Goethe and Schlegel, all used it in describing literary phenomena. But it was not until the 1940s that realism in writing was widely adopted, first in France and then in other European countries.

There are differences of opinion as to when realism as a literary term first appeared in China. Some scholars claim that it was introduced into China after the May 4th Movement in 1919. More hold that it occurred a few years earlier in Wang Guowei's *Ren Jian Ci Hua* (On Ci Poems), which was published in 1910. Actually neither is accurate, since in 1902, Liang Qichao in his *On the Relation Between Novels and Politics* raised the question of “idealistic novels” and “realistic novels”, ie romanticism and realism. But, even so realism has had a history of only seventy odd years in Chinese literature.

In the thirty years since the establishment of our People's Republic, the study of classical literature was often influenced by the various political movements. One of the results of this interfer-

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ence was a dearth of articles on realism in classical literary theory and on the theory of realism itself.

Since there has been too little research into the historical characteristics of the emergence and development of realism in Chinese literature, there has been some theoretical confusion.

Some scholars believe that realism matured with Du Fu (AD 712-770) and Bai Juyi (AD 772-846), two great poets of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). Some hold that realism only really developed in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1910) Dynasties, especially with Cao Xueqin's (?-1763) novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Some claim that there was no realistic literature until the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) Dynasties or even as late as the Ming and Qing Dynasties and that works before then, though having some realistic content, cannot be considered as realistic literature. Others hold that realism, like our literature, has had a long history.

In his *Reading at Night*, Mao Dun asserted that the struggle between realism and non-realism had occurred throughout the entire history of Chinese literature. For a certain period, his views exerted a great influence and caused much debate. Over twenty opposing articles were published in *Literary Legacy* and *Literary Review*. He Qifang contended with Mao Dun on this and with some of his views (such as the relation between realism and the neo-classical movement of the Tang Dynasty). These different views have influenced not only the theory of realism itself, but also research into Chinese classical literature.

How should we regard this? It involves two related but separate problems.

When did realism first exist in Chinese literature and literary theories? Though there are various opinions as to its appearance, their basis is the same: realism appeared in the West only after the bourgeois revolution in the 18th century. Therefore, it could only happen in China after the ascendancy of its bourgeoisie in the Song and Yuan or Ming and Qing Dynasties. But this argument has no firm basis. It over-simplifies the facts with a sweeping generalization. Engels said: Men used dialectics in their practical life long before the term came into being, just as they wrote prose

before the term existed. It is completely groundless to negate the existence of realism in the Chinese classics and literary theory or its existence in a certain historical period because realism only came into being during the bourgeois revolution in the West.

So when did it first appear, and how did it develop?

Here, the crux of the matter is how we understand Engels' theory of realism. In 1888, in his letter to Margaret Harkness, when he told her what he thought of *City Girl*, what he wrote has been quoted ever since: "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truth in reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." Although what he said concerned the novel *City Girl*, he made a correct generalization of the basic requirements of realism in novels and plays, where typical characters are created. Only when the typical characters reflect in full the "typical circumstances" in which they arise can the work reflect fully society in a specific period. Although this is true of all important literary creations, it is not a correct generalization of the basic requirements of realism. That was why Engels also stressed "truth of detail". Thus realism can be distinguished from romanticism.

Engels had in mind novels when he wrote this. Although it can be applied to plays and films, it cannot be applied to lyrical poetry or landscape paintings. So naturally, it cannot cover all forms of realism in literature and art.

