

CHINESE LITERATURE



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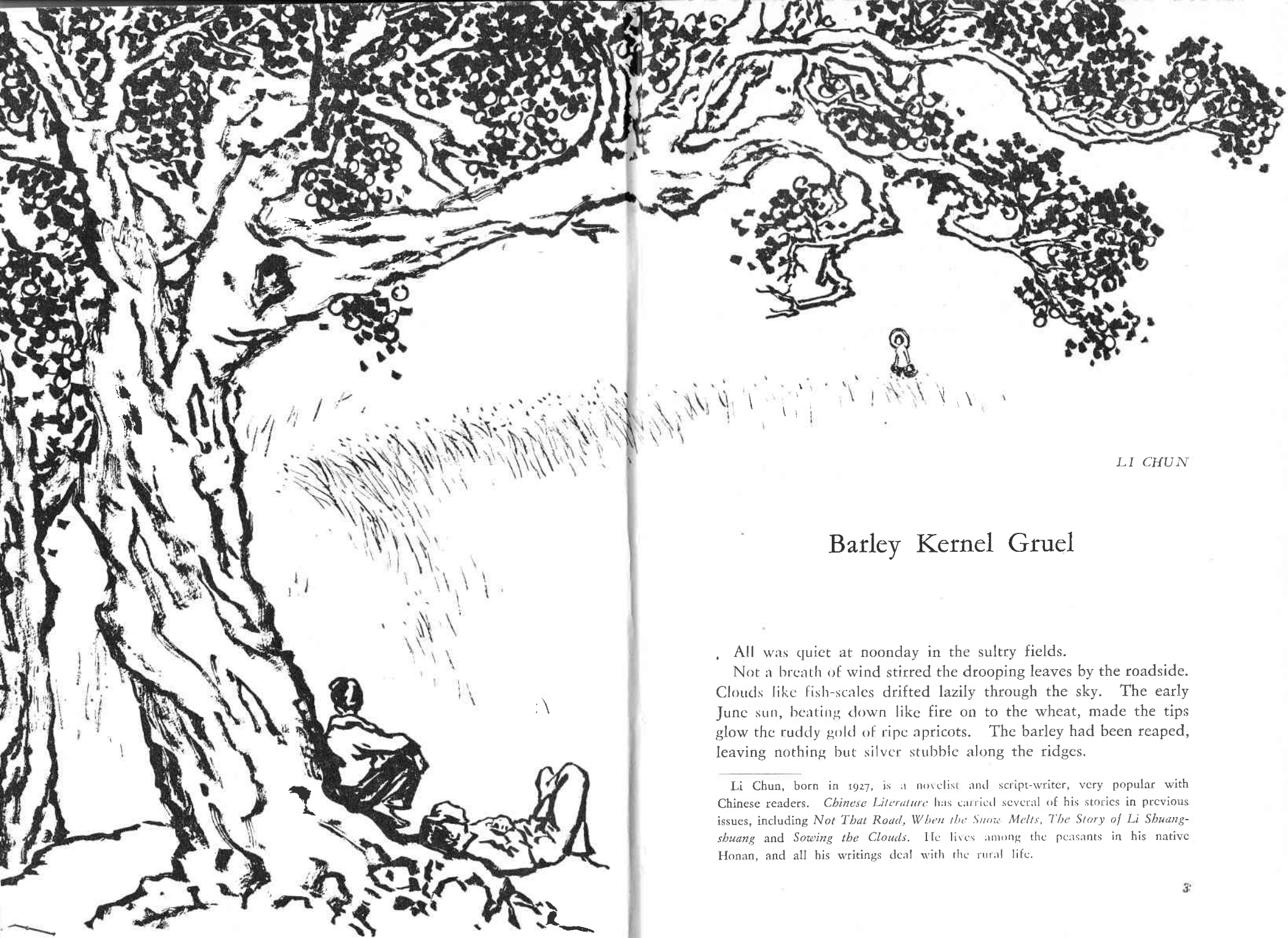
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LI CHUN

Barley Kernel Gruel

All was quiet at noonday in the sultry fields. Not a breath of wind stirred the drooping leaves by the roadside. Clouds like fish-scales drifted lazily through the sky. The early June sun, beating down like fire on to the wheat, made the tips glow the ruddy gold of ripe apricots. The barley had been reaped, leaving nothing but silver stubble along the ridges.

Li Chun, born in 1927, is a novelist and script-writer, very popular with Chinese readers. *Chinese Literature* has carried several of his stories in previous issues, including *Not That Road*, *When the Snow Melts*, *The Story of Li Shuang-shuang* and *Sowing the Clouds*. He lives among the peasants in his native Honan, and all his writings deal with the rural life.

Because of the heat and the fact that it was noon, there was not a soul on the land. Trees and crops drowsed sleepily. But from the ears of wheat in the terraced fields there wafted penetrating gusts of fragrance.

This was hilly country and a dirt track wound like a brown belt over the undulating landscape. Along this steep road two men were pushing a cart loaded with four telegraph poles of stout, straight red pine. The wheels of the cart were creaking.

The younger of the two men, Lei Wan-sheng, was a sturdy fellow in his early twenties. Sweat had gathered on the bushy eyebrows above his large black eyes, and he was panting for breath, his full red lips parted. Ho Sui-lin, his mate and senior by several years, looked the younger of the two. Short and light on his feet, he had small, rather boyish features, giving him the appearance of an overgrown child.

It was clear that they had come unprepared for this heat, for both were wearing long pants and thick shirts. Lei was sweating so much that the characters "Chengchow Electric Machine Works" printed in red on his shirt were sticking to his chest.

They were delivering these telegraph poles from Chengchow to White Goose Ridge Production Brigade. A month previously their foreman, Old Lu, had joined a work team sent to help the villages and had been assigned to this production brigade to install an electrically operated pump station. The brigade had prepared all the necessary wire, machinery and other equipment, but proved to be short of four telegraph poles, and these were not procurable on the spot, as the region produced nothing but deciduous trees. The local cadres brought along carrying poles used for sedan-chairs and old cross-beams, but none of these was the specified height or thickness. In the end, Old Lu wrote to his management asking them to help by sending some of the works' own stock of poles. Lei and Ho had been chosen to make the delivery.

This county lay not far from Chengchow, only two stops away by train. When they alighted at the station and learned that White Goose Ridge was just eighteen *li* away, Lei rolled up his sleeves and started off with the cart.

"Let's have a snack first," said Ho. "It's after eight."

But there was quite a crowd round the canteen and Lei, observing this, answered airily, "Come on! It's only eighteen *li*. We'll eat when we find Old Lu."

So the two of them set off with the telegraph poles. To start with, they exchanged light-hearted comments on the probable yield of the wheat on both sides of the road, and the strength and stamina of donkeys, while young Lei enlivened their progress by his imitations of bird calls.

They covered a dozen *li* without stopping to rest. After crossing several ridges and climbing not a few steep hills, they suddenly found the road before them cut. A passer-by informed them that the commune was building a highway to White Goose Ridge and they would have to go round by Walnut Gully. When farmers give directions, instead of confining themselves to a simple "Turn left" or "Turn right" like city folk, they launch into detailed instructions like a mathematics teacher holding forth to his class. On the basis of what they were told Ho made a rapid mental calculation and realized that this detour would let them in for another eighteen *li*. One thing reassured them, however, and that was the news that after reaching Persimmon Valley in the east they could follow the telegraph poles to White Goose Ridge.

As they trundled the cart back the way they had come, young Lei's comments on the wheat and donkeys dried up. So did his bird calls. He plodded glumly along, too disgusted to take out his handkerchief, using his sleeves to mop his sweating face.

Ho knew just how he felt, and in an attempt to keep his spirits up hummed snatches of Honan opera — slightly off-key. Young Lei could sing Shaohsing opera but he kept silent, except for the rumbling of his empty stomach.

After toiling past a few more ridges and valleys, Ho lapsed into silence too. By now all the peasants had left the fields and the sun was beating down more fiercely than ever. The swish of the cart wheels through the dust, punctuated by laboured breathing, was the only sound on the highway.

In the distance two large, leafy walnut trees came into sight, and just beyond them tall telegraph poles stretched into the distance. That put new life into both men and with joyful shouts Lei shoved the cart up the slope, beads of sweat pouring off him like rain dripping into his eyes. But great was their disappoint-

ment at the top! For there was nothing here but walnut trees, not a single village or wayside stall in that empty, rolling country. They could see White Goose Ridge, true enough, but one look at the line of telegraph poles made it clear that it was at least ten *li* away and very difficult going into the bargain.

Lei let go of the cart and squatted in the shade of the trees. He refused to move.

"What's up?" asked Ho. "That's White Goose Ridge ahead."

"I can't make it," Lei declared. "I've come over dizzy."

Secretly amused, Ho joined him in the shade.

"Confound these blistering hills!" swore Lei. "Not a snack bar or village to be seen, not even a river!"

"We ought to have bought a few buns at the station," said Ho.

Lei ignored this remark and, his eyes on the walnut tree, asked, "When do walnuts ripen?"

"Not till autumn," Ho informed him. "It's no use looking so hopeful — there's nothing but leaves."

Still Lei stared up at the trees. "I wish they were loquats!" he sighed. "Where I come from this is just the time for loquats."

They rested a while in a dispirited silence, their eyes fixed on the cottages on the distant hill beyond which lay White Goose Ridge. In the shimmering sunlight the village, surrounded by trees, seemed like an oasis of clear green and turquoise blue, while the brooks and irrigation canals below interlaced each other like sparkling silver girdles. The cackling of hens carried faintly to their ears. Plumes of smoke curled up from the cluster of grey-tiled roofs to hover in the air.

This kitchen smoke caused Lei fresh pangs of hunger. And a bird, alighting at that moment on a bough above them, warbled a greeting which sounded for all the world like "Cuppa tea! Cuppa tea!" To young Lei, this was adding insult to injury. "Shut up, you!" he shouted. "We haven't even water to drink!" Both he and Ho burst out laughing.

Lei had barely stretched out in the shade, his hat over his face, when he caught the appetizing smell of food. Sitting up with a start, he saw a girl approaching by a path through the fields. She was wearing a new straw hat and blue check blouse, but from the waist down was hidden by the wheat. A few strands of glossy black hair lay over her temples, her cheeks were ruddy from ex-

posure to the sun, and beads of perspiration had gathered at the tips of her finely arched eyebrows. The freckles on the bridge of her nose seemed vermilion in the sun. It was such a sweltering day that her liquid eyes seemed to be brimming over. In her left hand she carried a blue porcelain pitcher covered with a pea-green bowl, in her right hand a bamboo basket. Beneath the white towel on the basket was a big pile of onion cakes.

The heat drove this girl, too, into the shade of the trees, on the other side from the men. Sitting down with her back to them, she fanned herself with her straw hat, her bright, artless eyes fixed on the golden wheat.

The breeze she set up by her fanning wafted the smell of food still more tantalizingly into the men's faces. They identified the spicy savour of onion cakes and lettuce with green pepper and gelatin. In addition there was the aroma of some sort of gruel unlike anything that young Lei had experienced before, reminiscent of the scent of young wheat in the fields, its flavour heightened by cooking.

These appetizing odours made the men more conscious than ever of their hunger. With a glance at Lei, Ho suggested, "Suppose we move on?" He saw no point in staying there to be tormented.

Lei knew what he meant, for his own mouth was watering. "All right," he said. Then he turned to ask the girl, "How far is it, Elder Sister, to White Goose Ridge?"

The girl's finely chiselled lips curved in a smile at such a form of address from a bronzed, burly man. Shyly pointing to the hill ahead, she said, "Eight *li*. That red building beyond the stream is the brigade's new power station." Her voice was crisp, with the ringing tone of a bell.

"Your *li* in the mountains seems longer than on the plains," remarked young Lei.

"Yes, it's uphill and down dale all the way, so that eight *li* really amounts to well over ten." Only now did she turn to face them.

Their spirits rose at her air of concern. Young Lei seized the chance to say, "Oh, well, let's go. I could eat three big bowls of rice now, if only I had them!"

"What about pancakes?" asked Ho, deliberately.

"Pancakes? I could polish off ten!"

They watched the girl as she spoke, but she seemed not to have heard, judging by the lack of expression on her face. She was twiddling a wheat stalk and staring into the distance.

With a glance at his friend, Lei said rather sheepishly, "All right, get moving. No use talking about food here. I'd be thankful even for a sip of water."

"If you ignore the advice of your elders and betters, you're bound to run into trouble," declared Ho sententiously. "If you'd listened to me, you'd have eaten two big buns at the station and drunk some lentil gruel. Then you'd have more energy now."

Lei slapped his chest. "Well, missing a couple of meals isn't going to kill us. The Red Army crossed snowy mountains and fearful marshes — who's afraid of these little hills?" He tightened his belt, while the girl nibbled at her wheat stalk and smiled without saying a word.

"If we want to help the farmers, we mustn't mind hardships," continued Lei. "Didn't Old Lu say in his letter that once they have these poles eight hundred *mu* of dry land can be irrigated? Come on — let's put on a spurt!"

"That's all right with me." Ho grinned. "I'm not the one who's so hungry."

This last exchange had evidently set the girl thinking. She sprang to her feet and shyly yet firmly said, "If you're hungry, comrades, I've food here."

The two men hesitated and exchanged embarrassed glances.

"Go on!" she urged. "You've a steep climb ahead. And you're hauling a heavy load."

Her genuine sympathy overcame their scruples.

"Well, since Elder Sister's so good, let's have a snack, young Lei," suggested Ho. "No need to stand on ceremony."

"Right you are," agreed Lei, who was blushing like a boy.

The food was passed over. Onion cakes, a cold salad, and paper-thin pancakes made of fine white flour. The two men did not bother with vegetables: the pancakes disappeared down their throats like a flurry of snowflakes.

While Lei was still eating, Ho and the girl started chatting.

"Is your wheat crop good this year?"

"The best for a very long time. We're planning to sell more grain to the state this year."

"Then the state will be able to produce more machines for you."

"That's right! Nowadays the workers in town are doing all they can for us in the country. Yesterday they brought back electric bulbs for our village — much bigger than the bulbs in electric torches! They'll soon be fixed up."

"Had you never seen electric light?"

"I've seen it at the film shows." She smiled naively. "Why, that big light throws the moon into the shade!"

Young Lei, still munching pancakes, casually rapped his chopsticks against the pitcher and said, "There are some as big as this."

The sound served as a reminder. The girl exclaimed, "Why, here am I chatting and forgetting to give you a drink." She made haste to fill a bowl for each of them.

Young Lei saw a gruel made from golden beans and some grain much larger than rice but considerably smaller than lotus seeds, which was floating like pearls in the bowl. He tasted a mouthful — it had a fresh, sweet flavour. It slipped smoothly over his tongue and down his gullet.

He drank three bowls to two of Ho's, and was going to help himself to a fourth when the girl flushed red as a maple leaf and protested in some confusion, "Comrade, leave a bit for someone working in our fields."

It cost her such an effort to get this out, you could almost hear her heart thumping. Lei felt abashed and Ho interposed, "That's quite enough. We've had plenty."

"Have some more pancakes!" urged the girl.

The men assured her they had eaten their fill and hastened to produce money.

"We don't take money, comrades, up here in the hills. You're welcome to a meal."

"That won't do! . . ." It was the men's first visit to the country and they continued to press payment on her, but were at a loss for words.

"No, really, comrades. This is nothing. I'm not a snack vendor!" She spoke gently and smiled, but they saw she was adamant. With sheepish thanks they set off with their cart.

After they had gone a fair way, young Lei remarked, "They're queer people hereabouts. She refused to accept any money, but she wouldn't give me another bowl of that gruel. Made me feel a regular fool."

"Must be someone waiting for her in the fields," said Ho.

"Well, I call it rather mean," rejoined young Lei. "If you offer a fellow food, you should let him fill his belly."

"Haven't you filled your belly?" retorted his friend. "You ate at least ten pancakes!"

"Maybe. But I wanted a few more bowls of that gruel."

They delivered the four poles to White Goose Ridge by the end of the noon siesta, and found Old Lu. The local cadres were so loud in their thanks that soon the news had spread through all the village. Old Lu found the two young men a place to rest. "Take it easy now," he said. "When you fix up the poles tomorrow, mind you don't take up good land or spoil the crops. And at meal times just you eat what the peasants give you. Don't say you fancy this or that. If you do, the folk here will go out of their way to produce it, and that's no good. When we come to the country, we must eat and live like the peasants." He looked so hard at Lei after this admonition that the young man stuck his tongue out in dismay. He had meant to ask what that gruel had been made of, but now he did not dare. Old Lu's word was law.

The next day dawned overcast and unusually fresh, with a light wind from the east. They set to work to fix up the electric wires. Lei climbed up a pole beside a big tree at the entrance to the village, and was so busy installing the porcelain insulators that when Ho walked past with a village cadre Lei did not trouble to call out a greeting, and Ho did not notice him.

Just then, from below, he heard a woman's voice which sounded strangely familiar.

"That man who just walked past is one of those who ate our lunch yesterday," said the girl. "There was a fat fellow with him who really tucked in, munching so lustily it was all I could do not to laugh."

Young Lei recognized that voice, clear as a bell, and took care not to make a sound.

A man replied, "You were mean not to let him eat his fill."

"How was I to know they were coming to fix up the electric lines for our village?"

"What difference did it make where they were going? You should have fed them properly. They've come down from their factory to help the villages."

"There'd have been nothing left for you in that case! You'd done a hard morning's work, so I took the trouble to make some barley kernel gruel for you. I'd have felt bad if you couldn't even taste it."

"Trust you to have an answer for everything! . . ." The man broke off, and the girl began to chuckle.

Lei, hugging the telegraph pole, dared not look down but he felt two pairs of eyes boring into his back.

When the time came for lunch, the chief of the production brigade sent Ho and Lei off with a young farm hand, a poor peasant before land reform. He was a handsome fellow in his mid-twenties, with big, friendly eyes.

They followed him to his house in a small, clean courtyard. The gateway was newly built, and posted on the door was a wedding couplet:

*With men and women equal, work goes well,
Free marriages are happy marriages.*

The red paper had faded, but the writing still stood out clearly and could hardly date from earlier than January. A pomegranate tree in front of the gate was a mass of flame-red blooms. On the low coping round the tree stood two pots of garden balsam which country girls use to redden their finger-nails.

The young peasant led the way into the house, made Ho and Lei sit down at a well-scrubbed table and then went into the kitchen. He returned with a staggering pile of onion cakes, then brought in some big bowls of rice and two side dishes: scrambled eggs and lettuce with gelatin.

When he next left the room, Ho rounded on Lei. "You are the limit! You must have told him what you fancied."

"I never did!" protested Lei, his cheeks burning. "Not after what Old Lu told us. . . ."

Just then their host came back with a large pot of gruel—the same gruel that they had eaten the previous day. Neither young worker made any comment, but each was puzzled.

The three of them started their meal. The young peasant set a heaped bowl of rice before Lei, saying, "I know what you like."

"Anything goes for me," Lei made haste to assure him.

Ho shot him an accusing glance but Lei, very injured, refused to meet his eyes.

They started chatting. And their host, helping them to gruel, remarked, "This is barley kernel gruel. It's made from the green kernels of freshly reaped barley. We have a saying in these parts that mid-June is the time for three treats: fresh garlic, young lettuce and new barley. These kernels come from newly ripened barley and in the old days we wouldn't have dreamed of eating them. But we had a good crop this year, and we'd sown some in our private plot. So we'd like to treat you to this now you're here."

As the meal proceeded, both Ho and Lei had the feeling that the young peasant was no stranger.

They talked about the power plant and foreman Lu.

"Foreman Lu has eaten here too," their host informed them. "He's a fine man. Our villagers say that just by looking at the way Old Lu planned the power line and how to use as little arable land and materials as possible, they see the fine qualities of our brother workers."

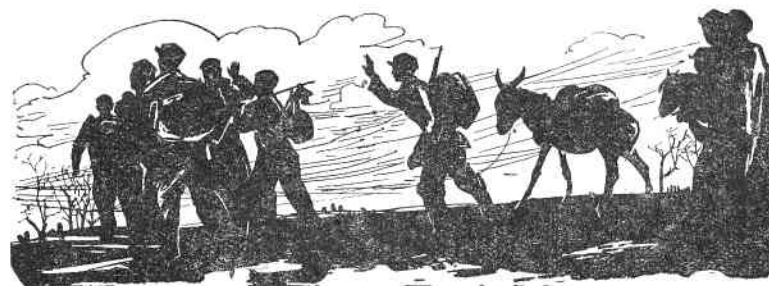
He broke off to urge young Lei to have more gruel. But the latter had already drunk three large bowls on top of the rice and side dishes. He was incapable of eating any more.

"I've had all I can manage, comrade," he protested. "Couldn't eat another thing. I'm not being polite."

A girl's laughter sounded from behind the bamboo curtain. "Who's not being polite?" she cried. "Don't give me that talk! Yesterday you said you could eat three bowls of rice and four bowls of gruel, but today you're not keeping your word."

Ho and Lei recognized the clear, bell-like voice they had heard earlier on the road. Flushing and grinning, they called back: "Today's different from yesterday!"

*Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustration by Huang Yun-bua*



LI CHI

The Wild Aster

In the winter of 1946 I was sent to take part in the land reform in a mountainous region fairly far from the unit where I worked. We had just about concluded our task when the Chiang Kai-shek brigands launched a large-scale attack against that region. News of the fighting reached me at the same time as a summons recalling me to my own unit.

Unfortunately, on my way back I fell ill and was delirious for nearly a week. By the time the villagers cured me with some traditional medicine, the enemy forces had cut off my way back. Luckily, I was able to attach myself to another unit passing that way. From that time onwards, I marched east and west with the comrades of this unit, spending nearly all of the most difficult days of the Liberation War with them.

Li Chi, a famous poet, was born in 1921. He is the author of the narrative poems *Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang* and *Life of Yang Kao*, and a lyrical anthology *Songs from the Yumen Oil Fields*. His recent book, *The Vow to the Sea*, is a narrative poem based on an ancient Japanese folk tale. He is now the assistant editor of the monthly *People's Literature*.

It was the Party committee of a sub-region that I had joined. There were no more than twenty of us altogether, counting the leading comrades and a few guards and soldiers. Other members of the Party committee had gone to work in different counties and districts or in places temporarily occupied by the enemy. I was assigned to the secretariat, and since there were so few of us my work included drafting notices or instructions for the secretary-general, making duplicate copies, mimeographing and writing the minutes of meeting. As the days went by, I came to know all my colleagues well.

Our sub-region was being attacked from three sides. In order to concentrate a superior force to destroy the enemy, several regiments hitherto stationed here were moved away. Only a few guerrilla detachments and hundreds of newly organized guerrilla units and armed underground groups remained in the locality. The county towns and chief means of communication were all in enemy hands. We shifted from place to place between the Kuomintang strong-points and blockade line, playing hide-and-seek with the enemy day and night. Wherever we stopped, the hand-worked wireless transmitter would start buzzing and each of us would busy himself with his own work. Although physically exhausted most of the time, we were cheerful and light-hearted.

The enemy had cut us off from newspapers since the fighting started. Needless to say, all of us were eager for news while the guerrillas and those working in areas under the Kuomintang kept writing to beg us for some information. Even the villagers kept tracking us down to ask, "Has our Liberation Army scored another big victory?" At such times, even a short bulletin was like a bugle call, giving inspiration and strength to those fighting on under difficult conditions.

"Can't we find a way to produce some kind of a paper?" I once asked the comrade marching by my side.

"A paper? The Party committee had a small lithographed paper but we hid the machine away when the war started. One of the men from the newspaper office was killed during the withdrawal, another two were sent to work with the guerrillas. A few days ago, though, the sub-regional Party committee decided that the paper must be brought out again as soon as possible. A wire has been sent to recall Ma Lan for the job."

"If Ma Lan comes back, things will be all right," a fellow in front of us turned round to say.

"Ma Lan," I muttered with some curiosity. But since it was a pitch-dark night and the path was muddy, instead of pursuing the matter I concentrated on keeping myself from slipping.

Later, I learned that Ma Lan had been a primary-school teacher who was assigned to work on the paper not long before the war started. I seemed to remember the secretary-general describing him as a "home-grown intellectual."

One afternoon a few days later, we were all working on a big *kang* in a villager's cave house when somebody outside shouted, "Ma Lan's back!" The men dropped their work and dashed out like a swarm of bees.

"He seems to be very popular, this Ma Lan," I said to myself, following the others outside.

A cheerful scene greeted my eyes in the next cave. Laughing and chattering, my comrades had gathered round a man who sat cross-legged on the *kang* like one of the local people. He was obviously Ma Lan. They were snatching at the tobacco he had brought back while he protected his pouch and protested feebly, "You've all had your handful, can't you leave me a bit for myself?"

When I was introduced he jumped off the *kang* to shake hands, presenting me with a fistful of tobacco at the same time. "Stow that away quickly, comrade!" he advised in heart-warming tones, speaking with a strong local accent. "This is the last of my tobacco. If you had come a few minutes later, there wouldn't have been any left."

That was a precious gift, a big handful of tobacco. But that day I was not too interested, for my eyes were intent on this newcomer.

Supper that evening was an unusually cheerful occasion. Holding their rice bowls, the others stood round Ma Lan, whose stone seat became the centre of attention.

After the meal, Ma Lan was tugged and pushed into our billet and urged to describe his meeting with Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

He told us that it was completely unexpected. He knew there were several rear organizations located there and the district Party committee often sent them food supplies. "One day," he said, "the

district Party secretary sent me with the porters. When we had delivered the grain, I told them to start back first while I waited a few minutes to get a receipt for the delivery. As soon as I got the receipt I turned to leave. I already had one foot across the threshold when I noticed a man in a grey uniform chatting to the old man milling grain on the threshing-floor.

"That's Chairman Mao," said the comrade beside me in an undertone. I had no idea what to do—should I walk out or retreat into the room? Meanwhile Chairman Mao asked the old man what was the main crop he cultivated? Was it millet or black beans? What grew best on his land? Was he afraid of the Chiang Kai-shek bandits? 'He's only a mortal, and so are we,' said the old peasant. 'Why should I be afraid of him?' Chairman Mao chuckled at that. 'You're quite right,' he told the old man. 'Why be afraid of him? He's only a piece of beancurd while we are the knife. He may be raging and roaring just now but if our troops and people in the liberated areas fight well, in three years, and I mean three years, we are sure to defeat him.' Yes, no fooling, that's exactly what Chairman Mao said. You should have seen him raise three fingers, comrades, when he said, 'three years.'"

"Is Ma Lan here?" someone asked outside the cave. It was a messenger from the sub-regional Party committee.

"What is it?"

"Head of the Propaganda Department is back. The secretary-general wants you. Wants to discuss work."

"Righto. Bring my horse, groom!" Imitating an actor on the traditional stage, he hopped off the *kang* as if vaulting on to a saddle.

"Finish your story before you go! What happened next?" someone pleaded.

"If you want to know what happened next, come to the next story-telling!" He made a face and rushed out like a gust of wind, closing the door with a bang.

For a long time, I was unable to sleep that night. Just before dawn, I slipped out for a breath of air. The light was still on in the next cave. Peeping in through the window, I saw Ma Lan busy with his mimeograph. Perhaps he was rushing out some urgent directive. I returned and went back to sleep.

Early the next morning, I was awakened by a clamour of voices: "Get up and read our paper, our paper's out!"

"Our paper!" I jumped out of bed, threw a coat over my shoulders and pushed my way through the group. Yes, there was a newspaper! Printed on smooth white paper, the size of a standard stencil, it was written in clear, not too elegant, characters. Red headlines made it particularly attractive.

"This is the result of Ma Lan's sleepless night."

"Look, two-colour printing too!"

"That Ma Lan's got brains. Sliced up two potatoes, rolled them in red ink and here you've got this dazzling effect."

"Now that we've got our own paper, let's get the messenger team to rush it out."

"Ha, you're a bit late in the day! Ma Lan lugged the whole lot to the messenger team at daybreak."

As I listened to their laughing comments, the reason Ma Lan had stayed up all night finally dawned on me.

At breakfast time, Ma Lan returned. He cracked jokes as cheerfully as the night before, only this morning his eyes were slightly bloodshot.

At dusk we had to shift camp once again. When we were assembling I saw Ma Lan, a bedding roll on his back, leading along a little donkey loaded with a few reams of paper and an old rusty mimeograph machine. The others chaffed him. "Ahoy there! Make way for the contingent of our newspaper office," they said.

"Don't you dare look down on our team of one man plus a donkey," he retorted. "Large or small, we're one of the units on this march."

We reached camp at midnight. Since we were only thirty *li* or so from the enemy and might have to march again before daybreak, I lost no time in duplicating an urgent notice for the secretary-general and then, without unpacking my bedding or getting undressed, I lay down and dozed off on the unheated *kang*. Later in the night, I woke up from the cold and saw Ma Lan still perched on his bedding roll carefully cutting a stencil by the dim light of a lamp burning vegetable oil. He was using his donkey's pack-saddle as a table.

"Go back to sleep," he told me when I sat up. "They say the enemy's retreated. We may be here a couple of days."

"It's too cold to sleep," I replied. "Are you cutting more stencils for the paper, Comrade Ma Lan?"

"Yes, running a paper single-handed is no joke."

"Can't you get the news copied down earlier? Then you could at least get a few minutes' sleep." I knew he had had no rest at all the last two days.

"You don't understand. This paper of ours was started on the spur of the moment, so we're short of all sorts of equipment. But the Party committee wants us to get the news out as quickly as possible. That's why as soon as I arrived the night before last I raked around until I got the stencils, mimeograph and paper. I'm supposed to use most of the space for news items but I have no wireless. Luckily the secretary-general thought of a way. I'm picking up all the news I can from the Party committee's transmitter when they're not using it. I write up the news as soon as it comes in and send it up for final clearance immediately. I've only just started on this stencil."

"But how can you carry on like this for more than a few days?"

"Oh, that'll be no problem. As soon as the paper comes out I perk up as if I'd had a good smoke. The fact that we can bring out a paper at all at a time like this is quite a triumph, isn't it?"

I was struck by his confidence and optimism.

The months that followed were hard ones. The enemy had thrown such a large force into this area that the front lines reached practically everywhere and there was scarcely ever a lull in the fighting. For more than a month we hardly ever slept properly, snatching only a few winks whenever we could. We hung on to our guns even when we were drafting notices or writing. Several times we were surrounded by the enemy but, cadres, guards and messengers, we fought our way out together.

Through thick and thin our paper continued to come out. On every march, Ma Lan was conspicuous in our small contingent with his "one man plus a donkey" press. Shouldering a gun, his baggage roll on his back, he had a bulging pouch at his waist and was in the habit of wearing the little tin basin we used for food and rice over his grease-stained army cap. He was a real sight with one hand on the reins and the other on his gun. No one could help smiling at the figure he cut.

When the situation was not too dangerous, our march was usually punctuated with talk and laughter and at such times Ma Lan proved indispensable. He had an endless fund of anecdotes and jokes, and he was a good singer always ready to oblige with a song.

Once we reached camp he had plenty to keep him busy. As soon as he had unsaddled the donkey and fed it, he would perch on his baggage roll and begin work on his newspaper, using the donkey's pack-saddle as his table. Since the bad communications made it difficult to get contributions from correspondents, besides writing up the material cleared from reports sent in to the regional Party committee, he had to make time to go out and gather news himself.

I admired his skill in making friends with the local people. Whether it was a district or township cadre, an old woman or old man, he was able to win over perfect strangers in less time than it takes to smoke a pipe. He drew young people and children like a magnet. Wherever he went he was always surrounded by them, and they were only too glad to deliver a message, work the mimeograph or water his donkey for him.

One night one of our people came in from an enemy-occupied area to report on the work there. He brought a large package of letters for the paper but had a hard time finding Ma Lan, who was finally discovered mimeographing the paper in the thatched shed used as a stable.



"What a big newspaper office!" said the man, bending his head to enter.

"Report!" Ma Lan raised a hand smeared with ink to salute. "Ma Lan, stockman, printer, dispatcher, correspondent, wireless operator, decipherer, copyist, editor and city reporter of the newspaper, now reports to you on his work!"

"Ha, in the few months since I last saw you you've accumulated such a pile of official titles."

"No less than nine altogether."

He was overjoyed at sight of the bundle of letters, thinking they were all articles from his correspondents. But they turned out to be mostly letters from guerrilla fighters and villagers in enemy-occupied areas asking him for news of victory or begging him to send them copies of the paper, only a few were stories from correspondents. Most of the letters were full of praise for Ma Lan's little mimeographed paper, telling him that this news-sheet had given them tremendous encouragement, strengthening their confidence in overthrowing Chiang Kai-shek and building a new China. The man who had brought the letters told Ma Lan that the paper was more welcome to the soldiers than a hand-grenade and everyone was clamouring for it.

Ma Lan was the picture of joy as he listened to these words. As he stacked his newly printed sheets together, his face was wreathed in smiles. "So it seems this paper of ours, edited and printed in a stable, has had some effect after all. What a pity there's a limit to what one stencil can print. . . ."

"Why don't you cut double the amount of stencils then?"

"That's easier said than done. I've not too many left. But never mind about that. Since you've just returned from the enemy-occupied area, hand over your trophies and let's enjoy them."

"What trophies?"

"Come on, don't pretend to be so dense. Cigarettes!"

"I've only a few left." The man had just produced a pack from his pocket when Ma Lan stretched out a hand and snatched it away. He was outside in a flash, shouting, "I've got cigarettes! Come on, everyone, a puff per person! The late-comers will get none."

All smokers have good ears and before long they were chasing each other round the yard like children playing tag.

Surprised by the sudden clamour, the secretary-general rushed out to see what had happened. When he saw Ma Lan being chased by a whole pack of people he chuckled. "They say, 'Hills and rivers will change but not a man's nature.' I'm afraid this old saying does not apply to you, Ma Lan. In ordinary times you're such a quiet fellow, it's hard to get a word out of you. But as soon as the fighting began, you became a real loudspeaker."

"You need a loudspeaker to run a paper, you know."

However, I was not the only one to notice that Ma Lan was fast losing weight in those difficult days. Someone told him teasingly, "Our newspaper office depends on a pair of lean donkeys." His retort was, "Lean donkeys are tough. The leaner they are the more energy they've got. Besides, being thin, they have less weight to carry during the march." This was true too in a way, for though he kept on losing weight he was energetic enough. The more tense the battles, and the more work there was to do, the more energetic he became. Once, after we had been on the march for two days and one night, we stopped in a fairly large village. Since there were plenty of rooms at our disposal, we assigned a separate cave to the newspaper office. Ma Lan sang as he worked and his songs went on till way after midnight.

We stayed there for over a fortnight. It was the first time since the war started that we stayed so long in one place. Since radio messages were received and dispatched at fixed times, Ma Lan was able to pick up news fairly regularly at about seven or eight in the evening. Usually we were so anxious to learn it that we would gather outside the station and ask one of the wireless operators to bring out the bulletin Ma Lan had written before he had completely finished. We would pass the pages round and, while we were at it, check the place names and correct wrong characters.

One day when Ma Lan was working, I went as usual to the station. But the wireless operators were away at a Party meeting, so I slipped in myself to see what news had come in. The big cave was dark but for the dim light on the table beside which sat Ma Lan, ear-phones over his head. Not wanting to distract him,

I approached on tiptoe. To my surprise, Ma Lan was weeping. While his hand moved busily, jotting down the news items, tears were coursing down his face.

Was the news so bad? Or had something happened to distress him? I could neither ask him nor go away just like that. I put one hand out to take up the sheets he had copied, but immediately thought better of it. I was in a predicament. Then, seeing that he was not aware of my presence, I quietly withdrew.

A few minutes later, the secretary-general sent for me. He told me that word had come that afternoon of the death of Ma Lan's wife, who was lying in when the enemy captured her. Both mother and child had been murdered. The secretary-general urged me to comfort Ma Lan as best I could and to help him with the paper for the next few weeks. That evening I moved my bedding into his cave. In my presence, he stopped weeping. I did what I could to help him and by midnight we had mimeographed all the sheets for the next day. We washed the ink from our hands, sent the rolls of addressed newspapers to the messenger team and came back to bed.

It was of course impossible for him to fall asleep; for me too sleep was out of the question. I wanted to make some small talk to distract him from his sorrows and cursed my own stupidity for being unable to find an appropriate subject. However, I realized that a man like Ma Lan did not need the comfort of others, he had strength enough to bear up under this fearful blow.

The next day he shed no more tears although he seemed much quieter than usual. All his comrades grieved for him and searched for ways to comfort him.

Work went on as usual and the paper continued to come out. In a few days, Ma Lan was practically his own normal cheerful self again except that he smoked more and more. Before this, to economize on tobacco, he had rolled his cigarettes small and short, but now he made them long and thick. At sight of him pulling desperately at his home-made cigarettes, thick as an index finger, and coughing painfully after each drag, I worried over his health. One evening when we had put the paper to bed and had turned in ourselves, I told him of my anxiety.

"Don't you worry. You still don't fully know me," he said, turning round to face me. "I never knew my father and it was

my mother who gave me the name Ma Lan.* Our neighbours used to say, 'He's a strapping big boy, why name him after a flower like a little girl?' My mother said it was because my father had never come back after he joined the Red Army and the two of us were left to fend for ourselves like the wild asters by the roadside, exposed to wind and rain and to trampling feet. When I grew up and joined the revolution, my comrades also teased me about my name but I remembered what my mother had said and thought of the aster growing by the wayside, always so fresh and green no matter how many horses or men passed that way. The little blue flowers in its green leaves are pretty too. I thought it wasn't bad to be like the wild aster and stopped caring whether it was a suitable name for a man.

"What we're up against now really doesn't worry me. During the bitterest days of the War of Resistance Against Japan, I was at the front and things were much harder than this. We wore thin cotton uniforms in the depth of winter and often ran short of water in the hottest part of the summer. We won victories in battle in spite of it all. Yes, we managed to pull through those long difficult days. Now we have two good square meals of millet a day. Can't call this hard, can you? When you're working for the revolution, you've got to be fearless and forge ahead at all costs. Revolution means overcoming difficulties. Better not be a Communist if it's comforts you're after.

"But to tell the truth, this recent blow hit me hard. You see it came out of the blue. It's queer the way there seems to be a strong chain binding a man's wife and baby to his heart—though I hadn't even set eyes on the child. What happened to them was like a knife in my heart, I just couldn't keep back the tears. Of course, as time goes by, the pain is dulled a bit. After all, just try to count how many of our people have been killed by Chiang Kai-shek alone. This is a revolution, each step is soaked in blood. . . ."

After this talk I understood Ma Lan better.

Just before we dropped off to sleep, the wireless operator Little Li came dashing in with the news that our army had liberated Shihchiachuang. He had taken down in brief the exact

* Ma Lan means wild aster.

time and number of enemy troops wiped out. It was exhilarating news! Ma Lan went over Little Li's figures carefully, then throwing a coat over his shoulders went in search of the secretary-general. In a few minutes, I heard him out in the yard shouting:

"Shihchiachuang's been liberated! Shihchiachuang has been liberated!"

The whole compound was astir. Ma Lan was so overjoyed that he set fire to an old broom and holding it all ablaze over his head ran round the yard shouting excitedly. The villagers were roused out of bed by this news. In a few minutes every single cave was lit and the young people brought out the gongs and drums of the *yangko* team, turning the night into one of wild rejoicing.

Having roused everybody, Ma Lan himself left the cheering crowd and pulled me into the cave with him to discuss an extra for our paper. He said he had the secretary-general's approval for putting out an extra that very night. But Little Li's news was not taken down word for word, so Ma Lan was to ride out fifteen *li* to the military headquarters of the sub-region to check the figures and get a really accurate report. Having asked me to get everything ready, he set off in the dark.

He returned when the cast was turning a pearly grey. Not even bothering to wipe the frost that had gathered on his eyebrows and beard, he shouted as soon as he stepped into the cave, "Little Li's news in brief was absolutely correct. Here, let's check it again. 'Our Liberation Army of the Shansi-Hopei-Chahar region liberated Shihchiachuang, an important military town in north China, on November 12. A total of twenty-four thousand enemy troops was put out of action. This is the first important city in north China to be liberated by our army. A detailed investigation is now being made of the outcome of the battle.'"

Less than two hours later when our unit assembled to move on again, Ma Lan appeared with his gun and baggage roll, leading the lean donkey. Once again his "one man plus a donkey" office moved through our contingent, to the accompaniment of jokes and laughter. Meanwhile, the extra, printed on glossy red paper, had been distributed by our messengers, its good news cheering thousands of hearts in the enemy-occupied towns and villages.

A few days after the liberation of Shihchiachuang I received a wire recalling me to my own unit. Thus I parted company with the comrades with whom I had shared thick and thin in the most unforgettable days of the war. I also said goodbye to Ma Lan.

Later, though I corresponded on and off with various of them in the months that followed, we had no chance to meet again. In September 1949, not long after I was transferred to work in Peking, I received this letter from an old friend in that unit:

". . . I have some bad news for you. Comrade Ma Lan of the newspaper office has given his life for the revolution. He fell ill when our army was sweeping along in victory and wiping out the enemy. It was the same kind of high fever and delirium that you had that year you were with us. While he was being taken to the hospital, they ran into some Kuomintang troops and Comrade Ma Lan was killed while still in a coma. . . ."

Who would have imagined that such a fine comrade, after coming through all those bitter days and hardships, should be killed when victory was already within grasp. . . .

*Translated by Tang Sheng
Illustrations by Shu Lan*



KAO YING

In the Same Boat

Old Pu shoved off, rested his bamboo pole and took up his oar. Just as he began plying it strenuously, two people rushed to the shore and ran alongside on the stone embankment.

"Wait for us, wait for us. We want to get on board!" the man in the lead shouted. He was gasping for breath. The woman behind him held an infant in her bosom.

The old boatman glared. "Devil take you," he muttered in a gravelly voice. "You couldn't have come earlier—or later. No, you had to pick this minute to come howling after me like demons."

He didn't want any more passengers. Although he was carrying only three, the boat, loaded with bags of salt for the commune downstream, was already lying deep in the water.

"Let's go, let's go. People have to catch boats, boats don't have to wait for people," a peasant in his forties urged fretfully. A cross-eyed fellow, he sat on his bag of rice.

"Whether he takes them on or not is none of your business," a withered-mouthed old woman seated opposite asserted shrilly.

Kao Ying, born in 1929, is a poet and short-story writer. His story *Dajee and Her Father* which was made into a film appeared in *Chinese Literature* No. 11, 1959.

A whiskered peasant who sat with his back against the salt bags paid no attention to any of this. He meditatively smoked his pipe.

The man running along the bank, seeing that the boat showed no signs of stopping, pleaded: "Do us a favour, old grandpa. The baby's sick. We just had him to the doctor. We're in a hurry to get him home and give him his medicine."

Pu was a stubborn old fellow. If his boat was fully loaded he wouldn't stop for the Old Lord of the Sky himself. But he also was very kind-hearted. When he heard that the baby was ill, he picked up his pole and punted the boat back to the shore. There he lay down a gangplank.