If we apply these famous words of Engels in a mechanical way to Chinese literature, we shall arrive at the conclusion that realism appeared only after the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Because, novels and dramas, which were not considered suitable for the feudal aristocracy, only matured after the Song and Yuan Dynasties, reaching their peak with *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

If we conclude that realism only came into being after the Song and Yuan Dynasties, then it only applies to the development of dramas and novels, not poetry, since, in terms of creativity, it is generally agreed there was little difference between realism in poetry before and after the Song and Yuan Dynasties. To exclude poetry is not in accordance with our rich history of realist literature. For many years, *The Book of Songs* and the poetry of Du Fu and Bai Juyi have been regarded as models of realism. It is uncon-

vincing to claim otherwise. Some scholars have held that poetry is our main realistic literary form. The tradition of realism in literary criticism began in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), continued in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) and matured in the mid-Tang Dynasty in the eighth century. The theory of poetry put forward by Bai Juyi in initiating the folk-song and ballad movement shows this. I agree with this view.

When we look at our history factually, we can clearly see that realistic poetry matured in the Tang Dynasty, centuries earlier than novels and dramas. We cannot judge poetry by the standards of realism for novels and plays, whose main task is to model typical images.

The discussion held recently on realism in our classical literary theory is very significant, an area long neglected in recent years.

Translated by Yu Fanqin

Gai Shanlin

Rare Cliff Engravings of Yinshan

IN recent years archaeologists investigating Langshan to the west of the Yinshan ranges, which run from east to west of Inner Mongolia, have discovered many remains and graves of the northern pastoral nomads in ancient times, as well as thousands of distinctive cliff pictures engraved by them in different historical periods. These engravings with their rich and varied contents record the nomads' experiences and hopes, providing reliable material for the study of their history.

The cliff pictures of Yinshan were described by the fifth-century geographer Li Daoyuan in his well-known work *Shui Jing Zhu* (Commentary on the Waterways Classic):

"The river then turns northeast to the west of the Rocky Cliff Mountains, five hundred *li* from Beidi. On the rocks are natural designs like tigers and horses, forming pictures of a sort. So this place is also known as the Picture Cliffs."

On the basis of these clues we explored the vast treasure-house of Langshan from the Alxa Left Banner in the west to the Urad Middle and Rear Joint Banner in the east, a region covering about three hundred kilometres from east to west and forty to seventy from north to south. On the cliffs of deep mountain valleys,

Gai Shanlin is a member of the archaeological excavation team of the Inner Mongolian Museum.

on the heights and on huge granite boulders we discovered over a thousand cliff engravings.

These engravings are not evenly distributed on all the rock faces or throughout every valley, but are to be found in a few localities. It appears that isolated cliff pictures are the most common. There are also groups of pictures, including several large ones.

They were often engraved on the north or west side of a gully, facing the sun, many being where a valley curves and hills and lakes form an enchanting landscape with suitable boulders or cliffs. Apart from these there are some on grand rocks and peaks, or on huge solitary boulders. As a rule, they are in the vicinity of lama temples.

The distribution of these pictures often depends on the content. The most prevalent are animal likenesses which are found on cliffs, high peaks and groups of rocks, but which appear most commonly on summits where hitherto no deities have been discovered. Nearly all these latter are on cliffs by gulches, on boulders beside valleys or on their rock beds — they are confined to the valleys.

The cliff pictures of Yinshan are highly diversified. It would be no exaggeration to say that they epitomize the history of pastoral nomads in north China, reflecting different aspects of their society and life in the past. They show horses, oxen, goats, deer, foxes, wild asses, mules, camels, wolves, tigers, leopards, tortoises, dogs, eagles and other creatures, but mainly goats, horses and deer. There are also some imaginary creatures, amalgamations of different animals.

There are some hunting scenes: lone hunters, groups of hunters and hunters rounding up game from different directions. The hunts for large animals are of great interest. We see some hunters on foot, others on horseback. Armed with bows and arrows, these surround their quarry and shoot at it, while a few others keep watch to see if any animals escape.

There are many depictions of horsemen, the largest groups of these being in the vicinity of Agui Temple, although similar subjects appear elsewhere. There are also pictures of the clothing, food, dwellings and treks of the pastoral nomads, as well as an-



cient carts, wheels, yurts and millstones. These illustrations from life contribute to our understanding of our northern national minorities.