The woman was about thirty-five, pale, thin-faced. Her forehead had acquired furrows too early. There was a faintly worried expression in her large eyes. A white kerchief covered her hair, which she wore with a large bun in the back. Her homespun blue clothes were faded. Wrapped in a worn apron was an infant of less than a year old.

The man was at least forty. On his head was a blue cap. He was dressed in a tunic of coarse white cloth. Short, with small eyes, he was clean-shaven. You could see at a glance that he was an honest person who would astound no one with either his appearance or speech. As they mounted the gangplank, he carried two packets of herb medicine in one hand and supported the woman's arm with the other. "Slowly, slowly," he cautioned.

They evidently were husband and wife.

"Where to?" the old boatman asked them.

"Pointy Hill Hamlet. We can get off at Rocky Cove," the man replied as he looked around for a seat. The small boat was very crowded. The cross-eyed peasant had his legs stretched out, taking up the only available bit of deck space. "If you don't mind, brother," said the man, "we'd like to sit down."

"Can't you sit on those salt bags?" demanded Cross Eyes. He didn't draw up his legs.

The withered-mouthed old lady picked up a basket of eggs. "Come," she said to the woman. "Sit here by me."

As the woman started towards her, she accidentally stepped on a duck's foot. The bird uttered loud indignant squawks. "Why don't you look where you're going?" Cross Eyes exclaimed.

"Sorry, sorry," the woman apologized in confusion.

"If you've killed that duck, you'll have to pay for it," Cross Eyes fumed.

The old boatman gave him a level glance. "What are you yelling about? People in the same boat have to make allowances." He pulled in the gangplank, then removed his shirt. His bronzed torso glistened in the sunlight. He leaned on the pole with iron-sinewed arms and the boat left the bank.

"Travelling on the water is not like on land. Everyone sit quiet and don't rock the boat," the old boatman rasped hoarsely. He wielded his sculling oar.

They were sailing with the current, and the boat sped like an arrow down the River of Golden Sands. Yellow waves leaped and rolled beneath the sun. The high red cliffs on either side, virtually bare of trees or grass, seemed to have been moulded of dark bronze. The paddy-fields close to the shore had just been harvested, and you could see the rows of brown stubble. At the foot of the cliffs only stripped stalks remained in the corn fields.

Although it was past noon, the weather still was scorchingly hot. Nobody had any energy. Too weary to speak, the passengers dozed, smoked, or occupied themselves with their own thoughts. When his boat was in motion, Old Pu was never one to chat. He concentrated on his rowing, pausing from time to time for a swig from a small crockery jug to revive his flagging strength.

"Wa . . . wa . . ." The baby began to cry.

Hastily the woman hugged and rocked it, and crooned: "Ah . . . ah . . . precious, don't cry. . . ."

"Does he still have fever?" the man in the blue cap asked.

The woman gazed anxiously at the infant's face.

Cross Eyes, who had been dozing, now looked at them sleepily and said in an irritated voice: "Quiet that baby down. Its bawling gets on people's nerves."

"I can't," the woman said unhappily. "Last night he cried until dawn."

"What rotten luck," Cross Eyes grumbled. "He howls the moment we set sail. That's a bad sign."

"Have you reserved this boat for yourself?" the man demanded, his face hardening.

"I've paid my fare. If I've got anything to say, I'll say it," Cross Eyes retorted belligerently.

"What's eating you, anyway?" the man asked angrily.

"You're the one who's making trouble. You've got everyone in the whole boat upset!"

Ordinarily, Old Pu hated to have babies crying on his boat. But Cross Eyes' insolence annoyed him. Without stopping his sculling, he said: "That's enough out of both of you. Strangers on land should be brothers on board."

The old woman also offered some advice. "Forget it. Leave a man a little room to back down, and the next day you'll still be able to talk things over." Addressing herself to Cross Eyes, whom she knew, she said: "Must you always act like an old rooster? Once you start something, you never let up."

Cross Eyes didn't reply. He was as puffed up as a toad with rage.

"Wa . . . wa . . ." the baby wailed.

The withered-mouthed old lady turned to the mother and said softly: "Such a bright-looking little chap. What's wrong with him?"

"The doctor says it's his stomach," the woman sighed. "It's not serious, but he cries all the time. I feel like a cat's clawing at my heart."

"That's not hard to cure," the whiskered peasant alleged pontifically. "You just get someone to write these words on a sheet of paper: *My little baby cries at night, nothing seems to set him right; please read aloud and pity take, and babe will sleep till dawn does break.* Paste the words up by the roadside. Many people will read them and naturally the baby will stop crying."

"A fat lot of good that will do," the old woman snorted. "The thing to do is find a good doctor. If the child drinks the right medicine he'll get well soon enough." To the man in the blue cap she said: "There's a Doctor Liu in my village who specializes in children. As the head of the family you ought to take the baby to him."

Startled, the man quickly corrected her: "He's not my child, old mama."

"What! Aren't you the baby's father?"

"No, no," the child's mother shook her head. "He's Brother Tien, leader of our production team."

The old lady slapped her knees and chuckled: "I've got eyes but no pupils. What a boner!"

Everyone laughed heartily except Cross Eyes. He was still sulking.

The old boatman also laughed. "Actually, you weren't so wrong at that. The production team leader is the team's head of the family!"

As if not used to all this laughter, the baby cried louder than ever. The waves of the River of Golden Sands rocked the boat gently, like a cradle.

After she finally managed to quiet the infant down, the mother explained to the old lady: "Early this morning, Sister Tien told me her husband was going into town on business, and said I should go along with the baby to see the doctor. I seldom leave home, and don't know my way around town. But Brother Tien helped me with everything—seeing the doctor, buying the medicine. . . ."

"He's a fine team leader!" the old lady commended, crinkling her eyes at him in a smile.

The praise made Brother Tien uncomfortable. He didn't seem to know what to do with his hands and feet. Propping his chin with his palms, he lowered his eyes.

"Brother Tien is a warm-hearted man. Not only is he good with crops, he's always thinking of others. If some members of our commune have trouble or illness in the family, he's more worried than they are. He keeps asking about them all day long, and brews the medicine for them himself," the woman continued.

"Must you talk about these things, Sister Ku?" Tien raised his head and asked awkwardly. "I'm only doing my duty."

But once Sister Ku started, she couldn't stop. It was as if she just had to get everything out. "I'm a widow with five kids," she said with a sigh. "Brother Tien has been especially good to me. My fate is bad. This year, at the beginning of spring, the baby's father died."

"Ai, it's hard to lose a husband when you're in the prime of life," the old lady said sympathetically. "What did he die of?"

"He caught the chills. The doctor could do nothing to save him," said Brother Tien, shaking his head. "A very honest fel-

low, one of our own poor peasant brothers, a real fighter during the land reform."

Tears came to the widow's eyes, and she lowered her head. After a moment's silence she said: "He worked like two men in the fields. No one could beat him at ploughing and harrowing. He worked very hard. Even though we had a lot of kids, we always had more than enough to eat. . . . But then he died. The children were all small, and they all had to be fed. I found it hard to make ends meet." She gazed at Brother Tien and said with a sigh: "If I'd taken a tumble like this in the old society, I'd have had to sell my children and beg for a living. But today, the production team is my support. Brother Tien is always thinking of us. He smoothed our road and saw to it that I was given the kind of job I could handle. I get my work-points and I get my grain. Since I'm busy all day with my work in the fields and feeding the kids, I've got no time to tend my private plot. But Sister Tien and some of the other neighbours' wives have planted it for me with vegetables."

Brother Tien raised his blue cap and scratched his head in embarrassment. "Ah, you've got it wrong. My family hasn't done anything special. It's just that everybody wants to help. And the Party helps, too. Everyone's getting along nicely. How can they stand aside when you're having a hard time?"

"As the old saying goes: *If your family includes more than five, you break your back to keep them alive,*" drawled Whiskers, blowing out a puff of smoke. "Even a strong man has trouble raising five kids, to say nothing of a widow woman."

Taking Sister Ku's hand, the withered-mouthed old lady stroked it gently. "Don't be too sad that your man has passed away. A broad view is more important than a big house. When you take a tumble, get up and brush the dust off. Everyone will just eat one mouthful less. They won't let you and your kids go hungry."

"Yes, I tumbled, but the people raised me to my feet." The widow's brows relaxed, and her wholesome face cleared. "My whole family has enough to eat and enough to wear. And my kids are still with me."

The old boatman, plying the oar with both hands, said nothing. But the others' words, especially the words of Sister Ku, beat

against his heart like a hammer, evoking bitter memories. As he gazed at the rolling waters, he seemed to see his wife and children before him once again. . . .

It happened more than thirty years ago. Although the soil on the banks of the River of Golden Sands was poor, and he and his wife tilled only a few *mou* of mountain slope land, by diligent application they were able to scrape along. Then came the year of the big drought, and the corn sprouts withered in the fields. Every day the ward chief pressed him for taxes. He had no choice but to leave his wife and cross the river into Yunnan to look for work. For three months he carried heavy loads as a porter and at last managed to earn a few measures of grain. He hurried home the same night he got his pay. In the moonless darkness, he called several times at his door, but no one answered. Pushing it open, he struck a match. The room was veiled with spider strands. His heart leaped to his throat. He ran to a neighbour's house. Only a lone old woman was there to tell him: His wife had died of illness two months before. Then his little boy died too. His daughter, his sole remaining child, was taken away by a passing merchant.

Pu felt as if his chest was being slashed by a knife. Unable to weep, he stood alone in the bone-chilling cold of the dark room. The following morning, neighbours found him lying unconscious on his dilapidated kitchen stove. . . . After that, he wandered up and down the waterways. He no longer had a home. When the country was liberated, he joined a river transport station and became a famous boatman. . . .

Old Pu sighed. He raised his jug and took a long swallow. Pushing his memories aside, he stared at the widow and her child. This generation wouldn't have to endure what he had suffered. His heart warmed. Although there were many things he wanted to say, he didn't know where to start.

"A single strand fears every puff of wind, but a rope will never break," he could only exclaim in an emotion-charged voice.

"That's true," the old woman asserted. "We learned that when we joined the commune. Once you're in, you're part of a collective. Not only do you raise better crops, but you don't have to worry too much about hardships and troubles. Any ridge in the field can break; what family doesn't have its calamities? But

if everyone helps out when things go wrong, you can get along even if the sky collapses."

"Well put!" Brother Tien sat up straight. "That's called getting prosperous together. On the one hand we pay each according to his work, on the other we look after any brothers and sisters who are in difficulty."

Cross Eyes hadn't spoken for a long time. But he wasn't dozing. He was quite disgruntled over the rebuke Tien had given him for shouting at the widow when she accidentally stepped on his duck's foot. Now he thought his chance had come to vent his spleen. He didn't like what the others had been talking about, and he couldn't refrain from saying what was really on his mind.

"It's all very well to look after people," he remarked, twisting his mouth and blinking his eyes, "only that brings benefits to some and losses to others."

"What kind of losses?" asked the old lady, arching her fine brows.

"What kind?" Cross Eyes waved his thumb in the air. "Raising crops takes hard work. Raising kids is your own headache. If you make some hard-working man help other people raise a brood of brats, how in hell do you suppose he feels?"

"How do you think things ought to be done?" Brother Tien asked stiffly.

"If you ask me, each family ought to be responsible for a definite piece of land and have a fixed quota. Everything they produce over that should belong to them; they'd collect the rewards of their labour. In that way, families with good workers wouldn't suffer."

Everyone stared at Cross Eyes except Sister Ku, who silently lowered her head.

"Of course you'll be a good producer all your life. You'll never have to look to anybody for help," Brother Tien flung at him.

"I'm a damn good producer!" The other's eyes bulged and his neck swelled. "I'm not boasting, but after land reform just on those few *mou* of mine I earned enough to buy an ox and a horse, and my granary was always full. Now that everyone's all teamed up, some people have jumped out of the chaff bag

into a sack of fresh rice, while others have fallen from the rice sack right into the coarse old chaff."

"You actually have the nerve to say a thing like that?" the old boatman demanded harshly.

"I've got a mouth. I say what I please," Cross Eyes countered.

The old lady grimaced. "And I suppose you're one of those who's fallen out of the rice sack into the chaff?" she queried shrilly. She pointed at the bag Cross Eyes was sitting on. "What's that? A sack of rice. And what are you holding? A big fat duck. You're bringing them as gifts to your mother-in-law, a fine prosperous son-in-law. The commune hasn't done badly by you at all. Put your hand on your heart and think. How much grain did your family get as its share this year, how much cash? Where did you suffer any loss?"

Cross Eyes was unprepared for this thorough exposure. He didn't know what to say. Pressing her advantage the old lady calmly proceeded to skin him alive.

"Others may not know you, but I've seen you at your shabbiest. I remember the year the ward chief wanted to drag you off as an army conscript because you couldn't pay him his bribe. You ran to hide in your mother-in-law's house. What gifts did you bring her then? All you had in your hands that day was your backside!"

Cross Eyes' face crimsoned and the veins stood out on his head, but he wouldn't concede defeat. Frothing at the mouth, he sputtered: "That's right, I had it bad, I was poorly off, but I've never held out my hand to beg from anyone. Whatever I eat, I've earned."

"If it weren't for liberation, you'd be eating the wind," the old lady said mockingly.

Whiskers rapped the ashes out of his pipe. "Don't quarrel," he advised. "Let's show a little restraint. Whatever it is, everything must be done according to the rules."

Bloated with rage, Cross Eyes cocked his head to one side, as if they all owed him a debt. The old lady airily ignored him. Brother Tien, himself as honest as the day was long, was unable to think of the right words to correct Cross Eyes' perverted reasoning. He was upset and disgusted. With lowered gaze, Sister

Ku silently patted her baby. Cross Eyes' viciousness had rather frightened her.

The only sound was the swishing of the oar.

Old Pu plied the oar unhurriedly, steadily, as if the argument had nothing to do with him. As a matter of fact, he was thoroughly nauseated. He wanted to curse Cross Eyes, but he couldn't find words strong enough.

Ahead, the river flowed between two high cliffs that looked as though they had been cleft by the stroke of a giant knife. Between them rushed the tumbling waves, roaring like thunder. The sound could be heard from afar. These were the notorious rapids. Whoever sailed through there, came out in a cold sweat.

"We'll be shooting the rapids soon," Whiskers said in a sibilant whisper.

Cross Eyes gazed tensely forward, his hands clutching the gunwales.

Old Pu laughed coldly to himself. With a few strokes of the oar, he propelled the boat into a cove where the water was still. The little craft bobbed slowly.

"I'm not rowing any further," he announced. Resting his oar, he sat down in the stern.

Mystified, the others stared at him.

He pointed at Cross Eyes. "You can take the boat through."

Cross Eyes blinked. "But I don't know how to row."

"Aren't you the fellow who can do everything? Who never has to rely on anybody?"

"On the water . . . I haven't had much experience."

"I can't be bothered about that. If you can't row, just step ashore."

"I paid good money for my fare!"

"Money? What use is that?" the old boatman smiled icily. "A thousand in gold can't buy a drop of affection. You don't need others, and others don't want anything from you. You go your way, we'll shoot the rapids ourselves."

"You shove me off half-way, without caring a hang what happens to me. Where under the heavens did you get that kind of morality?" Cross Eyes queried frantically.

"You go along with everybody half-way, but after you cross the stream you want to smash the bridge. Although you've

grown fat in the collective, now you want to forget your origin. Where under the heavens did you get that kind of morality?"

By then, the others had all caught on. The boat became animated.

"Right. You go your own way. Then you can be sure no one will take advantage of you," Brother Tien said with a straight face.

The old lady gave a hoot of laughter. "Otherwise you might fall out of the rice sack into the chaff!"

"Those cliffs are so steep. How can I cross them?" Cross Eyes was sweating now.

"Ah, so you can get into trouble and need people's help too?" the old man chuckled.

Sister Ku pressed her lips together to hold back a smile.

Cross Eyes was an old exponent of "a smart man knows when to retreat." He thought an apologetic smile would be enough to let him sidle out of it. But then he saw the old boatman's sharp eyes watching him fixedly. For a moment, he was at a loss for words. He looked very embarrassed.

Again it was Whiskers who came forward as the conciliator. "Forget it," he said. "Let's all be more forgiving. There's no need to take everything so seriously."

Cross Eyes visibly weakened. "Old grandpa," he said with a laugh, "you wouldn't really have had the heart to play a trick like that on me?"

Old Pu's stern expression didn't change. "I wasn't playing any tricks. I wanted to teach you a lesson. Think it over when you're lying on your bed tonight: Are your twisted ideas right or wrong? Can you really get anywhere going it alone?"

He picked up his oar and addressed them all: "If we're going to shoot the rapids, I'll need a helper."

Brother Tien stood up. "I can row a little."

The old boatman handed him another oar. Brother Tien spat on his hands, gripped the oar and took a position on the prow. "Let's go," he said with a smile. "Through the rapids!"

But Old Pu had another idea. Picking up a small net, he smiled at Tien and said: "Not so fast. Make a circuit or two around this back-water and watch me catch some fish. This place is full of them."

"*Aiya*, the sun will soon be setting. Is this any time to fish?" Whiskers protested.

"I need something to go with my wine tonight," laughed the old man.

It was nothing unusual for a boatman to fish during the journey, so the passengers said no more.

Standing in the stern, Old Pu cast his small net. After a few minutes he slowly hauled it in. Sure enough, there were two squirming bream in the bubbling net. One was a good two catties, the other a trifle less.

Everyone exclaimed in admiration.

"They're nice and fat!"

"He sure is lucky!"

Cross Eyes said enviously: "They'll fetch a good price, those two!"

Threading a grass rope through their gills, the old boatman dangled the fish before Cross Eyes. "Want to buy 'em?"

The other blinked and grinned. "How much?"

Old Pu laughed merrily and, in his gravelly voice, said: "You couldn't buy these fish if you gave me gold!" He stepped over to Sister Ku and presented her with his catch. "Take these and cook 'em up for the kids."

The mother gazed at him hesitantly. "But —"

"Take 'em!" he ordered. "You don't get fish often in your Pointy Hill Hamlet. I have only to stretch out my hand."

"Take them," the old lady urged. "The gift is small but the feeling's deep."

"She's right," laughed Brother Tien. "This is one gift you must accept."

Slowly, Sister Ku took the fish. She nodded, smiling: "Thank you, old grandpa."

"Don't mention it," said the old man with a wave of the hand as he returned to the stern. "People in the same boat are like one family. *Any burdens we all bear, any pleasures we all share!*" He picked up his oar. To Brother Tien on the prow he yelled hoarsely: "Hey! Let's go!"

Blades dug vigorously fore and aft, bringing a host of white bubbles to the surface of the water and creating swirling eddies.

The boat flew towards the entrance to the rapids.

Sister Ku's face was suffused with a rosy glow, and her large eyes sparkled. Softly she rocked her sleeping babe. From time to time she rubbed her cheek against the infant's velvety skin.

Smiling, the withered-mouthed old lady gazed at the mother and child. She leaned down, took a few eggs from her basket and put them stealthily in Sister Ku's cloth bag.

Whiskers continued smoking his pipe, emitting large puffs of smoke. One puff choked him, and he coughed a couple of times, but he went on smoking. He was deep in thought.

Only Cross Eyes was unhappy. He sat dizzy and confused, as if someone had clouted him on the head. Today was his unlucky day, he thought. That old woman had certainly shown him up. He had lost face completely, and had been sorely aggravated. He longed for a chance to get off some remark that would restore a bit of his self-esteem. But reason was on the side of the others. He seemed to be much lower than they. What could he say? All he could do was sit on his rice sack, gazing stupidly at his toes.

The boat raced with the waves.