Some pictures present warfare, with archers battling furiously against their enemies.

An important place in these cliff pictures is held by those which reflect the mentality and world outlook of the nomads. First, we see their belief in a divine order. Their lives were regulated by the sun, which is depicted as ☉ like the sun in the Chinese script on oracle bones or Egyptian hieroglyphs. The forms of sun worship shown are most interesting. Thus a cliff in the west part of Yinshan shows a figure standing erect, legs astride, both arms above his head and his two palms together. Above his head is a sun, and his veneration of the sun is clear.

Many moons also appear in the cliff pictures, mostly shaped like a crescent, but also like full moons. They may be shown alone or side by side with the sun and stars.

Stars are often scattered on the cliff pictures of deities, although there are also engravings of nothing but stars. They are usually separate, seldom linked together. In the south of the Urad Middle

and Rear Joint Banner a picture of the Big Dipper, unfortunately now destroyed, and a complete map of stars have been discovered.

In addition, there are quite a few depictions of clouds, most of them heavily outlined circles, others in irregular forms.

To show respect for Heaven, the men of old created a god of heaven. The Yinshan cliff pictures also present a large number of deities in different forms and postures, interspersed with clusters of stars or a sun and moon to indicate that these divine beings inhabit the sky. The majority are found on cliffs in the valleys, and probably the tribesmen gathered in front of them at regular times each year to sacrifice to them.

Related to the worship of the gods of heaven and earth and the other deities are all manner of scenes of prayer and dancing. The suppliants raise both hands, their fingers outstretched, and long tails are often suspended from their shoulders as a sign of reverence.

A considerable variety of dances are depicted. Some are primitive group dances, in which the performers link arms and stamp the ground; some show community dancing in a line and other dancers holding tails or dressed up as animals or birds. From them we can see the characteristics of primitive dances, including solo dances and some performed by two people.

The pictures also show primitive numerical signs, footprints, imprints of hands, people, beasts, sacrificial objects, pictorial writing, tribal emblems and male and female sexual organs.

The dates of these engravings can often be determined from



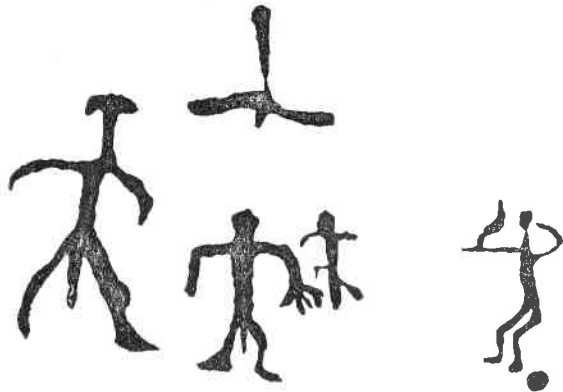
internal evidence. Thus below Mount Hanwula in the Urad Middle and Rear Joint Banner is a representation of the god of heaven, while in the upper right-hand corner are carved the characters "Great Tang", showing that this was indubitably a Tang-dynasty work. On a peak in the south part of the Qog Banner, a picture of animals has an inscription in Tangut, thus it was probably carved while the Tanguts were dominant in that region. We can estimate the dates of some other pictures by comparing their craftsmanship, subject-matter, composition, style, shape and degree of erosion.

Now let me briefly introduce some typical works with different themes and styles from among the thousand and more Yinshan cliff engravings of which rubbings have been made. Hunting scenes are prominent. One picture of a hunter is 0.6 metres high and 0.7 metres wide. The hunter in the middle with a tail is drawing his bow and aiming at a beast ahead. He is surrounded by goats and dogs, and below are a ram and a ewe, the latter suckling a lamb. They are vividly depicted and true to life.