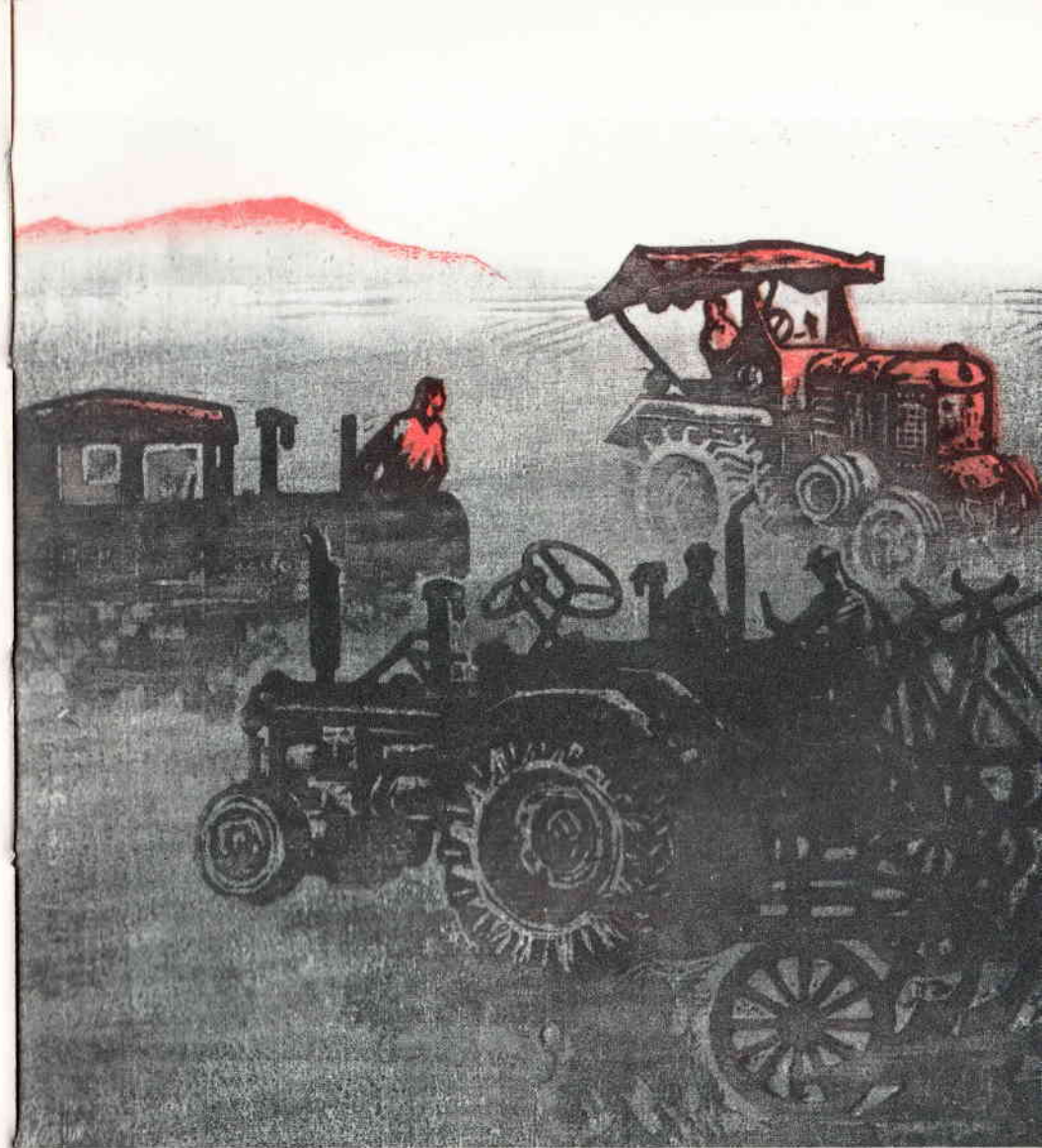
A rolling billow broke over the prow, and hissing froth washed the deck. The small rocking craft sped through the dangerous rapids towards the broad placid waters on the other side.

The River of Golden Sands shimmered in the rays of the setting sun.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Drawing by Huang Chung-chun

The Day Begins (coloured woodcut) ▶
by Wu Chun-fa

Wu Chun-fa was born in the family of a poor farm hand in Kiangsi Province in 1927. He was apprenticed to a carpenter when he was a boy and started wood-engraving in 1942. In recent years he has been trying to apply the traditional methods of Chinese coloured woodblock printing to contemporary themes. At present he is the director of the Kiangsu Province Art Gallery. *The Day Begins* is one of his more recent works.



Remembering Dark Africa

DRUMS AT NIGHT

In Northern Guinea, at Kankan, in the heart of Africa,
I heard night drums beating which kept me spellbound.

Night advances step by step
into the heart of Africa;
red flowers turn purple
green leaves become dark
human shadows disappear
from the mirror; darkness
becomes master of all.

Night advances step by step
into the heart of Africa;
clamour of the day ebbs
like the tide, until we

Han Pei-ping was born in Yangchow, Kiangsu Province, in 1914. He started writing poetry in 1935. Collections of his poems have been published under the titles of *The Grass South of the Yangtze*, and *The People's Song*. A long poem *Eagle's Mate* and a novel *High Mountain and Deep Ravine* have also seen print. He has recently returned from a journey to Africa and has written a collection of poems entitled *Remembering Dark Africa*.

scarcely hear it, only
its whisper remaining.

Night advances step by step
into the heart of Africa;
silently I crossed a clearing
seeing a sky filled with stars
fireflies ever chasing each other
over the ground below.

Suddenly came drum throbs, out
of the depths of the forest;
first notes like a soliloquy, or
a man complaining, crying.

Then beating quickened, with
a sound like the call of men
lifting their arms; like the
shooting of thousands of arrows;
like the swift movement
of a weaving shuttle.

Sounds that are like a storm,
like a torrent rushing down,
like the prancing of tigers
and lions; a sound that drives
darkness away, that heralds the arrival
of dawn.

The sound of drums makes
leaves fall; beacons flare
as if thousands
of red lilies open; then
the sleeping forests awaken;
the great earth trembles,
breath comes more quickly.

African drums, African drums,
creation of the highest
human genius; their beating
expressing deep emotion
then the joy of the people
in so complete a way.

Drum beats can express
welcome to guests; entertaining
them with notes of happiness;
drum beats can praise a woman's
beauty, in front of all.

African drums, African drums,
these the eyes of the hunter,
the swiftest proclamation;
aggressors attack like brutal
beasts; immediately drum
beats sound the alarm.

Beats that pass through
primeval forests, through
impassable marshes; that
go swiftly along roads
slaves took, telling folk
to pick out arrows, draw swords.

Night becomes deeper;
a waning crescent moon
hangs over the kapok tree
beating sounds more urgent
stirring me.

Underfoot is the old
battle-ground of Africa
broken arrow-heads buried
in yellow sand along with
rusty knives; Old Toure
led good fighters, struggling
against aggressors tearing
them to pieces.

Needless to sentimentalize over the past
dawn comes already to dark
Africa; beside the Milo River
the grass grows green; plantains
are shiny, mangoes fragrant,
fish leap.

African drums, African drums
that have beaten for the glory
of ancestors, for the rebellions
of slaves, against humiliated existence.

Drums that now beat for freedom
and independence; in their
throbbing is the deep note of
indignation, while sounds
of joy rise to the clouds.

NEGRO SLAVE POSTS

Along the sea coast of southern Ghana, there still remain many old
forts that were slave trade posts used by the colonialists. Built in
1482, it is still in good condition, remaining as an evidence of crime.

Sorrow and anger followed
each step, as I held to the
icy cold iron railing
climbing up to the slave trade
post.

Opening a lock already
spotted with verdigris; scared
bats hung down, spider's webs
covered blood-stained walls;

at the base of stone columns
were marks where fetters
and handcuffs had cut deep.

Ocean winds cannot blow away
the stench of blood; ever do
its waves bring back the moaning
of slaves; though an equatorial
sun is warm, it cannot drive
away the dank cold of dungeons.

Its exterior looks like some
Western parliament house; inside
is an assembly hall which was
the market for slave traders
where human rights were ruthlessly
trodden underfoot.

Ten human lives for a gun;
one for a bottle of spirits
mixed with water; then after
settlement, slaves dragged out
and treated worse than cattle.

Men slaves in a dungeon,
women tied beside a well,
waters of which still taste
bitter as if made up of tears.

The dungeons, a human hell
to hold the rebellious,
head of a Negro carved over
the door lintel, was the death cell
for those who revolted.

These from a life of freedom,
when could they see sunlight
again? Either they were dragged
out and tossed aside, or else made
to crawl out like dogs.

From the end of the dungeons
a corridor, outside which a
stone causeway ran where slaves
were made to walk and then
climb up steep rope ladders
to waiting boats alongside.

A stone-flagged corridor, one
end of which reached out
to the end of earth, to slavery and death,
calm beaches of the Atlantic
bitter green coasts of bloody tears.

With each step they took,
slaves turned and looked back
at their homeland, as if

to remember it until seas
dried up, rocks crumbled.

Four hundred and eighty years
have passed; sunset reflects
on the old fort; facing it stands
a Catholic Church; Christianity
went along with the slave trade.

Then when sunset lit over
the coast, did you go on
tolling for vespers? Could
you bare your conscience
in the High Mass? Could
the black cassock cover the
blood-stained whip?

This place must be preserved
as an evidence of the great
crime, with peoples everywhere
standing as accusers at the bar
denouncing colonialism in the
court of the world.

BRONZE STATUES BY THE BEACH

By the beach at Conakry, the capital of Guinea, are a pile of bronze statues of colonialists, which have been torn down. They still lie by the wayside, with none to even cast a glance at them.

One general has lost his sword; here
a colonel's head hits the ground,
there a governor's hand touches
a Negro boy, showing now how close
they are; another governor leans
over a balustrade, as if praying to God.

Boasting or reticent governors,
heroic gallant colonels, plastered
with medals; generals with all their
pomposity, their steely stare; these
once the pride of Paris, favourites
of the colonial ministry, adored
by society women.

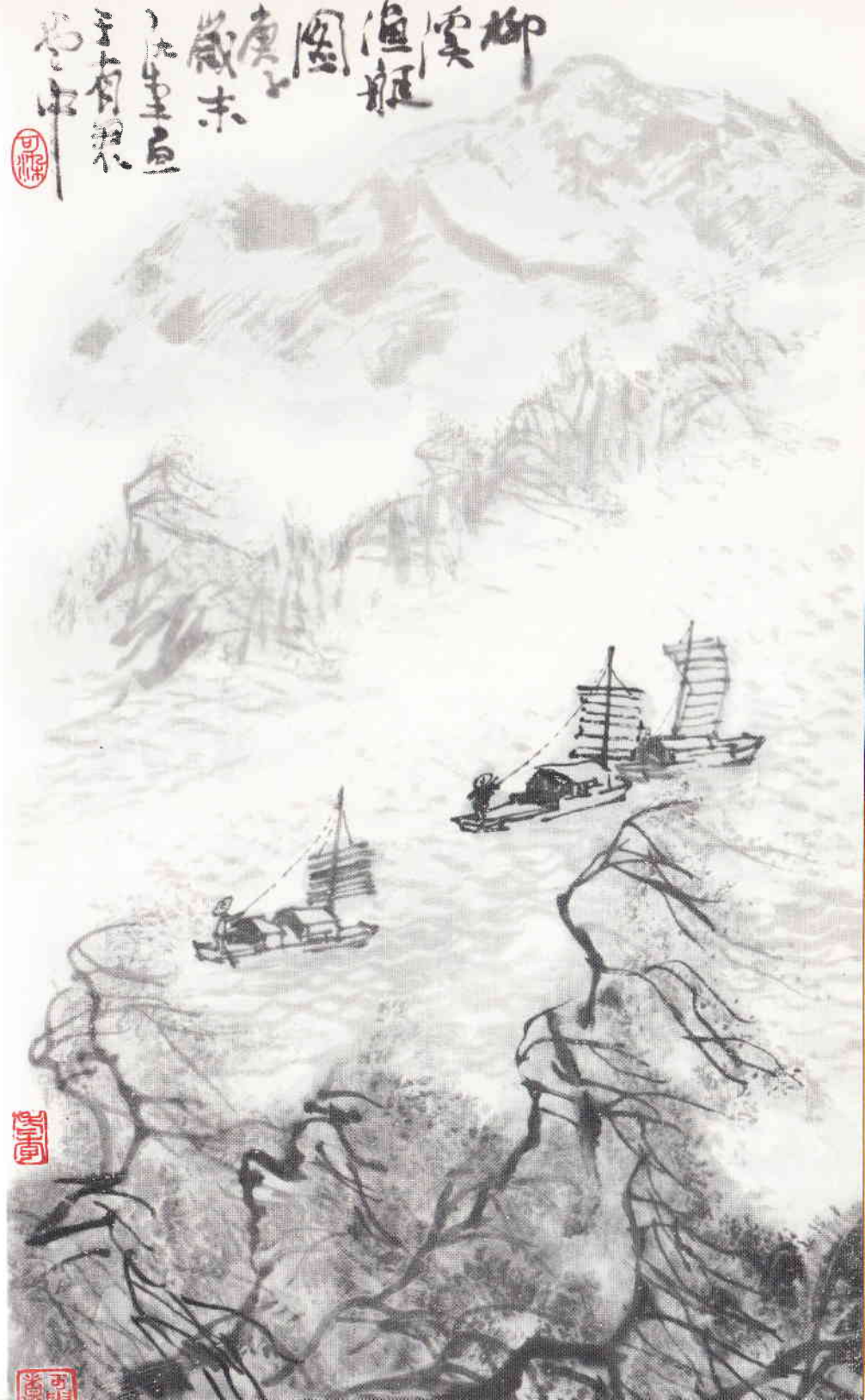
Now they are all together; when
discussing their careers realizing
all were famous; though at present
they are a trifle crowded, none
are missing; all somewhat sad, eyes
bewildered, surprised.

As they gaze over the wide
ocean, it seems as if they are
counting up days until that
next leave; ever looking for
the three-masted ship that will come
to rescue them. So sorry! You who lie
are just human left-overs, doomed
for ever to obscurity.

Translated by Rewi Alley

Fishing Boats in the Willows ▲
by Li Ko-jan

For details about the artist and this
painting see the article on p. 78.



Writings of the Last Generation

LU HSUN

Two Stories

THE WHITE LIGHT

It was afternoon before Chen Shih-cheng came back from seeing the results of the county examinations. He had gone extremely early, and the first thing he looked for on the list was the name Chen. Quite a few Chens leapt to meet his eye together, but none followed by the characters Shih-cheng. Thereupon, starting again, he made a careful search through all twelve lists. Even after everyone else had left, the name Chen Shih-cheng had not appeared on the list but the man was still standing there, a solitary figure before the front wall of the examination school.

A cool wind was ruffling his short greying hair and the early winter sun shone warmly on him, yet he felt dizzy, as if from a touch of the sun. His pale face grew even paler; his tired eyes, puffed and blood-stained, glittered strangely. In fact, he had long stopped seeing the results on the wall for countless black circles were swimming past his eyes.

He had won his first degree in the county examination and taken his second in the provincial capital, success following success. . . . The local gentry were trying by every means to ally with him by marriage, people were treating him like a god, cursing

See Tang Tao's article on these stories on p. 73 of this issue.

themselves for their former contempt and blindness. . . . The other families renting his derelict house had been driven away — no need for that, they would move of their own accord — and the whole place was completely renovated with flagpoles and a placard at the gate. . . . If he wanted to keep his hands clean he could be an official in the capital, otherwise some post in the provinces would prove more lucrative. . . . Once more this future mapped out so carefully had crashed in ruins like a wet sugar pagoda, leaving nothing but debris behind.

Not knowing what he did, he turned with a strange sensation of disintegration, and shambled disconsolately home.

The moment he reached his door, seven small boys raised their voices to drone their lesson together. He started as if a chime had been struck by his ear, aware of seven heads with seven small queues bobbing in front of him, bobbing all over the room, with black circles dancing between. As he sat down they handed in their home work, contempt for him manifest on every face.

"You may go," he said painfully after a brief hesitation.

They snatched up their satchels, stuffed them under their arms and were off like a streak of smoke.

Chen Shih-cheng could still see a host of small heads dotted with black circles dancing in front of him, now pell-mell, now in strange formations; but by degrees they grew fewer, hazier.

"Failed again!"

With a violent start he leapt to his feet, for undoubtedly the sound came from just beside him. When he turned his head there was no one there, yet he seemed to hear another muffled chime and his own lips formed the words:

"Failed again!"

Abruptly he raised one hand and reckoned it up on his fingers: eleven, thirteen times, counting this year made sixteen, yet not a single examiner had been capable of appreciating good writing, all had been completely blind. It was so pathetic, in fact, that he had to snigger. In a fury he snatched his neatly copied examination essays and poems from their cloth wrapper and started out with them; but in the doorway he was dazzled by the bright light outside, where even the hens were making fun of him. Unable to still the wild pounding of his heart, he slunk back inside again.

He sat down once more, a strange glitter in his eyes. He could see many things, but hazily — his wrecked future, in ruins like a sugar pagoda before him, was looming so large that it blocked all his ways out.

The neighbours' kitchen fires were long since out, their bowls and chopsticks washed, but Chen Shih-cheng had not started cooking a meal. His tenants knew from years of experience that after he had seen the results of the county examinations their best course was to close their doors early and mind their own business. First all voices were hushed, then one by one lamps were blown out, till nothing was left but the moon slowly climbing the cold night sky.

The deep blue of the sky was like an expanse of sea, while a few drifting clouds looked as if someone had dabbled a piece of chalk in a dish for washing brushes. The moon discharged cold rays of light down upon Chen Shih-cheng. At first the orb seemed no more than a newly polished iron mirror, but by some mysterious means this mirror projected light through him until he reflected the shadow of the iron moon.

He paced up and down the yard outside his room, his vision clear now, all around him still. But this stillness was abruptly and rudely shattered as in his ear he distinctly heard the urgent whisper:

"Left turn, right turn. . . ."

He pricked up his ears and listened intently as the voice repeated more loudly:

"Right turn!"

Now he remembered. This yard was the place, before his family fortune declined, where he used to come with his grandmother on summer evenings to enjoy the cool. A boy of ten, he would lie on a bamboo couch while his grandmother sat beside him and told him diverting stories. She had it from her own grandmother, she said, that the founder of the Chen family was a man of great wealth who had built this house and buried a vast store of silver here, which some fortunate descendant was bound to find, although so far no one had discovered it. A clue to the hiding place was in this riddle:

Left turn, right turn, forward, back!

Gold and silver by the sack!

Chen Shih-cheng often quietly cudgelled his brains to guess this riddle. Unfortunately he no sooner hit on a solution than he realized that it was wide of the mark. Once he was sure the treasure was under the room rented to the Tang family, but he lacked the courage to dig there and a little later it struck him as most unlikely. As for the vestiges of earlier excavations in his own room, these were signs of his depression over previous failures in the examination, and the sight of them later shamed and embarrassed him.

But this iron light enfolding him today was gently persuasive. And when Chen Shih-cheng hesitated, the serious proofs it brought forward, backed up by some covert pressure, compelled him to cast his eyes towards his own room again.

A white light, like a round white fan, was flickering in his room. "So it *is* there after all!"

With these words he charged like a lion into the room, but once across the threshold he saw no sign of white light, nothing but a dark, shabby room, with some rickety desks half swallowed up in the shadows. He stood there irresolutely till by degrees his vision cleared and the white light reappeared beyond a doubt, broader this time, whiter than sulphurous flames and lighter than morning mist. It was underneath a desk by the east wall.

Chen Shih-cheng charged like a lion to the door, but when he put out his hand for the hoe behind it he bumped into a dark shadow. He gave an involuntary shiver and hastily lit the lamp, but there was nothing there except the hoe. He moved away the desk and hardly stopping for breath raised four square flagstones. Kneeling, he saw the usual fine yellow sand, and rolling up his sleeves he removed this sand to reveal black earth beneath. Very carefully and quietly he dug down, stroke by stroke. The night was so still, however, that the thudding of his sharp-bladed hoe against the earth was plainly audible.

The pit was over two feet deep yet still no crock had appeared and Chen Shih-cheng was beginning to lose heart when — clang! — he wrenched his wrist as the hoe struck something hard. He dropped his tool and scabbled in the soil, discovering a large square brick beneath. His heart was throbbing painfully as with infinite care he prized up this brick, disclosing beneath it the same black earth as before. Although he loosened a great deal

of earth, it apparently went down and down without end. All of a sudden, however, he struck a small hard object, something round, probably a rusty coin. There were some fragments of broken china too.

Faint and soaked in sweat, Chen Shih-cheng burrowed desperately. His heart nearly turned over when he struck another strange object shaped somewhat like a horseshoe, but light and brittle in his hands. Having extracted it with infinite care, he picked it up cautiously and studied it intently by the lamp. Blotched and discoloured like a mouldering bone, it bore an incomplete row of teeth on the upper side. He realized that it must be a jaw-bone. This jaw-bone twitched disconcertingly in his hands and gaped as if with laughter. Finally he heard it mutter:

"Failed again!"

An icy shudder went through him, he let it go. The jaw-bone had barely dropped lightly back into the pit before he bounded out into the yard. He stole a glance at his room. The dazzling lamp and supercilious jaw-bone made it strangely terrifying. Averting his eyes in fear, he lay down in the shadows of the eaves some distance away, where he felt slightly safer. But another sly whisper sounded through the stillness in his ear:

"Not here. . . . Go to the hills. . . ."

Chen Shih-cheng had a faint recollection of hearing this remark in the street that day, and at once light dawned on him. He threw back his head to look up at the sky. The moon was hiding itself behind the West Peak, so that the peak thirty-five *li* from the town seemed immediately before him, upright, black and awesome as the tablet carried by ministers to court, while from it pulsed great flickering beams of white light.

And this white light in the distance seemed just before him.

"Yes, to the hills!"

This decision taken, he rushed wildly out. Doors banged as he opened them, then all was still. The lamp, its wick heavily furred, lit up the empty room and the gaping pit. Presently it sputtered a few times and by degrees dwindled and died as the oil burned out.

"Open the gate! . . ."

In the dawn this cry, fearful and despairing yet fraught with infinite hope, throbbed and trembled like a floating thread before the West Gate of the town.

At noon the next day someone noticed a drowned man floating in Wanliu Lake fifteen *li* from the West Gate. He lost no time in spreading the news till word reached the local bailiff, who got some villagers to recover the corpse. It was the body of a man in his fifties, "of medium height, pale and beardless," completely naked. It may have been Chen Shih-cheng. But since none of his neighbours could be troubled to go and look and no kinsmen went to identify and claim him, after the county authorities had held an inquest the bailiff buried him. The cause of death was beyond dispute and the theft of a dead man's clothes a common occurrence, insufficient grounds for suspicion of foul play. In fact, the post-mortem established that he had fallen in while still alive, for he had undoubtedly struggled under the water—embedded in all his nails was mud from the bottom of the lake.

June 1922

THE LAMP THAT WAS KEPT ALIGHT

One overcast spring afternoon the atmosphere was somewhat tense in the one and only tea-house of Lucky Light Village, for in the customers' ears lingered the faint yet earnest cry:

"Put it out!"

This was not true of everyone in the village, of course. The villagers here were a stay-at-home lot, who before stirring abroad would look up the almanac to see whether that day was "propitious for a journey" or not. If it was, before setting out they would step in the direction of the God of Luck to be sure of meeting with good fortune. Sitting here so free from constraint in the tea-house were merely a few youths who prided themselves on their

broad-mindedness, although in conservative eyes each mother's son among them was bound to be the ruin of his family.