In Mount Sidilihari, in the west of the Urad Middle and Rear Joint Banner, are several scenes of hunting. One engraved on a high cliff facing south is 1.12 metres high, 0.91 metres wide. There are three archers on the right side. Two of them, wearing tails, have shot wild beasts; the one in the centre is taking aim. Another hunter in the top left-hand corner has also shot his quarry and is treading fiercely on its head while it struggles. In the lower right-hand corner stands a figure who appears to be a woman.

A representative picture of animals is that in Dengkou County's Wustai Gorge. The rock here is black. This lovely engraving, which remained undiscovered for many centuries, measures 0.77 by 1 metres. A herd of wild goats is dashing wildly off as if escaping from an enemy. In the lower part of the picture is a great beast, possibly a tiger, its body incised with stripes, which



seems to be pursuing the goats. This is a very dramatic, lifelike scene.

Horsemen also figure largely in these cliff pictures. In one, measuring 0.7 by 0.9 metres, some men are riding horses, others camels. Most of them are proceeding from right to left, and with outstretched arms are urging their mounts forward. One is looking over his shoulder, his arms and legs hanging down; one has an arm raised like an acrobat.

The sheer cliffs in some deep valleys are ornamented with the heads of many gods of heaven having human or animal faces, as well as gods of the earth and other deities. But large paintings of this kind are rare, and only occur in the places where the tribesmen of old held major sacrifices.

Pictures of dancers can be found in many parts of Yinshan. One scene of a primitive dance measures 0.87 by 0.46 metres. It shows three dancers, arms outstretched but lowered from the elbows, their fingers outstretched, their legs apart, with tails hanging from their hips. This is a distinctive posture in eastern dancing.

Beside these lovely engravings we often find carved irregular strokes which are probably primitive numerals. Thus the fourth picture in Moliheqi Valley, Dengkou County, has the signs 11 and 1|11, no doubt denoting two and five.

In many parts of China — Guangxi, Yunnan, Xinjiang, Gansu, Tibet, Guizhou, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia and Sichuan — we have discovered cliff pictures from various periods, with different themes. But those of Yinshan outnumber them all and surpass them in their richness of subject-matter and fine craftsmanship.

These treasures created by the pastoral nomads of north China over a period of a thousand years have a place of honour in our ancient culture.

Translated by Gladys Yang

Ji Qin

Researches into Tang-Dynasty Poets

THE Tang Dynasty was the golden age of Chinese poetry. Tang poems are not only gems of Chinese literature, but also of world literature. It is, therefore, no wonder that many scholars have engaged in the study of Tang-dynasty poetry.

Researches into Tang-dynasty Poets by Fu Xuancong was published in 1979 by the Zhonghua Book Company. This book studies different poets in chronological order. On the basis of systematic textual research it has carefully amended some of their poems and commented on their significance. In these respects it has broken fresh ground.

Fu Xuancong studied the Tang poets for more than ten years and accumulated a great deal of historical material before writing these scholarly and systematic studies. The twenty-seven articles in the collection deal with nearly forty poets ranging from the early seventh century up to the ninth. They comment on their careers, the dates of their works, the scope and different periods of their writing,

Ji Qin, 46, is a woman editor of the literature section, Zhonghua Book Company.

the position their works deserve in the history of literature as well as the influence they have had. Bearing in mind the important relationship between history and literature, the author does not study the Tang-dynasty poets in isolation, nor does he do research for its own sake. He considers Tang poetry as an artistic whole set against a specific historical background, with different poets influencing each other. Thus the publication of this book is a new departure in our study of literary history, which fills in certain gaps in earlier accounts of Tang poetry.

Fu Xuancong adopts a scientific approach. Take Wei Yinwu, a famous poet of middle Tang, for example. Neither the old nor new *Tang History* carried his biography. Song-dynasty (960-1269) historians recorded his life according to some materials available at that time, yet there were still errors and omissions; and little has been written about him even in the works published in recent years. But here Fu Xuancong's "A Study of Wei Yinwu's Dates" has given an accurate account of his life and his major works in chronological order, and at the same time has ascertained the fact that his father and uncle as well as a cousin on the paternal side were all noted painters; it was in such a highly cultivated family that Wei Yinwu grew up. This is, of course, valuable reference material for the study of his poetry. Yet this fact has been neglected by earlier scholars.

Liu Zhangqing is another case in point. He was a poet with a distinctive style during the early and middle Tang. A Qing-dynasty literary critic held that, with the exception of Du Fu, Liu Zhangqing was the most brilliant poet of that period. Nevertheless, both the old and new *Tang History* failed to write a biography for him. Only in the section on literature and art attached to the *New Tang History* was there a simple record of his life, which related that because he once offended a superior he was falsely accused of a crime and banished to Lingnan. Most scholars believed this account, which was repeated in almost all works on literary history or the introductions to his life in anthologies of Tang poems. Now, according to the emendation made by Fu Xuancong, Liu Zhangqing was actually banished twice, at an interval of fifteen to sixteen years. The first time he was sent in

disgrace to Lingnan, the second time to Zhejiang. So the section on literature and art was unreliable. By clearing up these facts about his exile we have a more accurate picture of his life. Apart from the two above-mentioned articles, several others deal with ten gifted scholars in the Da Li period (AD 766-779) of the Tang Dynasty, and either rectify errors or make good omissions. In short, this book has made a useful contribution to the study of Chinese literary history.

Fu Xuancong is now the director of the ancient history editorial office of the Zhonghua Book Company. He carries on research work in his spare time and is now compiling data about Song-dynasty poems and prose. His *Classical Literary Data on Yang Wanli and Fan Chengda* was published by the Zhonghua Book Company in 1964, while his *Classical Literary Data on Huang Tingjian and the Jiangxi Poets* was published in 1978. These works provide material on literary criticism dating from the Song Dynasty up to the last period of the Qing Dynasty. This new work of his in 400,000 words, completed on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the founding of our People's Republic, is carefully researched and scholarly.

Now, in collaboration with two other classical scholars, Fu Xuancong has compiled a *General Index of Biographical Material on Figures of the Tang and Five Dynasties*. This runs to well over a million words and should be out next year. In future he will continue to write up his researches into the literature and lives of the poets of the middle and late Tang.

Translated by Hu Zhibui

Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans
by Qiu Ying



Shan Guolin

“Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans”

WANG *Xizhi Inscribes Fans* is a figure painting to illustrate an anecdote about the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317-420). Towards the end of his life he became the prefect of Guiji (present-day Shaoxing), Zhejiang, and was given the rank of a right general. He studied various styles of calligraphy of the earlier dynasties when the clerical and rustic scripts predominated, then evolved his own cursive style of writing. Facsimiles and rubbings of his calligraphy are still copied and studied in China today.

In his lifetime Wang Xizhi was already well known for his calligraphy. People treasured any examples they acquired. Because of his reputation, many anecdotes were told about him. When at Jishan, he met an old woman trying to sell bamboo fans in the street but there were no customers. To show sympathy for her, he took over the fans and inscribed five characters on each of them. But this upset her. Wang smilingly said, “Just tell

Shan Guolin is an art specialist in the Shanghai Museum.

your customers that the characters on the fans were written by Wang Xizhi, and each of them will fetch you a hundred cash." Though sceptical, she took her fans to the market. Sure enough, people flocked to buy them, and soon they were sold out. The delighted old woman took another bundle of fans to Wang the next day and asked him to inscribe them. Wang smiled but did not answer. Since then many painters have portrayed this story.

Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans published in this issue was painted by the celebrated Ming artist Qiu Ying (?-1552). Born in Taicang, Jiangsu, he lived most of his life in Suzhou. As a child he loved drawing. According to some accounts he made lacquerware before he established himself as a painter. Later he was instructed by the noted artist Zhou Chen and brought into contact with the renowned contemporary painters Tang Yin (1470-1523) and Wen Zhengming (1470-1559). When middle-aged, he was invited by the collector Xiang Yuanbian to his home to copy paintings, and had access to numerous excellent works by earlier artists. As he learned conscientiously from these past masters, his technique gradually improved. He could paint not only landscapes, flowers and birds, but also male and female figures. At that time Qiu Ying, Tang Yin, Wen Zhengming and Shen Zhou (1427-1509) were called "the four great painters of the Ming Dynasty". (More detailed information about Qiu Ying appeared in *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1979.)

Through the painting *Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans*, Qiu Ying successfully reflected Wang Xizhi's character. On the right side of the painting is an overhanging cliff, behind and opposite which stand bamboos. From the background flows a stream. This peaceful, charming scene accords with Wang's predilection for country excursions. In the middle, Wang sits on a stool in a loose robe and scholar's cap. Standing by him is a page, and before him a white-haired old woman is looking up at him with her hands folded and a basket of fans at her feet. The painter, instead of depicting Wang inscribing fans, portrays the old woman, after her successful sales, respectfully entreating him to do her a favour once more. Wang with his long beard is smiling affably and looks

scholarly. By these subtle means Qiu Ying presents him as an outstanding calligrapher of that time.

A versatile artist, Qiu Ying was skilful at painting both in the meticulous and the impressionist styles. In *Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans*, Qiu combines both styles to display elegance in his vigorous brush strokes. Wang Xizhi's eyebrows and beard are exquisitely delineated in soft and fine lines, but simple, flowing strokes are used for the folds in his garments. The rugged grandeur of the cliff and rocks is presented by means of bold horizontal ink-and-wash brush strokes. The grey banks in the background give an impression of remoteness. The varied brushwork and shades used to reflect the figures' vivid expressions and quiet surroundings display the painter's virtuosity.

Qiu Ying was a hardworking artist. Though he did not live to a great age, he left a wealth of works. One of them is *Wang Xizhi Inscribes Fans*, painted in his prime. Measuring 280.5 cm by 99.1 cm, it is now housed in the Shanghai Museum.

Translated by Song Shouquan

A Collection of Chinese Folk Narrative Poems Published

Volumes I and II of *A Collection of Chinese Folk Narrative Poems* were published recently by the Shanghai Literature Publishing House. Each contains ten narrative poems and short reference articles. These poems were chosen from the best works of different Chinese nationalities including the Sani people's *Asbma*, the Dai people's *Zhaosbutum*, the Mongolian *Kbadamelin* and the Nasi people's *Creation*. Other volumes will follow.

A History of Chinese Films Reprinted

Edited by Cheng Jihua, *A History of Chinese Films* has been reissued by the China Film Publishing House.

The book gives a brief history of Chinese films from 1896 to 1949, their impact on Chinese society, as well as comments on acting and directing.

The two-volume work, with 800 photographs, was first published in 1963. It retains its original text with a few corrections.

An Introduction to the Traditional Entertainment "Quyī"

An Introduction to the Traditional Entertainment "Quyī" by the noted comedian Hou Baolin, Wang Jingshou, faculty member of

the Chinese Department, Beijing University, and Xue Baokun, faculty member of the Chinese Department, Nankai University, Tianjin, has been published by Beijing University Press. Consisting of ten chapters, it gives an account of the development and characteristics of *xiangsheng* (comic dialogues), and various forms of ballads of Hebei and Shandong Provinces, and assesses their role in the history of Chinese literature.

Trends in Modern Western Literature

Four volumes of translations of modern western literature have been published by the Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House. New literary trends from the First World War onwards are represented, with reviews and articles introducing the writers. The preface was written by Yuan Kejia of the Research Institute of Foreign Literature, the Academy of Social Sciences.