The atmosphere was somewhat tense now in this tea-house.

"Still no change?" asked Triangle Face, picking up his bowl of tea.

"Still no change, they say," replied Square Head. "He keeps repeating, 'Put it out, put it out!' His eyes are flashing worse than ever. The devil! Don't think it's a joke—the fellow's a menace to our village. Fact is, we ought to find some way to get rid of him!"

"Get rid of him, by all means. He's nothing but a dirty bastard. When the temple was built his ancestors paid their share, yet now he wants to blow out the temple light! Is that unfilial or isn't it? Let's send him to the county court as an unfilial son!" Kuo-ting ended with a flourish, smashing his fist on the table. The tilted lid of one bowl fell off with a clatter.

"That won't do. Only parents or maternal uncles can charge an undutiful son. . . ." objected Square Head.

"Pity all he has is a paternal uncle. . . ." Kuo-ting's spirits immediately sank.

"Kuo-ting!" cried Square Head suddenly. "Did you have much luck in your game yesterday?"

Kuo-ting stared at him round-eyed but did not answer. Fat-faced Chuang Chi-kuang was already bellowing:

"If he puts out the lamp that'll be the end of Lucky Light Village, won't it? Don't all the old folk say this lamp was lit by Emperor Wu of Liang, and it's been burning ever since? Not even the Long Hairs* put it out. . . . Just look, ha! at that splendid green light it sheds! Folk from other parts passing this way always ask to see it and admire it. . . . It's something to be proud of. . . . What does he mean by carrying on like this? . . ."

"He's crazy. Didn't you know?" Square Head spoke scornfully. "Bah, you're so clever!" Chuang's fat face glistened with sweat.

*The Taiping revolutionaries of the mid-nineteenth century, who wore their hair loose as a protest against the queues imposed by the Ching rulers.

"I say, trick him again in the old way." Hui-wu's wife, proprietor-cum-waitress of this tea-house, had been no more than a listener hitherto; but at this digression from a topic which enthralled her she hastily intervened to prevent a quarrel and lead them back to the subject.

"What old way?" asked Chuang in surprise.

"Didn't he go crazy, just like this, once before? That was in his father's time. After being tricked, he recovered."

"Tricked—how? Why did I never hear of it?" asked Chuang in even greater surprise.

"How could you? You were just brats at the time, guzzling your mammy's milk. I wasn't like this either, I'd have you know. You should have seen my hands in those days, so smooth and soft and white. . . ."

"You're still smooth and soft and white. . . ." interposed Square Head.

"Get away with you!" Her glare turned into a smile. "Enough of your nonsense! Let's be serious. He was young then and his father was a little crazy too. They say one day his grandfather took him to the temple and told him to bow to Old Man Earth, General Plague and Guardian Angel Wang, but instead he ran off in a fright and he's been odd ever since, just the way he is now. He talks to everyone he meets about blowing out the lamp that's always kept alight in the main hall. Once it's blown out there'll be no more locusts or plagues, he says, as if that would be such a wonderful thing. Most likely he's possessed by some devil that's afraid of seeing true gods. Which of us is afraid of Old Man Earth? Is your tea cold? Let me add some hot water. There! Yes, after that he rushed in to blow it out. His father was too fond of him to lock him up. But that provoked the whole village, and folk kept after his father. Still no one knew what to do. Thank goodness my old man was still alive in those days to work out a plan. He blacked out the lamp with cotton, then took him to see it and told him it had been put out!"

"My, my! That took some thinking out!" Triangle Face heaved an admiring sigh.

"Why go to all that trouble?" growled Kuo-ting. "A bastard like that should be beaten to death—good riddance!"

"What an idea!" Staring at him in horror, she made a sign of dissent. "The idea! Didn't his grandfather hold an official rank?"

Kuo-ting and the rest eyed each other, unable to improve on her old man's plan.

"That cured him!" Brushing the spittle from her mouth with the back of one hand, she went on even faster. "That cured him completely! He's never crossed the temple threshold again or said a word about the lamp all these years. I don't know what sent him off his head again a few days after the last temple fair. It's exactly the same as last time, that I know. Soon after noon he passed this way, going to the temple no doubt. Go and talk it over with Fourth Master and see if you can't trick him again. Wasn't that lamp lit by Emperor Wu of Liang? Don't they say that if it goes out this village will become a sea and we'll all change into eels? Do go on and talk it over with Fourth Master. . . ."

"We'd better have a look at the temple first," said Square Head striding out.

Kuo-ting and Chuang Chi-kuang followed him. Triangle Face, the last, turned at the door to say:

"Score it up to me today, dammit! . . ."

Hui-wu's wife, assenting, picked up a piece of charcoal from the floor. On the east wall, under a small triangle with a cluster of short lines beneath it, she drew two more lines.

Looking towards the temple, sure enough, they saw a small group gathered: the fellow himself, two on-lookers, three children.

But the temple gate was shut tight.

"Good! The temple gate's still closed," said Kuo-ting approvingly.

Their approach apparently gave the children courage, for they closed in. He had been standing in front of the temple gate, but now he turned to regard them over his shoulder.

He seemed the same as usual with his sallow, square face and shabby blue cotton gown, except that his large, almond eyes shone under their shaggy brows with a strange light and he stared at them unwinking for some moments, grief, suspicion and fear in his gaze. Two straws were sticking to his short hair, no doubt

thrown by the children behind his back, for each time they looked at his head they hunched their shoulders and grinned, sticking out their tongues.

They all stood still, eyeing each other.

"What are you up to?" It was Triangle Face who finally stepped forward to put this question.

"I've asked Old Hei to open the gate." His voice was low and gentle. "Because that lamp has got to be blown out. You see, they should all be put out: Blue Face with his three heads and six arms, Three Eyes, Long Hat, Half Head, Ox Head and Swine Tusk. . . . Out with the lot of them! When they're out we shall have no more locusts, no more plague. . . ."

"Hee-hee! Nonsense!" Kuo-ting tittered scornfully. "If you blow out that lamp there'll be even more locusts, you'll catch the plague yourself!"

"Hee-hee!" tittered Chuang Chi-kuang.

A child, clothed only in a pair of pants, held up the reed he was playing with and aimed it at him, parting small cherry lips to cry:

"Bang!"

"Go on home now!" said Kuo-ting loudly. "If you don't your uncle will break your bones! We'll blow out the lamp for you. You can come back in a few days and see for yourself."

His gaze glittered even more brightly as he looked Kuo-ting in the eye, forcing Kuo-ting to turn his eyes away.

"You'll blow it out?" with a contemptuous smile he went on firmly. "Not you! I don't need any of you. I'll do it myself. I'm going to blow it out now!"

Kuo-ting was promptly reduced to the state of collapse that follows a bout of drinking. But Square Head had stepped forward to say slowly:

"You've always shown yourself an intelligent man, but this is ridiculous! Let me tell you something you should be able to grasp. Even if the lamp's blown out, those creatures will still be there, won't they? Stop playing the fool and go home! Go and have some sleep!"

"I know they'll still be there if it's blown out." He flashed them another grim smile before regaining his gravity and proceeding earnestly, "I shall just be doing the best I can. I'm tackling

this first because it's easiest. I'm going to blow it out now, I'll do it myself!" He turned back to batter at the temple gate.

"Hey!" Kuo-ting was angry. "Don't you belong to this village? Do you want us all to turn into eels? Go home! You can't push that door open, you've no way of opening it! You can't blow out the lamp—go on home!"

"I'm not going home. I'm going to blow it out."

*Not you! You can't get in!"

". . . ."

"You can't get in!"

"I'll think of some other way then," he said gravely, turning to eye them intently.

"Ha, let's see what other way you have."

". . . ."

"Let's see what other way you have!"

"I'll set the place on fire."

"What?" Kuo-ting could hardly believe his ears.

"I'll set the place on fire!"

The silence was like a clear chime which died away so slowly that all living creatures near by were held motionless. But presently they started whispering together, and presently they withdrew. Two or three halted at a distance. Outside the back gate of the temple, Chuang Chi-kuang shouted:

"Old Hei! Watch out! Keep the temple gates closed tight! Do you hear me, Old Hei? Close them tight. We'll come back when we've decided what to do!"

But he, seemingly oblivious of all else, flashed his blazing eyes as if searching the earth, the air and men's bodies for the wherewithal to kindle a fire.

After Square Head and Kuo-ting had shuttled to and fro between some of the larger houses, the whole of Lucky Light Village was plunged in confusion. Many ears and hearts were filled with that fearful word "Fire!" This was not true, of course, of quite a few more conservative ears and hearts. Still there was an air of tension throughout the village, and all conscious of this tension felt as acutely uneasy as if at any moment they were liable to change into eels and the whole world to perish. Although they

were vaguely aware that only Lucky Light Village was to perish, to them Lucky Light Village was the world.

The centre of all this activity soon shifted to Fourth Master's reception room. In the place of honour sat Old Kuo, in the fullness of years and virtue, his face as wrinkled as a wind-dried orange, plucking at the white hairs on his chin as if eager to pull them out.

"This forenoon," he declared slowly, releasing his beard, "when Old Fu in the west end had a stroke, his son said it was because the God of the Earth was displeased. That being so, in future, if by any chance something disturbing should happen, it is almost sure to affect you. Yes, you — most unfortunate."

"True." Fourth Master tugged casually and absent-mindedly at his grizzled moustache. "This is a judgment on his father's sins. My brother never believed in Buddha, did he? . . . I didn't agree with him, but what could I do? What do you expect me to do now?"

"To my mind, there is one way only. Only one. Tomorrow, tie him up, send him to town, and leave him in the big temple for one night — yes, for one night — to exorcize this evil spirit."

This was not merely the first time Kuo-ting and Square Head had entered this normally inaccessible room in their capacity as champions of the village, they were actually sitting below Old Kuo yet above Fourth Master, and moreover had been offered tea. Having entered with Old Kuo, after making their report they had confined themselves to sipping tea, not even opening their mouths when the tea was finished. But now, without warning, Kuo-ting voiced his opinion:

"That would take too long! The two of them are still there watching him. The main thing is to decide on immediate action. If he really starts a fire. . . ."

Old Kuo jumped for fright and his jaw began to tremble.

"If he really starts a fire. . . ." chimed in Square Head.

"Well," said Kuo-ting loudly, "that would be the end!"

A brown-haired girl came in to fill their bowls. Kuo-ting subsided into silence, picking up his bowl immediately to drink. With a convulsive start he set it down, licking his upper lip, then removed the lid and blew on the tea to cool it.

"I hate being involved like this." Fourth Master drummed softly on the table. "A son who's such a disgrace to his family would be better dead!" He sighed.

"That's true, he'd be better dead." Kuo-ting looked up. "Last year they killed one like him in Lienko Village, a disgrace to his family. Everyone agreed to set on him together at the same instant, so that nobody could say who struck the first blow. And no trouble came of it."

"That was different," said Square Head. "This time the authorities are in charge. We must think quickly what to do. In my opinion. . . ."

Old Kuo and Fourth Master solemnly studied his face.

"In my opinion, we'd better lock him up."

"That's a good idea." Fourth Master nodded slowly.

"Good," agreed Kuo-ting.

"That certainly is a good idea," drawled Old Kuo. "We'll have him brought here now. We must make haste, here, to prepare a room. A padlock too."

"A room?" Fourth Master threw back his head to think. "I've no suitable room to spare here. Besides, we don't know how long he'll be in this state."

"Use his own. . . ." suggested Old Kuo.

"Our Liu-hsun is marrying this autumn." Suddenly Fourth Master sounded both stern and grieved, and his voice was trembling. ". . . What a nephew, long since past the age to marry, yet instead of founding a family and settling down, all he can do is go mad! My brother did his duty. He may not have been too good a citizen, but at least someone must continue the sacrifices to him. . . ."

"Yes, indeed!" said the other three together.

"When Liu-hsun has sons, I shall let him adopt the second. But can you take someone else's son for nothing?"

"No, indeed!" said the other three together.

"This tumbledown house means nothing to me, and Liu-hsun doesn't care about such things either. But will the child's mother be willing to give away her own flesh and blood for no return?"

"No, indeed!" said the other three together.

Fourth Master fell silent. The other three looked at each other.

"Every day I've been hoping for his recovery," resumed Fourth Master slowly after a pause. "But he doesn't get any better. It's not that he can't, he won't. There's nothing for it but to lock him up as this gentleman suggests, to keep him out of mischief, lest he disgrace his father. This may be just as well, we owe it to his father. . . ."

"Yes, of course," said Kuo-ting with emotion. "But what about a room? . . ."

"Aren't there spare rooms in the temple?" asked Fourth Master slowly.

"Yes!" Kuo-ting saw light. "There are! That room to the west as you go in is empty, and there's only a small square window with thick bars—he'll never get out of that. Just the thing!"

Old Kuo and Square Head hastened to express their approval. Kuo-ting heaved a sigh and puckered his lips to sip tea.

Before dusk fell, peace reigned once more, or the matter was completely forgotten, for tense expressions had relaxed and the earlier signs of jubilation had vanished. Naturally there were more visitors to the temple than usual, but the number soon dwindled. Only the children who had been unable to play there for some days because the gates were closed found the temple yard a special attraction today. After supper several of them ran back there to play at riddles.

"You guess," said the biggest. "I'll say it once more:

*Red oars, a snow-white boat,
I paddle across, then rest;
I eat a snack, then sing;
What am I—have you guessed?"*

"Red oars—what are they?" asked one little girl.

"I'll tell you, it's a . . ."

"Wait a bit!" begged one with a scabby head. "I know: a boat!"

"A boat!" repeated the boy wearing nothing but pants.

"A boat, eh?" said the biggest. "A boat is paddled, but can it sing? You'll never guess. I'll tell you. . . ."

"Wait a bit," begged Scabby Head.

"Bah, you'll never guess. I'll tell you. It's a goose."

"A goose!" The girl chuckled. "Red oars."

"Why a white boat?" asked the boy in nothing but pants.

"I'll set the place on fire!"

With a start the children remembered him and turned together to look at the west room, where they saw him clutching the window frame with one hand and tearing with the other at the bars, between which two bright eyes were flashing.

After a second's silence, Scabby Head rushed off with a shout, and laughing and shouting the others raced after him. The boy wearing nothing but pants pointed his reed over his shoulder and, parting his cherry lips, called out distinctly:

"Bang!"

Then all was utterly still. As the shades of night fell, the bright green altar lamp shone even more brightly on the gods on the dais and on the hall, shining into the yard and into the gloom behind the wooden bars.

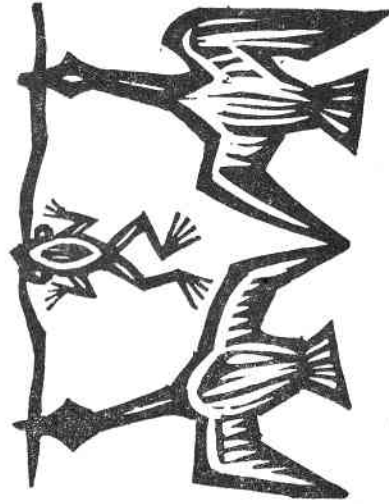
After scampering out of the temple the children came to a halt. Holding hands, they sauntered slowly home, spluttering with laughter as they sang in chorus a song they had just made:

*A white boat moors not far away.
I'll blow it out myself,
See if I don't!
Come on, come on and join our play!
I'm going to start a fire!
Oh, no, you won't!
Can you guess my riddle, pray?*

March 1, 1925

*Translated by Yang Hsien-yi
and Gladys Yang*

Folk Tales



The Frog Moves House

(MONGOLIAN)

A pair of wild-geese and a frog, neighbours by a lake for a long time, were like members of the same family. When the lake dried up in a drought the wild-geese decided to move to a place nearer drinking water. But they did not want to leave the frog behind.

"What shall we do?" they asked him.

"Get a stick," said the frog after some thought. "You two hold the ends in your beaks. I'll grip the middle with my mouth. In this way you'll be able to take me along."

The wild-geese agreed, and they started on their journey.

They flew over some yurts. A man noticed them and remarked, "What a clever means the wild-geese have thought up for transporting the frog."

"It was my idea," the frog said to himself.

They flew over another cluster of yurts and were seen by more people who remarked: "What a clever means the wild-geese have thought up for transporting the frog." "It was my idea," the frog thought of correcting them, but refrained at the last minute.

Then they came to an even larger cluster of yurts and were seen by even more people all of whom remarked: "What a clever means the wild-geese have thought up for transporting the frog!"

This time the frog could restrain himself no longer. "It was my idea!" he shouted.

As soon as he opened his mouth, the frog fell to the ground and was instantly killed.

The Tiger and the Squirrel

(MONGOLIAN)

Once there was a conceited and bad-tempered tiger who lived in a dense forest and lorded it over the other beasts.

One day, this fierce tiger fell into a hunter's trap. Try as he might he could not get away. Exhausted and helpless, he suddenly caught sight of a squirrel hopping and merry-making in a tree. "Help, help," the tiger called out to the squirrel.

Sorry to see the king of the beasts in such a state the kind-hearted squirrel quickly jumped down, gnawed the ropes and freed the tiger.

"What a disgrace! Strong as I am, I've had to ask a little squirrel to free me from the hunter's trap. My reputation will be ruined if he tells this story to the other beasts." The tiger brought his paw down on his saviour and roared: "Don't think you can get away, squirrel!"

"I must have mashed him," thought the tiger as he lifted his paw. But the squirrel, wagging his bushy tail, said to him from a tree:

"Don't forget the good turn I've done you, Mr. Tiger."





The Fox and the Turtle

(TIBETAN)

Once, there were eight deer who went to a lake to drink water every morning and evening. Four of them were devoured by a giant turtle who lived there. The other four, though parched with thirst, dared not go near the place.

One day the fox asked them why. The deer told him.

"Why not do this?" the fox suggested. "There's only one turtle but there are four of you. You can go in two pairs. When he chases one pair the second pair can drink. When he chases the second pair, the first pair can drink. Running back and forth this way, he won't be able to catch any of you."

Following his advice, the deer were able to drink their fill every day.

The giant turtle was so annoyed with the fox for helping the deer, he decided to get rid of him.

But the fox was prepared for this. Going to drink, he dipped his forefoot into the lake first. The turtle, who was waiting for

his prey beneath the water, clamped his jaws on the foot as soon as it was inserted. The clever fox pretended that nothing had happened.

Laughing merrily he said: "What a useless turtle! He doesn't let go of even a stick once he catches hold of it."

The turtle loosened his grip and the fox dashed away.

One day when the fox again went to the lake, he found the turtle lying on the beach shamming death. It was clear that this was a ruse to make the fox draw near.

The fox said: "The turtle is not really dead, otherwise his legs wouldn't be stretched out like that."

On hearing this the turtle immediately drew in its legs. Again the fox hurried away.

Having failed twice, the turtle was very angry. So one day he hid in the fox's cave.

When the fox returned he discovered the turtle's footprints and knew that he had come. Was he still in the cave? "Has anybody come here today? Is he gone?" the fox asked a boulder outside the cave. Of course the boulder couldn't answer. "That stupid boulder," the fox mumbled. "Even though there's someone inside he doesn't dare answer."

The turtle, confused, hastily pretended to be the boulder. "No one has been here, all day," he cried.

The fox knew that the turtle was inside and fled.

The Drunken Sparrow

(TIBETAN)

The sparrows used to feed on the peasants' grain whenever it was being dried in the sun on the threshing ground.

One day a peasant scattered some distiller's grain there and hid in a shed near by to watch. Flocks of sparrows came in no time and pecked happily at the grain. Soon they became tipsy and he caught all of them, except one, who had not had too much. This one managed to fly into a locust tree. As the



wine began to tell on it, it forgot all about the danger it had been in and started to sing raucously: "I'm afraid of neither heaven nor earth. I am the biggest bird next to the phoenix."

It drove the cicada out of the tree and pecked sharply at a swallow which happened to fly past. The little bird fled. The sparrow then sang even more belligerently. A magpie received the same treatment when it alighted on the tree. Knowing the sparrow was drunk, the magpie paid no attention and flew away. Elated, the sparrow sang and danced like mad.

Soon the news spread that the sparrow had occupied the locust tree. A turtle-dove who was sceptical about the news went to have a look. But before it could alight it received so many pecks on its head that it quickly fled to a nearby date tree.

"The turtle-dove fears me too," the sparrow thought and it sang again: "I'm afraid of neither heaven nor earth." The turtle-dove found the sparrow so ridiculous and infuriating that it sought out the yellow hawk and told him: "Brother Hawk, a sparrow has monopolized a tree and has driven away a cicada, a little swallow and a magpie. When I alighted on the tree it pulled off a dozen or so of my feathers. And it keeps chanting an outrageous song."

"What does it say?"

"It says that it is afraid of neither heaven nor earth and that it is the largest bird next to the phoenix. It seems that even you, Brother Hawk —"

Even before he finished the infuriated hawk had stretched its wings and headed for the sparrow. The turtle-dove, the magpie, the little swallow and the cicada followed close behind.

The hawk dived so quickly that it missed the sparrow who was singing merrily. Very frightened, the sparrow escaped into a bush of thorn. The hawk, too big to get into the bush, demanded angrily: "Who is the bigger of us?"

"You are. You're bigger than the phoenix too," the sparrow replied in a trembling voice.

"Do you still have the nerve to be so conceited, you little bastard?"

"Forgive me, please forgive me. I was drunk," pleaded the sparrow, its tears streaming down.

The hawk glared and spat at the sparrow and gave it a piece of its mind, then flew away.

The sparrow dared not emerge from the bush long after the hawk was gone. The little swallow, the magpie and the turtle-dove sneered at it while the cicada kept singing "Shame, shame," to its face.

The Crow's Promise

(TIBETAN)

Once, a gardener grew some excellent grapes. Just when they were ripening he discovered that his store of firewood was running out. He would have to go to the mountains to cut some more, but he didn't want the grapes stolen while he was gone. A crow volunteered to watch them for him.

"How are you going to do it?" inquired the gardener.

"It's very easy. I'll peck at the eyeballs of any thief who comes along and caw so loudly you'll hear me and hurry back."

"What if you should steal my grapes yourself?"

"May boils grow on my beak at this time every year if I eat even one," the crow swore casually. "Set your heart at ease. I'm not so worthless."

The gardener was taken in and entrusted his grapes to the crow. Then he went up the mountain to gather firewood.

Left alone, the crow jumped from arbour to arbour eating cluster after cluster. When the gardener came back from the mountain, the crow couldn't open its beak, it was so sticky with grape juice.

Since then, when the grapes ripen, boils grow on the beak of the crow, who has to rub it incessantly on the ground. And so there's an old Tibetan saying which goes:

*When grapes ripen the crow's beak is covered with boils,
The same thing will happen to anyone who eats his own words.*



The Cock King

(TARTAR)

Once upon a time there was a cock who strutted around among the chickens in his coop all day as if he were reviewing his subordinates. One day, he jumped onto a wall and sang proudly:

"Ohhhh. . . I am the king, I'm the emperor. I am the khan and I am the sultan. Tell me, my dear black hen, my spotted hen, my speckled white hen and my golden hen, tell me who is the most beautiful, the most courageous, the most manly cock on earth?"

All the chickens praised him to the skies, clustering around their dear, handsome brave imperious sultan, and clucking reverently:

"Our noble sultan, our handsome king, our dignified emperor. Wherever you go there is none stronger, cleverer, and better looking than you."

The cock was enraptured by these praises. Becoming more arrogant he sang loudly:

"Ohhhh! On this earth, whose voice is stronger and louder than the lion's? Who has the strongest legs, the most handsome and colourful robe?"

"You have the strongest legs, our king. Your voice is louder than the lion's, our sultan," the chickens chorused.

These praises puffed up the cock, making him livelier and more conceited than ever. He raised his comb and his dignified ear-rings and crowed louder:

"Ohhhh . . . come close to me. Tell me, who has the highest crown on his head?"

The chickens clustered round the cock at the foot of the wall, bowed their heads and sang to their noble sultan: "Your crown is as bright as fire. You are our only king and emperor."

The incessant crowing of the cock had been irritating the cook for a long time. He now stole up to the wall, caught the all-commanding "emperor" by his left leg and decapitated him with a sharp knife, stripped off his imperial robe and made a pot of soup with the meat of this peerless sultan.

Those who tasted this appetizing soup could not stop praising it: "Ah, what delicious soup the cock makes."

Translated by Yu Fan-chin

Illustrations by Huang Yung-yu

Notes on Literature and Art

TANG TAO

On Lu Hsun's Two Stories

If anyone wants to understand the China of yesterday and learn something about the thoughts and life of the last generation, I would advise him to read Lu Hsun's short stories. In the thirty years of his literary career, this great writer wrote relatively few short stories. This genre, generally speaking, has its limitations and in the hands of a not too talented writer may present us only with a series of portraits. Lu Hsun, however, made such good use of it that he portrayed men's souls, not the soul of isolated individuals either but of representative types. These characters with their distinctive characteristics appear against the historical setting of old China, and although they are individuals they represent a social phenomenon in the old days. I cannot speak for others, but whenever I read Lu Hsun's stories I feel a strong upsurge of emotion: first deep sorrow, then indignation. I feel indignant on behalf of the characters, for they seem to be caught in an invisible trap and I detest the very air they are breathing.

Tang Tao, born in 1913 in Chekiang Province, is a well-known literary critic and essayist. He engaged in Left-wing writers' activities in Shanghai in the thirties, and took part in editing and publishing the *Collected Works of Lu Hsun*. He is now the assistant editor of *Literary Review*. His collections of essays include *Accompanying Voices*, *Knitted Brows*, *Projections*, *Long and Short Notes*, *Souping Pines*, and a volume of critical articles called *A Study of Lu Hsun's Thoughts*.

Lu Hsun wrote in his preface to the Russian translation of *The True Story of Ah Q*: "The Creator made Man so ingeniously that one man could not feel the bodily pain of another. Our sages and their disciples have improved on this by making people impervious to the agony of spirit in others." The sages and their disciples here refer of course to the exponents of feudal thought and defenders of feudal morality in old China. It is indeed inhuman for people sharing the same oppressive fate to behave callously to each other, but this is just what happened in the past in China. In those long dark nights Lu Hsun, with deep sorrow in his heart, wrote these stories to convey that stifling atmosphere.

One tactic in ancient Chinese military strategy was to form your line of battle on the bank of a river, and Lu Hsun put his characters into a similar position. They could not retreat, but must either advance or fall into the water. He used this method to arouse the people to a consciousness of their wrongs, to encourage all the oppressed to unite and revolt together. This shows the militant humanism so characteristic of him. Of course, in his stories different characters come to different ends. Some remain unawakened and retreat until they fall into the water like Chen Shih-cheng in *The White Light*. Others try to go forward but are tricked or forced to the brink; however, they still put up a last desperate fight like the madman in *The Lamp That Was Kept Alight*.

The White Light deals with the psychology of a scholar who fails in the official examination. Quite a few foreign writers have commented favourably on the strict standards of the civil service examinations in ancient China, but actually this is a fallacy. It is known from past records that the candidates often carried hidden cribs and the examiners stooped to trickery too; there was also an open sale of scholarly ranks. The whole system was simply one colossal fraud, for the emperor was supposed to "select real talent" but the scholars were tested by writing fatuous essays and poems quite unrelated to practical politics. All they achieved by years of hard work was learning to write the stultified "eight-section" essays known as *pa-ku*. How could such a system produce genuine talent? Once they passed the examination, successful candidates joined the ranks of the ruling class and became exploiters themselves, fettered in spirit. Thus this system served only to produce slaves and social parasites.

Chen Shih-cheng in *The White Light* aspires to just such a career. He has failed year after year, yet even when his hair turns grey he still sits for the examination and dreams that "he has won his first degree in the county examination . . . success following success." After that he lacks for nothing. People treat him as a god, the local gentry try by every means to ally with him by marriage; his house is completely renovated, with imposing placards extolling his virtue and flagpoles showing his official status. . . . However, when the results come out, his hopes collapse again like a wet sugar pagoda. His tragedy is not that he has failed in the examinations sixteen times but that he clings so stubbornly to this philosophy of slaves and parasites.

The story starts with Chen Shih-cheng looking at the examination results, then little by little lays bare his soul while the tension mounts steadily to a climax. In Wu Ching-tzu's eighteenth-century novel *The Scholars*, a poor scholar who is starving takes his only hen to sell at the fair in order to buy a little rice. The announcement reaches him there that he has passed the examination, and the sudden transition from despair to ecstasy sends him out of his mind. Chen Shih-cheng in Lu Hsun's story has no such luck. He remains in hell, suffering with other souls in torment, and he too is mentally deranged. His face turns ashen and black specks float before his eyes. Lu Hsun used his knowledge of pathology and rare gift of social analysis to convey this man's mentality with an unerring touch which shows complete understanding. The attitude of Chen's pupils and his neighbours subtly conveys the atmosphere after his repeated failures, making all he does stand out more vividly. In his failure he thinks of his future while the cold moonlight shines on him, and surrounded by absolute silence he begins to imagine a voice whispering in his ear. Can this be some revelation? Startled and despairing, he listens carefully. A parasite to the core, now that he has failed to achieve officialdom he feels a compulsion to look for buried treasure. The white light which he deludes himself into seeing persuades him to dig in his room. He is by turns wildly excited, afraid, panic-stricken. Finally the poor wretch is lured by the mysterious white light to a lake outside the city, and even his clothes are stolen after he drowns, so that he leaves the world as naked as he came into it. All through the story Lu Hsun flays this character, but reveals his

sympathy for him at the end. And this sympathy turns the reader's attention from the unsuccessful scholar to the examination system itself, concentrating his hatred upon it.

The central figure in *The Lamp That Was Kept Alight* is different. He has lost his mind under different circumstances and is already deranged when first we meet him. This was not the first time that Lu Hsun used such a theme, for in the story called after *The Madman's Diary* by Gogol he makes skilful use of the disjointed language of a madman to project his thoroughly anti-feudal message. In this story we hear the cry "Put it out!" In the old society, members of the landlord class who wanted to parade their power and glorify their rule used to build pagodas that were supposed to stand for ever and light lamps that were intended to burn for ever. For a long time these pagodas and lamps served as symbols of the traditional feudal forces, the totems worshipped by them, and they could tolerate no opposition to these fetishes. Lu Hsun himself welcomed the crumbling of such pagodas,* and he looked forward to the extinguishing of such lamps. More than once he made a madman the protagonist in stories challenging the old tradition, because in the eyes of the diehards all those who were eager for a change were mad; hence the epithet itself suggested that they were rebels. However, these stories were based on real life and the central figures in *The Lamp That Was Kept Alight* as well as in *The Madman's Diary* were really mentally deranged and not revolutionaries, for Lu Hsun did not and could not go counter to realism in his characterization. The madman wants to put out the lamp in the temple because he thinks that will mean an end to locusts and plagues, not because he consciously opposes the feudal forces. Similarly, he wants to set the temple on fire just to extinguish the lamp, not to destroy the old society. He is a madman with an obsession, not a staunch revolutionary, and we must not confuse the two. From another angle, however, Lu Hsun's portrayal of the madman undoubtedly hints at a revolutionary. Such is his art that both his method of writing and the feelings aroused in the reader make this figure a positive one. In this story, Lu Hsun does not concentrate on the

* See his essay *On the Collapse of the Leifeng Pagoda* in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun* Vol. 2, Foreign Languages Press.

madman but presents four scenes—the conversation in the tea-house, the warning in front of the temple, the negotiation in Fourth Master's house, and the children's game in front of the bars—which form a superb contrast of light and dark. The chief character appears in the second and fourth scenes, but the most powerful descriptions come in the first and third, where we have two vivid genre paintings of conspiracy and trickery. Here we see the environment of the main character, his relationship with others, the machinations of those despicable fetishists, who are afraid of being turned into eels. Lucky Light Village is just the setting for the main character, for only surroundings of this kind could exert enough pressure on him to drive him out of his mind. When Lu Hsun describes these surroundings he is actually describing the main character too, even if he does not appear. The reader is made aware of his existence from the conversation and uneasy looks of the other villagers. Even after dusk, when a deathlike silence enfolds all Lucky Light Village, in the distance sounds the cry, "I'll set the place on fire!" And this, like a seed of fire, has entered the songs of the children.

Chen Shih-cheng drowns himself, while the madman in the other story fails to break through the bars behind which the "eels" imprison him. This was the fate of the last generation. Alongside his regret the writer expressed hope. And we have heard the songs of the children with the cry, "I'll set the place on fire!" That generation depicted by Lu Hsun has gone, we have learned from the past, and can reach different conclusions from those characters, which is what Lu Hsun hoped.

FANG CHI

A Myriad Hills Tinged with Red

Introducing Li Ko-jan's Ink and Water-colour Landscapes

Sometime ago I sat in the studio of the painter Li Ko-jan. A dozen or so of his recent works stood in wooden frames in a row against the bookcases. As is the way with all artists, he was having a look at his new paintings from a "distance." As we sat there chatting and looking at the pictures, my attention was drawn particularly to the one facing me directly: a landscape glowing with crimson light like that reflected from clouds at sunset. It made a strong first impression on me, as if the reflected sunset itself had entered through the window and filled the room with dancing colours. But it was early morning, and the sunlight filtering through the trees outside merely dappled the gauze curtains with shimmering golden light. Perhaps my first impression was due to an accidental flash of sunlight on the glass of the frame; still I could not help marvelling a bit at it.

I knew from long acquaintance with Li Ko-jan that he used colours sparingly, perhaps because he followed the old admonition to "treasure ink as if it were gold." For instance, his

Fang Chi, story-writer, essayist and poet, is also a connoisseur of art. He was born in Hopei Province in 1919. In his youth he took part in revolutionary student movements and later became a newspaper correspondent. His works include *Unconnected Tales*, a collection of stories, *Voyage on the Yangtse*, a book of essays and *Endlessly Flows the Yangtse*, a volume of poems.



Apricots in Spring Rain South of the Yangtse done in light ink and lightest pink is characterized by its sparing use of colour. He has brought out the romantic aura of the spring rain south of the Yangtse by means of delicate washes with the one colour pink for the misty apricot blossoms. In his *Autumn Wind Brings a Red Shower*, he adds dull yellow to crimson for the frosted leaves, making them bright but heavy, not fragile, in order to show the rich fruitfulness of autumn. These are ways very different from those of other artists.

In recent years, striving to attain the ideal of "power and luxuriance" in his landscape paintings, Li Ko-jan seems to be exploring new ground by depicting hills and streams, trees and rocks, fresh air and sunlight as a closely integrated whole. That is why he has been using more greens and blues, and his newer landscapes are mostly of the verdant summer, rich and luxuriant. In this he is following in the footsteps of his teacher, the late Huang Pin-hung, an outstanding modern landscape painter who all his life aimed at achieving this same "power and luxuriance" in his landscape painting. In order to grasp the variety and

changes of nature Li Ko-jan often watched the landscape at night to capture the nocturnal appearance of mountains and hills.

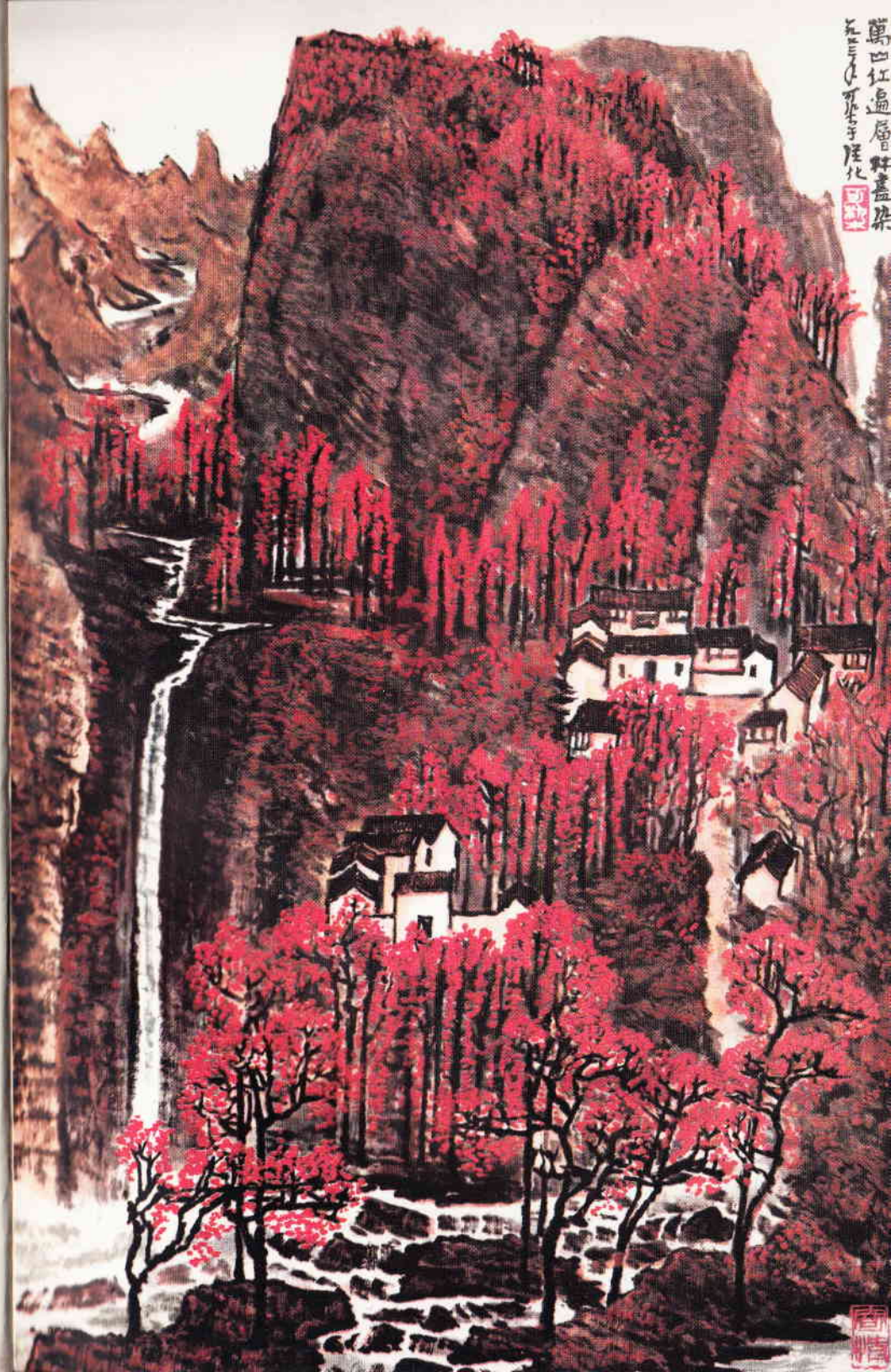
Last year, in a friend's house I saw a painting Li Ko-jan had done for him, entitled *In the Midst of a Thousand Plum Blossoms*. It was dominated by crimson, splashed on with a powerful brush and highlighting the spring riot of the plum blossoms bursting into bloom like burning clouds. The hills were sketched in heavy ink, black as lacquer and sharply outlined so that they formed a strong contrast with the vivid coloured flowers and conveyed the artist's longing for spring. This latter technique of Li Ko-jan comes from yet another teacher of his, the late Chi Pai-shih, that brilliant modern Chinese painter who was adept at using such contrasts of red and black to create pictures with great emotional force.

However, this picture of dazzling crimson now facing me in the studio seemed different again from previous pictures by its creator. A magnificent glow lit it up; it was compact and vividly conceived, majestic and beautiful; it gave an uplift to one's spirit. The artist's inscription of two lines from Chairman Mao Tse-tung's poem, *Changsha*,

*A myriad hills all tinged with red,
Tier upon tier of crimsoned woods,*

further enhanced its air of magnificence.

I was impelled to stand up and take a closer look at this new picture. I saw that the hills were all done in dry ink with fine "wrinkles" showing an angular strength. Starting from the lower part of the picture, the hills rose higher and steeper until finally they stood ranged, fold upon fold, in sharp precipitous peaks. Luxuriant trees dyed vermilion encircled the peaks in a stretch of dazzling colour rising along the folds of the mountains in even but unmonotonous lines, a grave yet passionate note. The red leaves on the hillside, like the red glow at sunset, not only tinged the hills, the wrinkles of the rocks and the space between the trees with colour but cast a warm rosy light over the houses half-way up the hill, the waterfall cascading down the gully and the clear stream flowing by the foot-hills all drawn in black and white. The blank white spaces in the picture further enhanced



萬山紅遍層林盡染
一九五九年十月
李可久畫於滬北



the colour effect by creating vivid contrasts so that though the scene was one of late autumn it was full of life and vitality.

Li Ko-jan comes of peasant stock and joined the ranks of China's contemporary artists without completely discarding his strongly peasant characteristics. Although he graduated from the famous Hangchow Art School some thirty years ago, he learned his art from his experiences of life, particularly after he made the acquaintances of his two great masters, Chi Pai-shih and Huang Pin-hung. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, he became a professor in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. His many trips during the past decade have carried him to all the famous mountains and rivers of China, and led to the accumulation of a great pile of sketches. His paintings show his strong love for nature and sensitive reaction to it.

Chinese landscape painters have always laid great stress on the importance of the total creative conception of the painting, as that which determines the life of the painting. This attitude is the same as that of the Chinese poet to classical Chinese poetry. In both cases, "creative conception" connotes both the ideas and feelings expressed and the art by which they are materialized; in landscape painting it is what the ancients called "sentiments embodied in a scene." When the sentiments of the artist are truly embodied in the scene which he depicts by means of his art, then the viewer, contemplating the pictured scene, will divine the sentiments of the artist or "enter the scene" as depicted and conceived by the artist with the sentiments expressed so that creation and appreciation become a closely integrated process. It is in this process that the artistic effect of a painting is fully realized.

Another important element in Chinese painting is the use of brush and ink and colour in their unique Chinese forms, the basic means of expressing the artist's creative conception on the chosen ground. As the structure of lines are important in classical Chinese poetry, so are brushwork and the use of ink and colour in Chinese painting. The brush stroke and colour of the ink on the rice paper or silk used for Chinese painting produce a direct aesthetic effect in the same way as in Chinese calligraphy. The artist materializes his artistic conception by means of brush and

ink, and so displays his own style of art and aesthetic judgement of life.

Chinese art history records the beginning of landscape painting during the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907); its growth during the Sung dynasty (960-1271), and its maturity during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). In the beginning, as was the case with art in other countries, hills and streams and nature in general were depicted only as a background for human figures and in pictorial stories. One of the earliest masterpieces extant today, the *Goddess of the River Lo* attributed to the fourth-century painter Ku Kai-chih, shows a background of hills and rivers which is still simple and crude in pattern. In *Spring Outing* by Chan Tzu-chien of the Sui dynasty (A.D. 587-618) the hills and streams have a more definite shape and prominence, but the main content of the picture is still the human figures. By the Tang dynasty, thanks to a period of fairly stable political rule and prosperous economic life, all branches of literature and art reached unprecedented heights and Tang times became known as the "renaissance" of Chinese feudal society. New changes appeared in regard to man's relations with nature; nature became an object of aesthetic contemplation, and this found expression in painting. The advance of the art of calligraphy to maturity provided improved skills in the use of brush and ink. It was thus that landscape painting as a genre in itself came to hold an important place in Chinese painting.