A Full-Length Dance Drama

Adapted by Liu Dekang from a Central Asian legend, the full-length dance drama *Sword* was recently staged by the China Song and Dance Drama Theatre in Beijing. It tells of a prince who falls in love with a blacksmith's daughter. When the kingdom is attacked, the prince and the girl are captured. The enemy tries to force the prince to surrender by torturing his sweetheart. For her sake, he capitulates. The girl is desolate and, on their wedding night, stabs him with a sword — a token of their love — and then kills herself.

The part of the heroine was performed by the renowned dancer Zhao Qing, daughter of the late celebrated film star Zhao Dan.

New Shanghai Play *The Blood Is Always Warm*

The play *The Blood Is Always Warm* produced by an amateur drama group affiliated to the Workers' Cultural Palace caused a

stir in Shanghai. It reflects the conflicts in present-day China's economic reform, with a fine portrayal of Luo Xingang, a Communist and manager of a silk factory.

The amateur worker playwright Zong Fuxian, who wrote *When All Sounds Are Hushed* (see *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1979), wrote this play together with another young worker He Guofu.

Tibetan Murals Exhibited in Beijing

An exhibition of more than 100 reproductions of traditional Tibetan murals, sponsored by the Chinese Artists' Association and the Cultural Bureau of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the Tibetan Federation of Literary and Art Circles, was recently on show at the National Art Gallery, Beijing.

These copies had been made by local artists and craftsmen from murals in temples in Lhasa, Shannan, Xigaze and Qamdo.

Chinese Puppetry Society Established

The newly-established Chinese Puppetry Society aims to exchange plays and performances with other countries, sponsor festivals and assist in the training of young puppeteers.

There are about 100,000 puppeteers and shadow-play performers in over 20 cities, municipalities and autonomous regions. In Shaanxi, Hunan, Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, they are especially popular.

New Discoveries from the Qin Emperor's Mausoleum

After the discovery of large numbers of life-size pottery horses and warriors in the mausoleum of the Qin-dynasty First Emperor (259-210 BC), archaeologists have unearthed from pits to the west two bronze carriages, each with four horses and a driver.

The carriages, one metre long and wide, are decorated with spiral clouds and coloured geometric patterns. Each horse, 70

cm tall and about one metre long, is painted, but the colours have faded. The driver, 90 cm high, is also painted. The two carriages are alike in their structure, and the horses resemble each other in casting techniques. The only differences are the types of carriages and the positions of the two drivers: one squats on his heels, the other stands erect. Archaeologists date the finds to the period between 221-211 BC. Probably the pits were a part of a stable outside the underground palace. Judging by the headdress worn by the drivers, the carriages are believed to have been modelled on those of the empress, concubines or the crown prince.

These are the earliest, largest and best-preserved bronze carriages, horses and figures unearthed so far.

Burns' Night Celebrated in Beijing

Poetry recitals, Scottish songs and dances, toasts in Scottish whisky and an audience of Burns lovers from at least six countries brought out the Scottish and international character of the first Burns' Night in China since 1949 on 25th January, organized by the magazine *Poetry*, Beijing Foreign Languages Institute and Beijing University and held at Beijing's Capital Theatre. Burns was presented as a farmer, a humorist, a patriot, an internationalist and a songwriter. Patricia Wilson, a Scot working with *Chinese Literature*, and Huang Zongluo, an actor, presided over the gathering. Among the performers were Scots or those of Scottish origin, members of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, film personalities, singers and pianists. Zou Difan, deputy editor of *Poetry*, and Huang Yongyu, a noted painter, read poems they had written in honour of Burns. Huang Yongyu also presented to the Burns Federation in Scotland a portrait he had made of the poet in the traditional Chinese style. Telegrams of greetings were sent from the Burns Federation in Scotland, the Scotland-China Association and other Scottish linked organizations. There were several hundred people present.

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Summer Night (woodcut)

by Hu Kang



中國文學

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