It is difficult to say which, if any, of the Tang dynasty landscapes that have come down to us are genuine. We can only guess from literary records what the landscapes of those times were like. The green and gold landscapes of two famous painters of the Tang dynasty, Li Ssu-hsun and his son, Li Chao-tao, must have been a reflection of the splendour and magnificence of the Tang dynasty at its height; while Wu Tao-tzu's *A Thousand Li down the River Shu* manifested its wide-ranging spirit and passionate temperament. As for the works of landscape painters of the Five Dynasties and the Sung dynasty such as Ching Hao, Kuan Tung, Tung Yuan and Chu Jan, these indeed attained a high level of maturity. The magnificent spirit and powerful style embodied in their vigorous scenes of mountains and rivers show a strong sentiment and love for their native land. When the Mongolians ruled China during the Yuan dynasty, many men of

letters lived as recluses in the hills, and well-known painters of the Yangtse Valley such as Huang Kung-wang, Wang Meng, Ni Yun-lin and Wu Cheng expressed, from different angles, the indomitable national spirit of men who lamented the fact that their beloved rivers and hills were ravaged. This period was marked by further advances in the use of brush and ink resulting in a wider range and greater versatility in brushwork, the ability to create more generalized forms and strokes more pregnant with meaning. Following this, famous painters of the Ming dynasty such as Chen Hung-shou and Hsiao Yun-chung used their art to depict the reality of their times and the hardships of the people in masterly portrayals of contemporary social life. Another school of painters at that time, known as the scholar painters, and including Wen Cheng-ming, Shen Chou, Chou Ying and Tang Ying, made their original contribution to the advance of the art and craft of painting. In the seventeenth century, under the harsh rule of the Ching dynasty painters with a sense of justice and patriotism, like the famous "four monks of the Yangtse Valley" and the "eight painters of Yangchow" stirred by a spirit of revolt and protest, started a new school in painting with a romanticist style.

In the modern era, Huang Pin-hung was one of the greatest Chinese landscape painters. In a verse inscribed on one of his paintings, this great master said:

*Precise in their delineation Tang paintings are akin to woven silk;
Dark and majestic, like a chiselled inscription, is the art of Sung.
Strength enough to control ten thousand oxen, must inspire the brush;
Only thus is a powerful and luxuriant art to be achieved.*

This ideal of a "powerful and luxuriant art" in landscape painting, which he pursued all his life, also denotes a spirit of patriotism and realism. In his use of the brush and ink too, Huang Pin-hung attained a unique skill. Many artists today follow in his footsteps. They carry on and develop the excellent tradition of Chinese landscape painting: they depict the majestic rivers and hills of the new China and imbue them with the thoughts and sentiments and aesthetic views of our new era. Li Ko-jan stands out prominently among these brilliant landscape painters of today.



Silhouette of Picture Mountain

Li Ko-jan's paintings are powerful yet simple, vivid and moving. Every brush stroke is done with such thought and confident authority that one glance is enough to convince the viewer that here is a serious and conscientious painter who owes his achievements to something more than talent and inspiration. An ink sketch like *Silhouette of Picture Mountain* evidences his training in the use of brush and ink. It fully brings out the shape and feel of the mountains and rocks through brushwork alone without enlisting the help of colours and other means. Picture Mountain in Kweilin, Kwangsi Province, famed for the beauty of its natural scenery, is a place that has stirred the imagination and fantasy of countless people. Its rock surfaces are so eaten away by the elements through ages of erosion that it resembles a gigantic sculpture of nine horses, hence its name: *Picture Mountain of Nine Horses*. Many poets and painters of old have made play with this imagined resemblance; Li Ko-jan, however, has painted a true picture of it without connecting it with the legend

of nine horses. He reproduces the sharp peaks of the mountains and the grotesque shapes of its rocks so successfully that one can feel the very texture of the Karst limestone. This faithful portrayal also captures in full the unique beauty of the Kweilin landscape.

This picture is so unusual among modern Chinese landscapes that the first time I saw it I sent a little poem written in the classical style to the artist as a token of my appreciation:

*"Wrinkles" and brushwork unmatched in fineness,
Ink like fine lacquer, brush sharp as a graver,
Bring Kweilin's landscape vividly before our eyes.
This freshness of conception is born of superb craftsmanship.*

And I think such freshness in conception is one of the unique charms of Li Ko-jan's paintings.

Boats



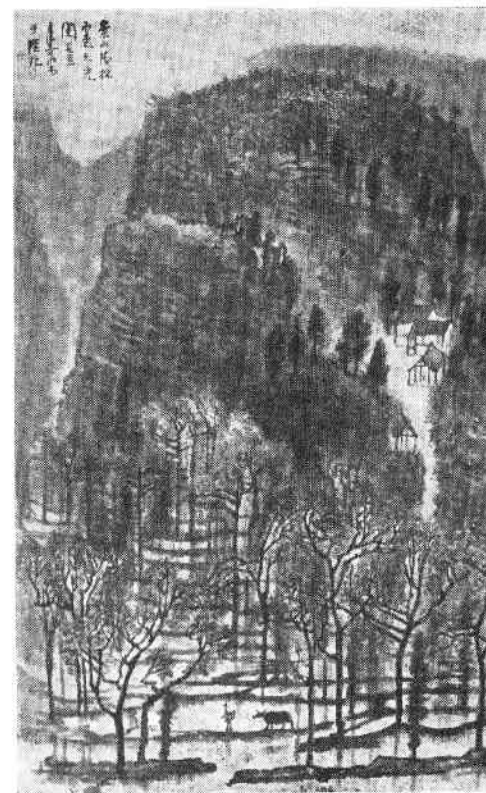
Some of Li Ko-jan's paintings are very simply handled but pregnant with meaning. His *Boats*, for instance, is done in horizontal and vertical lines; he has painted it with light washes of ink and blue to depict that moment in the misty light of dawn before the fishermen start out for their day's work. But the simplicity is far removed from immaturity, and implicit but unexpressed sentiments give the picture a rich meaning. A careful viewer will note the accuracy and vitality of his lines and see them not merely as the outline of the boats or the figures of the men but as embodying the artist's deep sentiments towards the fishermen and the surrounding landscape. As I have said earlier, ink and brush are the direct means with which the artist expresses his sentiments; this picture is a good example of this truism.

Li Ko-jan's *Fishing Boats in the Willows* is another good example of the power of his ink and brush. This is a picture of fishing boats returning home as a storm rises. The willows by the lake show the havoc wrought by the wind; the full sails of the boats denote the fishermen's tension while the tremulous curves of the rolling waves make one feel that the wind is rippling over the paper. The dynamic feel of the whole picture carries the stirred emotions of the painter. There is clearly no room here for hesitation and each brush stroke is irrevocably made. Just as sails are manoeuvred by the skill of the boatman to catch the wind, so here the brush is wielded with the experienced hand and guided by the sensitive eye of the artist, sweeping on, full course, until the artist has fully realized the conception matured in his mind.

The three paintings just mentioned when taken together give a fairly comprehensive picture of the author's approach to his art: his truthfulness to nature, his love of life and the deep passion with which he brings his artistic conception to realization on paper. Only by understanding that approach can we understand why his pictures are imbued with life, how he projects his ideas and expresses his aesthetic judgement of life.

Comparable to *A Myriad Hills Tinged with Red*, is another of Li Ko-jan's outstanding landscapes: *Dark Forests* which expresses "profundity" as compared to the "warmth" embodied in the former. The richness and dignity of this picture

show the artist's admiration for the splendour of the mountains and waters of his native land; the patch of azure sky reflected in the paddy-fields under the deep forests adds a touch of brightness in the midst of the dark trees. The man leading the ox going across the small path in the fields brings the picture to life. All this — the solidity of the hills, the darkness of the trees, the limpid water and the vitality of the man form a pattern of vivid contrasts and interrelations as in nature itself so that the



Dark Forests

distance of the hills, the order of the trees, the angles of the lines and the shades of the ink, as well as light and air, darkness and blank space fall into place so as to create the consciousness of an integrated artistic whole.

It is perhaps too early to say that Li Ko-jan has already reached full maturity as an artist. It is sometimes felt that his carefulness in the use of ink and brush may, in some respects, have hindered the flow of his imagination so that in one or two of his paintings one may detect an over-painstaking effort, a sense of strain.

In an article he wrote two years ago, about how he learned to paint, Li Ko-jan mentioned that it was necessary to have deep,

wide-ranging roots in life and a diligent apprenticeship in craftsmanship; that it was not advisable to seek one's own way too early. To achieve artistic maturity, the artist, he said, must gradually integrate his own thoughts and feelings in life with those of the people and master the traditional skills so that step by step and in due course he could find his own way in art and attain a higher level through diligent creative work. Li Ko-jan's paintings are a testimony to the truth of his own words. This indeed is the road he has taken and he continues to work to this end with diligence and great endeavours, seeking to perfect his art.



WANG CHAO-WEN

The Artist and His Audience

THE DEPICTION OF CHARACTER COMES FIRST

The Szechuan opera actor Peng Hai-ching once told me that while training to act in opera he rehearsed the part of a murderer.

His teacher asked, "What are you killing the man with?"

He answered, "A wooden sword."

"No, that's wrong. Go away and think it over again."

The next day, asked the same question, he replied, "With a sword."

Still his teacher was not satisfied and told him, "No, you kill a man not with your sword but with your heart."

This is a thought-provoking answer. And we must admit that the best exponents of the traditional drama have a profound understanding of the art of "entering into the character." In addition to mastering the conventions of the classical theatre, they pay great attention to feeling.

A well-acted drama, in so far as it can hold an audience spell-bound, has something in common with conjuring. A murder or suicide committed with a wooden or papier-mâché sword is clearly

Wang Chao-wen, born in 1909, is a well-known art critic, sculptor, and at present editor of the bi-monthly *Fine Arts*. His writings include several collections of articles on art, *On the Creation of New Arts*, *What the Masses Love to See and Hear*, and *One for Ten* which is a collection of essays on the arts. The two pieces printed here are taken from this book.

false, but an actor can trick the audience into believing in it. Unlike conjuring, however, the drama does not make you worry for a moment that the victim on the stage is really dead. By means of a psychologically sound imitation of a murder or suicide, the actor projects a distinctive character, who recalls other similar characters to the audience, thereby deepening their insight into life and sublimating their feelings.

To me, plays which depend for effect on mechanical devices are too much like conjuring tricks, neglecting the expression of thought and emotion. If in the search for sensation a producer draws the audience's attention to the stage setting rather than to the characters, then drama which should be a noble means of education degenerates into something perhaps lower than vaudeville shows meant purely for amusement.

Those exponents of Chinese opera who excel in their art are really like magicians. Thanks to their supreme skill they can trick the audience into believing that on the bare stage are doors, stairs, carts, horses, boats, bridges, mountains and rivers, that the action is taking place in real surroundings, that murder is committed with a real sword, for instance. However, Chinese actors do not regard themselves as conjurers. Their purpose is not to amaze spectators or force them to admire their skill in conveying a semblance of reality by making the stage seem full of objects, in the way that a conjurer produces dozens of eggs from a handkerchief. No, their purpose is to reveal the minds of men in specific circumstances, good fortune and ill, joy and pain, to disclose their virtues and vices, their moral beauty and vileness, to help the audience to recognize such characters in real life, and to arouse feelings of envy, pity, hatred or admiration. If undue attention were paid to the stage setting, real doors, horses, hills and water would hamper the artist's portrayal of his role. This would neither satisfy the audience nor do justice to the opera actor, who after all is not a conjurer.

If we consider the parallel case of poetry, we find that scenery is not simply a background but is often coloured by the poet's emotions, becoming the tangible expression of his mood. Li Po's poem *Gazing at Mount Tienmen* runs:

*Tienmen is sundered by the River Yangtse,
Whose green waves flowing east take a new course;*

*On either bank loom two blue hills,
And through the sunset drifts a lonely sail.*

You may have to read these lines carefully to realize how the description of scenery conveys the poet's feeling, whereas more obvious examples occur in Wang Shih-fu's poetic drama *The West Chamber*, as in this description of the young scholar's longing for his love:

*My lamp on its low stand burns dim,
The shabby screen lets through the cold.
My lamp is dim,
And out of reach my dream.
A piercing wind seeps through the lattice window,
And the chilly paper rustles.*

Is this a description of physical surroundings? Undoubtedly, but it is more than that. Similarly the novel *Heroes of the Marshes* has a description of scenery in the chapter about the burning of the fodder depot* which is closely linked with the mood of the character involved. Such scenes are not presented as independent phenomena but as a component part of the portrayal of character.

The short and humorous Szechuan opera *Autumn River* deals with a young nun who hires a boat in order to catch up with her lover and who keeps begging the old boatman to make haste. Conventional movements conjure up the boat and river, while the descriptive dialogue helps to show what is passing through the minds of the characters. It is not enough for actors to use their skill to evoke the non-existent river and boat on the stage. What is more important is for them to bring out the complex feelings of a girl pursuing her lover under such circumstances and the sense of humour of the old boatman, who knows that she is in a hurry but enjoys teasing her. Although the girl's impatience, anxiety and joy are shown by imitating the movements of someone in a boat as it leaves the shore, rocks on the river and speeds through the water, the purpose here is not to depict the motions of the boat but the specific mental state of the characters.

The Chinese classical drama pays little attention to scenery and stage properties but concentrates on the characters, aiming at a

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1959.

concise portrayal such as we find in the paintings of Pa-ta-shan-jen or Chi Pai-shih, who rarely supply a background. The excellence of this method lies not only in its power to conjure up certain images which bring to mind many other things which are not directly presented. An artist who chooses not to treat his material in a naturalistic manner does so not because he lacks the ability to reproduce all that he sees and feels, but because he decides there is no need, that such a method might even cramp his style. The full depiction of character and of conflict is the supreme duty of dramatic art. A performance which is not based on the character's psychology and played "from the heart" will fail to enthrall spectators who regard the drama not as a conjuring show but as a means of learning more about life. No matter how real the moon, stars and lightning on the stage may appear, these will not hold their interest very long.

APPRECIATION IS A PROCESS OF "RE-CREATION"

Some days ago I enjoyed a ballad singer's performance which set me thinking about the relationship between the artist and the audience.

When the performer said, "A bright moon hangs over the horizon," he did not indicate the shape of the moon with his hands or point to the distance, but simply raised his head slightly and looked upwards. Instead of using clumsy gestures to represent the non-existent moon, he tried to make his listeners imagine it and, above all, enter into the feeling of the character looking at the moon. Men's moods and emotions take first place in his art, not descriptions of natural phenomena for their own sake; so that even when not describing a character directly he places his emphasis on the man's feelings.

Whether a work of art is appreciated or not depends mainly on its content, but another factor is beauty in form and fine technique, both of which are closely bound up with the understanding and taste of the audience. An experienced artist knows the requirements and understanding of his public and grasps those crucial things which help the audience to develop their imagination and

ability to correlate different ideas. He should guide their thinking in a certain direction so that they can make new discoveries and supplement the image he supplies, instead of just accepting it. Because he leaves the spectators scope to "re-create" the artistic image, the latter will not criticize the artist for failing to express his ideas fully. On the contrary, this will make audiences appreciate the artist more, because he understands and respects them and shows confidence in their powers of comprehension. This is much more stimulating and beneficial than mere passive acceptance.

Artistic images are no more than limited yet forceful stimuli for the imagination, for audiences accept and even "enrich" or "improve on" such images on the basis of their own feelings and experience. Music appeals to the ear, but the listener sees images in his mind's eye. The same principle applies to the visual art of painting, for a great painting like that of turbulent waves by the twelfth-century artist Ma Yuan almost makes you hear the thunder of surging water. I cannot for the moment think of an apt term to describe this mental activity, so let us call it a process of "re-creation."

Any artist who tries to create an image of real life which will benefit and appeal to the public cannot ignore the latter's need to "re-create" this image, and the effect of this. Of course, audience participation is different from the actors' performance of a play. The spectator does not have to express the image present in his mind in a visible form. He cannot change the objective reality which is independent of the human will. At the same time he is not simply accepting the image, for when moved by an artistic image he invariably "supplements" and even "transforms" it. This mental activity is not standardized and uniform, but it is a necessary process. Kuo Hsi, a famous landscape painter of the eleventh century, insisted that a work must move those who saw it so deeply that they felt the mountains and streams were accessible, that they could live in those landscapes or travel through them. This implies that such images should not only appear truthful but must exercise a strong enchantment to draw people into an imaginary world, just as a good drama draws spectators out of themselves to become active participants in the play. A special power of attraction is possessed by apparently incomplete pictures: a monk by the

stream whose monastery is hidden by the woods, an inn sign above the trees when the inn is out of sight, a ferry at the ford waiting for travellers to come down the road. . . . These fleeting glimpses and fragments of a scene make you imagine what is not directly presented and may even draw you into the picture, thereby strengthening your ties with life itself. This delightful and beneficial method of appreciation has been described as "travelling while lying down" or "roaming in spirit." It has often been said that a fine landscape painting gives the impression of a thousand *li* in the space of a single foot. But how can such an effect be achieved without a discriminating viewer?

In works of fiction, where a character's personality is clearly depicted, the reader may imagine all sorts of external details. You may think a certain character is like this or that person you know in real life, or you may visualize him as a complete stranger. Even when his salient characteristics are well depicted, his appearance may not be so graphically presented as in a painting, nor will he be as tangible as a character on the stage. All arts have their distinctive features and limitations. Characters in a novel or story are not visible to the eye, and this is one of the weaknesses as well as one of the strengths of fiction. Since the image is not fixed and immutable, the reader is free to use his experience of real life to re-create it in his mind. (The author does the same himself when creating characters.) And since different readers have different experiences, feelings and mental associations, although they visualize a character on the base of the descriptions of his main characteristics, in some respects they will view him in very different lights. Thus a critic has said that "a thousand readers mean a thousand Hamlets." Of course, the re-creation of a character must be determined by the image in the book; thus readers, however different, will not confuse Hamlet with Don Quixote.

An artist should try to create a rich and full image, but his success in this respect depends less, I fancy, on his raw material than on how truthfully and vividly he projects it, also on the extent to which the image can express his own thoughts and feelings. The artist should "co-operate" with his public and not attempt to introduce extraneous material in a naturalistic manner. This shows his respect for his audience and a responsible attitude towards them. A master craftsman does not distract his audience unneces-

sarily. Works of fiction pass over certain details, plays have some action offstage, paintings suggest something without actually showing it. All these are specific measures to stimulate interest and increase the artistic impact, while truthfully reflecting life and fully expressing the subject. This does not mean that the artistic image is incomplete.

A pause in the singing or action of a stage performance, just like a blank space in painting, does not mean a break in continuity but is another method of continuing the performance. Experts regard a pause as an integral part of speech, and silence is by no means an effortless performance. In the Szechuan opera *The Emperor Goes Off to the War*, two ladies bid goodbye to the emperor while another of his favourites, facing the audience, has to show her jealousy in silence and convince the spectators that her part is not superfluous, without trying to steal the show. This is far from easy. At each pause in the action or dialogue, a talented actor conveys his feelings at that moment not only with his eyes but with his whole attitude. Such a gap may be bridged by the mental activity of the actor, by silent speech, as it were. It may also be bridged by the audience. Spectators who are held entranced by a drama are kept in constant suspense, speculating about the outcome or worrying about the fate of the characters, even if these happen to be historical figures. This is what makes watching a play so enjoyable. So when there comes a pause in the action or dialogue, provided of course it is a natural one, the audience's minds work harder than ever and they do not simply sit idle. The response may vary with different individuals, but all alike respond to the legitimate demand made by the actor, arriving at a better understanding of the play.

Art need not copy life in every respect. If an actor overlooks the requirements of the audience and sheds floods of tears or laughs himself silly on the stage, even if these actions correspond to real life and accord with his temperament and situation, the audience is not likely to be moved or to appreciate the actor's efforts. On the contrary, they may be displeased, for if the actor has done all the crying and laughing what is there left for the audience to do? It is even more important to realize that although an actor shows clearly that he wants to move the spectators, he may be unable to bring home to them the true feelings of the character he is portray-

ing. An artist who respects his audience will never try to ram anything down their throats. He knows that you cannot force an emotional response. An article full of jargon is not appreciated precisely because the writer shows too little consideration for his readers and their need to "re-create" something for themselves.

Tu Fu's poem *Looking at the Snow* has this evocative power to a high degree. It is twilight and a snow-storm is raging outside, while an old man sits sadly thinking of the war, his separation from his family and his poverty. His wretchedness is conveyed in these two lines:

*The dipper is cast aside, no foam brims in the cup;
In the stove a fire seems to glow.*

No direct mention is made here of cold and poverty. It is not explicitly stated that the old man cannot afford the comfort of wine or a fire, yet his misery is clearly brought out. For these unemotional lines make us aware of the unshed tears of the wanderer. With an indefinite word like "seems" the poet links two antithetical concepts. He contrasts the glow of a fire and a fireless stove, two concepts which are contradictory and cannot co-exist at the same time and place. Moreover by the use of "seems" he conjures up a picture of a glowing fire only to destroy the illusion. This is deeply moving and shows a high degree of art. Since the glow of a fire and a fireless stove form such a strong contrast, the old man's wretchedness is driven home to the reader. The impression made is a strong one, and the reader's eyes are opened so that by using his imagination he invests the poem with a much wider meaning, understanding the hard lot of the poor in the past and the poet's close affinity to the people.

The use of specific artistic images to stimulate a reader to think for himself, to "re-create" the image and "enrich" it in his own mind although it is independent of his will — this is not just a question of the magic power of art but depends also on the ideological content. For the thought is embodied in the image, not tacked on to it. So while the artistic image which stimulates the fancy and is grasped by the mind is further "enriched" by the reader, at the same time it serves to deepen his understanding.

Interview

YANG YU

'The Playwright Tsao Yu

Many years ago, during the interval at a show, the friend sitting next to me asked:

"See that man wearing glasses over there?"

I looked in the direction indicated and saw a man in a dark overcoat gazing in front of him as if deep in thought. Someone went up to greet him, they started talking, and he began to make animated gestures. Then he stood up abruptly — he was not tall — and strode hastily past us, out of the theatre.

"Who is he?" I inquired.

"The playwright Tsao Yu."

That fleeting glimpse of Tsao Yu made a lasting impression, for he struck me as such a lively, excitable character. Recently I went to interview him. And sitting in his neat, well-appointed study, talking with him face to face, I had my earlier impression confirmed. Tsao Yu sat at his desk and his darting glance was keen, though he wore thick glasses. He is a man who cannot conceal his feelings, and even strangers are made quickly aware of his distinctive, almost boyish frankness.

Worked up while talking, he admitted:

"I always seem to be in the grip of some emotion, either love or hate, which carries me away. This often forces me to write. In the fifty years and more that I have lived, there have been

Yang Yu is a member of our editorial staff.



tremendous changes. I've come across all sorts of people and events: some enraged me, some saddened me, some made me blissfully happy. . . . All left indelible impressions. . . ."

Tsao Yu was born at a time of great upheavals and changes. In 1911, the year after his birth, came the revolution which toppled the Ching dynasty. But then reaction prevailed and China was plunged into internecine strife between rival warlords. Tsao Yu's home was in Tientsin, a busy industrial and commercial centre in north China close to an important seaport. This city, built with the blood and sweat of Chinese labourers, was infested by foreign adventurers in outlandish costumes as well as corrupt officials, feudal gangsters, profiteers and social parasites of every description. Their shameless excesses contrasted vividly with the inhuman conditions of the labouring people. Even as a child, Tsao Yu was painfully aware of social injustice. In years of famine, peasants driven to desperation carried their children in baskets suspended from poles to sell in the city streets. Little Tsao Yu, unable to bear the sight of their silent, grief-ravaged faces, would turn his head away as he gave them alms. Such

tragedies brought home to him the horror of the old society. He belonged to an official family which occupied a large house in one of the foreign concessions. His parents and elder brother led an indolent life, seldom getting up before noon. In those long, lonely days the sensitive boy wandered about disconsolately by himself in the vast silent house or recited the old classics to his tutor.

"That was a grim existence and I hated it from the bottom of my heart," he said. "Those surroundings made me rather a gloomy boy. My home and the world outside seemed so grey and hopeless that I detested them."

These early experiences had a considerable influence on Tsao Yu's writing. Later he entered the well-known Nankai Middle School in Tientsin and was drawn into student activities. He joined the drama group and became an enthusiastic amateur actor, taking part in plays by Ting Hsi-lin, a veteran Chinese dramatist, in Ibsen's *The Doll's House* and *Enemy of the People* and some of Molière's comedies. When he could not sleep at night he would devour the plays of Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov, Gorky and Eugene O'Neill. The magnificent lines of Shakespeare made such an appeal to him that he could recite long passages by heart. He had a passionate admiration, too, for Greek tragedy, the superb works of Aeschylus and Euripedes. His devoted study of classical world literature laid a solid foundation for his subsequent writing.

What drew Tsao Yu most strongly, however, was life itself. Those were troubled and dangerous times. In his school there were underground revolutionary organizations. One of his classmates, who was a revolutionary, was arrested one day without warning, and soon afterwards Tsao Yu heard that he had died a hero's death. Once he met a powerfully built worker on the train who urged him earnestly to have the courage to struggle against tyranny. On another occasion he visited a gaol with some of his friends, and a prisoner slipped him a note exposing the inhuman treatment they were receiving and calling on the people to see that justice was done. . . . These brief, accidental encounters convinced him that hope lay with people like these, and he admired their strength and vision. But although this

admiration is clearly expressed in his plays, he felt powerless to change his surroundings. Recalling these years, he said:

"Shakespeare wrote in *Julius Caesar*:

*Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*

At that time I was sincerely convinced that those who dared to revolt were masters of their fate, while I had the desire to do so but not the strength. I felt frustrated, hostile to all around me, borne off on a swirling torrent of emotion. The need to express my bottled up indignation was probably what impelled me to write *Thunderstorm*."

Tsao Yu was still a student in the department of foreign literature of Tsinghua University in Peking when he wrote this play. He had previously embarked on the study of medicine, but sensitive as he was to the life around him he found the long medical training unbearably irksome. So he had to abandon this career, although he never ceased to admire the men and women who devoted their lives to science. Two of his later plays, *Transformation* and *Bright Skies*, have doctors as their chief characters. During the year of his graduation from Tsinghua University, Peking, Tsao Yu worked in the university library for three months and wrote the tragedy *Thunderstorm* which he had long been turning over in his mind. He showed this first play of his to Pa Chin and Chin Yi, two writers then staying in Peking. Soon after, it was published in the *Literature Quarterly*. It immediately aroused attention. Critics and playgoers in general agreed that it was the finest Chinese play produced in the thirties. It has been reprinted thirty times and still draws enthusiastic audiences today, three decades later. Tsao Yu was only twenty-three years old when he wrote the play.

The action in *Thunderstorm* takes place in 1923. This tragedy in four acts, so packed with suspense, gives a comprehensive picture of the vices of the family of Chou Pu-yuan, a bureaucrat-capitalist. The young playwright revealed most penetrating powers of observation and remarkable skill in creating a wide range of characters. In connection with his characterization, Tsao Yu told me:

"I like to concentrate contradictions and put my characters in the position where these contradictions are sharpest, for this is the easiest way to bring out the development of each. This concentrated method of character portrayal can be likened to peeling a tangerine, for you first peel off the skin, then take segment by segment. In the same way all your characters are finally revealed. It can also be likened to winding the silk off the cocoon until the pupa inside is disclosed. Chou Pu-yuan, an old capitalist in semi-feudal and semi-colonial China, is the sort of man who may seem very dignified and honourable on the surface, even able to convince himself that he is a good man, a paragon of virtue, and that others have let him down. This shows his hypocrisy and pettiness. He often thinks wistfully of Shih-ping, the maidservant whom he seduced and then abandoned. He flatters himself that he has remained faithful to her memory, preening himself on his virtue until he becomes more self-satisfied than ever. All this simply typifies the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie."

Soon after writing this play, Tsao Yu left the university. He did some teaching but much of his time was spent in wandering from place to place, working at various jobs, and he came across many extraordinary characters in that abnormal, monstrous society under the fascist rule of Chiang Kai-shek. He also witnessed such intolerable injustice that once more he had to vent his indignation with his pen. Two years later he produced *Sunrise*, another tragedy in four acts depicting the licence of the rich and the wretched conditions of the lower strata in a big city.

"It seems to me now that *Thunderstorm* shows my revolt against the family and *Sunrise* my revolt against society," he said. "The characters in both plays were very familiar to me. They were products of an abnormal society and I had been in touch with each of them. I loathed those who were thoroughly corrupt and sympathized with their victims."

Sunrise was followed by *Wilderness* which reflected the terrible life of Chinese peasants. *Transformation* dealt with life in a hospital during the War of Resistance Against Japan, *Peking Man* showed the decline of a large feudal family, and *The Family* based on Pa Chin's novel of the same title had as its theme the feudal marriage system.

After liberation Tsao Yu plunged eagerly into a new life. He lived with the men working on the Huai River water conservancy project, then went to the countryside to work with the peasants for a time. New horizons opened up for him, filling him with such pleasure and enthusiasm that he immediately felt the urge to write about the new characters he had come to know. Several dozen essays written at this time were published in a collection entitled *Welcome the Spring*.

After several years of preparation, Tsao Yu turned back to the drama, choosing the life of intellectuals as his theme, since this was the subject most familiar to him. He went to Peking Union Medical College where he had once studied to collect material, and used to talk late into the night with the staff. With his intimate knowledge of the life and views of intellectuals whose experience he had shared, Tsao Yu realized that they had to remould their outlook and way of thinking in order to adapt themselves to the new society and the path before them was not an easy one, but tortuous and complex.

"Intellectuals may achieve something in their life and work, but the satisfaction this brings them is brief and superficial," said Tsao Yu. "Only those who take part in the collective struggle can really understand the meaning of life and know true happiness."

Bright Skies, a three-act play, takes the ideological remoulding of intellectuals as its theme. It deals with the changes in a hospital before and after liberation and the way in which some doctors and bacteriologists who are experts in their field come to understand the nature of U.S. imperialism through their practical work. After meeting with a series of defeats in the aggressive war they launched in Korea in 1951, the U.S. imperialists resorted to the inhuman use of bacteriological weapons against the civilians of Korea. Confronted with these facts the Chinese doctors realize their duty, and join in the struggle to resist U.S. imperialism and aid Korea. The production of this play aroused wide interest among intellectuals.

Tsao Yu next wrote *The Gall and the Sword*, a historical play about a small kingdom which was invaded by a powerful enemy more than two thousand years ago, but whose stout-hearted people finally turned defeat into victory. In this play Tsao Yu experi-

mented with the use of some conventions from the classical Chinese drama. He is now writing another historical play, *Wang Chao-chun*. The heroine of this play, who is well known in folk legend, was sent to the people of an outlying region to improve relations between different Chinese nationalities. A classical opera about Wang Chao-chun has long been popular. But history records that the imperial beauty Wang Chao-chun had herself volunteered to go to the outlying regions; she was a real heroine. And now Tsao Yu is making use of historical researches to write a modern play on this theme.

Tsao Yu keeps a strict discipline in his work. He concentrates on writing in the mornings, then dictates what he has scribbled down hurriedly to his wife or secretary, and revises his script many times. I was often amazed by his characterization, so I asked him to speak about his experience in writing. He is such a modest man that he looked quite embarrassed. After some thought he said:

"What you meet in life are genuine individuals, not people embodying the generalized characteristics of different persons. For instance, I wrote *Thunderstorm* because my interest had been caught by a few specific incidents and characters. Chou Pu-yuan and the chief woman character Fan-yi were people I knew inside out. I had met so many of their sort. Even now, many years later, I still seem to see them before me. *Sunrise* is about the night life of a group of parasites in a high-class hotel in Tientsin. When I was young I came into contact with such strange types, and got to know their character and language. Or take the case of *Peking Man*, which is also based on people I knew well. I was living in Szechuan at the time. I happened to know the young son-in-law of a landlord, who had studied abroad, did no work but gave all his time to fishing and gossip. I used to go with him on his fishing trips. He was an intellectual who could talk but not act, whose character and conversation set me thinking. On the whole, if you want me to speak about my experience, I can only say that in these thirty years I have never been able to write about anything which I have not experienced in real life. I can only write about what I have found in life."

New Publications

Violin Fountain by Yen Chen

Writers' Publishing House, Peking

*He trudged from door to door,
An elm stick in one hand,
A bamboo crate over one arm.*

These lines come from the first poem, *Old Chang's Hands*, in the collection entitled *Violin Fountain*. Old Chang was a poor peasant who before liberation with his toil-worn hands "herded cattle and horses, hauled carts and boats and blunted countless hoes and sickles in the service of wealthy landlords." Yet he was reduced to begging from door to door and was "tied to the black lacquered gate" to be whipped and lashed. Once he was emancipated, he dealt a fatal blow at the vicious landlord class with his same two hands and used them to fight against natural disasters and win a better life. He was given the title of model worker in the socialist era and became the proud recipient of thirteen banners awarded for merit. He came to Peking at last and, with infinite happiness, clasped the great hand of Chairman Mao Tse-tung in his own.

This poem was written in 1953, a few years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, when land reform was carried out in the south. Old Chang typifies thousands of peasants, and this poem stands out among many others on the historic subject of land reform. Sombre yet spirited, it illustrates one facet of Yen Chen.

The poet also writes in a lyrical vein as in *Red Ropes*. Beside the stream winding past the village stands a hoary willow tree and children enjoy swinging on the gay red ropes suspended from its branches. An old woman, who looks after the commune nursery, stands under the tree to watch. As the red ropes sway to and fro, they seem to her to change into a red sash with which a poor peasant girl has hanged herself. But the children flying and whirling around like butterflies in spring bring her back to reality. Again the red ropes turn into a blood-stained cord binding revolutionary martyrs, until the old woman sees the children like red lotus flowers whose

shadows are dancing happily in the stream. The ropes have just changed into an army horse tied to a tree when a bell rings and the children run indoors. In conclusion the poet sings:

*An old willow stands by the stream outside the village,
Its branches downward bent.
Well it knows the price of happiness,
It has witnessed the blood and tears of bygone days.*

When the poet wrote this poem in 1958, as people's communes were being set up in the villages of China, he did not forget the past while singing of the happy life of the present. This was not fortuitous, for Yen Chen grew up and reached maturity in the crucial period when the Chinese people were marching through sufferings and trials to victory. He was born in Shantung Province and spent his childhood there during the War of Resistance Against Japan. After liberation he went to Anhwei Province in the Yangtse River Valley, where he has worked and lived ever since. His deep feeling, keen observation and understanding of the peasants' life are reflected in most of his poems, including his collection *Songs South of the Yangtse*.

About thirty, or nearly half of the poems in *Violin Fountain*, are taken from this earlier collection. We can see that everything in the Yangtse Valley makes a fresh appeal to the poet: commune carters under the willows by the river; bright newly-built brick houses; peasants studying hard on fine spring nights; frogs croaking in early summer; beds of seedlings being weeded; sickles swinging as the reaping begins; sunset clouds over the River Hsinan; hunting by the River Luhua; boats loaded with newly picked tea under the moonlight; singing from the threshing ground; evening songs in a fishing village; the stream of people at Peach Blossom Ford. . . . These scenes, like a series of fresh water-colours, give us a new picture of the villages south of the Yangtse, the enchanting scenery of the south, and the life and work of the people there. *Red Rain* describes the soundless fall of rain in March in the south, when each drop dyes a blossom red or brightens a smiling face. That is when the apricot comes into bloom and the young men handle their new ploughshares lovingly, eager to turn up the soil. In *Mountain Valley* we read:

*Moonlight shimmers on a sea of pear blossom
In the valley this April evening,
Moonbeams and blossom
Merging into one.*

*A wall covered with flowers, a courtyard full of flowers,
A whole path lined with flowers;
The entire valley is slumbering,
The moonbeams and blossom its dream.*

Yen Chen goes on to depict wheel-barrows in the moonlight and tractors under the blossom, all a transparent white, fragrant and serene. Only a red flag flutters softly above the pear blossom, protecting the valley through the night and waiting for the dawn. The next day:

*From the depth of the blossom,
Down fragrant paths,
More wheels will rumble
And more laughter float.*

These poems with their subtle feeling are glowingly alive.

Some poems in this collection deal with the old revolutionary base in the Tapien Mountains. *Cradle* presents a young mother leaning over a cot, recalling to the poet's mind the Tapien Mountains which have borne and bred so many revolutionary fighters.

*This is no cradle
Rocking beside the wall;
Look, swaying under the mother's lamp
Are red mountains!*

The poet recalls the past with a profound sense of gratitude, and in *Red Sentry Post* he expresses his faith in the great future of the revolution.

*Towering above all mountains
Ranged around,
That highest peak
Is burning red as flame.*

This red sentry post has come through the war of resistance and the Liberation War, defending the fruits of revolution. Now this sentinel:

*Sees the sun set and rise over Asia,
Hears the wind from great Africa,
And is stirred by the surging waves from Latin America.*

This fearless sentinel, standing guard against all enemies and gathering storms, is concerned for the struggles of the oppressed peoples in lands far away.

Violin Fountain is permeated with the feelings of a young poet in this revolutionary era, and is to some extent an echo of the voice of this age.

— Chi Chun

The Distant Gobi by Odsor

Writers' Publishing House, Peking

Earlier this year, an article by the veteran writer Mao Tun entitled *On "The Distant Gobi"* was published in *Grassland*, literary monthly of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, together with an open letter to Odsor, the author. Mao Tun paid warm tribute to the young Mongolian writer's achievement and expressed himself "greatly moved and quite delighted" by his book.

Odsor has spent most of his life in the far-stretching grasslands of Inner Mongolia. He did not embark on his career as a writer until after the liberation. Starting with plays, he turned to writing short stories in 1952 and *The Distant Gobi* is a selection of fifteen of his best stories written in the past decade. The book consists of three parts: seven stories written since 1959, one long story, *Pearl-sprinkled Grassland* written in 1962, and seven short stories written before 1957. These tales are vivid portrayals of the Inner Mongolian people during the stirring war of liberation and the years of peaceful construction after it. These many-sided sketches of the people on the grasslands are gripping and vibrant with life.

To deal with the stories chronologically, let us start with the author's early works in Part Three. The first story in this section, *Tale of a Roan Horse*, depicts a brave messenger in a cavalry troop. But it was his second story, *Son of the Herdsmen*, that brought the name of Odsor to the attention of the reading public. This is an outstanding tale of two heroic Mongolian fighters, Bolot and Batsur. In a battle to break through Kuomintang encirclement, Bolot is severely wounded but instead of leaving the battle-field he goes on fighting and draws the enemy fire to himself to save his friend Batsur; he dies a hero's death under enemy barrage. The author succeeds in this story in bringing out the flesh-and-blood relationship between the people of the grassland and the revolutionary fighters.

Another story with a similar theme is *The Distant Gobi* which describes how the herdsmen's feelings towards the people's army

change from fear and alarm to great love and respect. One old woman in the story has been so persecuted by reactionary troops in the past that the mere word "soldier" arouses her fear and hatred. When the revolutionary troops led by the Chinese Communist Party arrives, she eyes them with hostility and gets her daughter-in-law to help her hide what little grain they have in the house. Later, she finds that the men of the liberation army are more gentle than "the lamas begging from door to door," they take nothing from the people no matter how hungry they are, and one young soldier even goes to the length of giving his last scrap of food to her grandson. So her heart is touched and her attitude towards the liberation army changes. She begins to look upon these soldiers fighting for the people as her own kith and kin.

The author's own experience has left him with a strong affection for the brave men of the liberation army and he devoted much attention in his stories to the depiction of these fighters, creating inspiring and unforgettable characters.

His long story, *Pearl-sprinkled Grassland*, is about a group of Mongolian girls who set up a stud farm. Their attempt to improve the breed and multiply the number of cattle on the grassland comes as a shock to some old-fashioned herdsmen who are superstitious, and conflicts arise. The contradiction is well developed and its solution not an over-simplified one. The excellent characterization shows a marked improvement in the author's technique.

However, the most interesting stories in this volume as far as ideological content and artistic form are concerned are the seven in Part One. *The Tale of the Old Squad Leader* is Odsor's first attempt at writing in Chinese. The main character, leader of the cooks' squad, is a simple, genial man with a sense of humour who has worked for many years in the army. His only weaknesses are a liking for the bottle, a tongue that runs away with him and a mulish streak. He has worked conscientiously in the cooks' squad, counting it a joy to serve the fighting men, although this is regarded by some as "menial" work. In his late fifties, he is discharged from the army and given the post of section chief in a coal mine where he continues to mix freely with the cooks and enjoys messing in the kitchen. As in the turbulent war years, he still crosses hills in the wind and rain to inspect the kitchens in various mining districts, and often empties his own purse to help others. The author has succeeded very well in bringing to life this generous, diligent and lovable character who is just an ordinary working man.

In two other stories the author presents two more characters of the "old squad leader" type. Dtalsan, the new league chief in *The Old Driver* who goes to work in the people's commune and Hujtin, director of Silin-gol's first state cattle farm in *Crystal Palace*, are both leading cadres maintaining a close relationship with the people. After years spent working for the revolution, they devote themselves just as selflessly to the large-scale construction of the motherland. Hujtin gallops through snow and storm across the vast grassland to get things ready for the cattle farm. At night, he makes a camp-fire by the river, dines on barbecued antelope he has hunted down himself and sleeps in a shelter built with blocks of ice cut from the river which he jokingly calls his "crystal palace." This romantic name is soon to be justified by the erection of a fine new building for the cattle farm, a great building sparkling with electric lights.

Joyous New Year's Eve represents another type of the author's stories. It is a charming and humorous portrayal of three members of a people's commune who are dedicated heart and soul to collective work. It is New Year's Eve on the grasslands and old Eh-Mitge, who is spending the holidays at the water conservancy construction site with her son, looks forward to meeting Chang Ying, her son's fiancée who has promised to pay her a New Year visit. Suddenly a goods lorry arrives, driven by a young man who introduces himself as the brother of Chang Ying. The old woman who has been bragging about the cleverness of her future daughter-in-law is astounded to hear the young man speak of Chang Ying as a silly girl. It is not until the next morning when her son wakes up and takes off the cap of the sleeping driver, that the old woman realizes the supposed young man is her future daughter-in-law and a very pretty girl at that. Eh-Mitge's cup of happiness is filled to the brim. With this human touch the author shows the people's enthusiasm for work even on the eve of a holiday.

Odsor likes to describe scenery closely connected with the development of the story, thus shedding light on his characters and introducing a lyric note into his style. This is particularly evident in his later tales, and *Crystal Palace* is a good example. The grassland in bitter winter, the swift-footed steed, the raging snow-storm, desolate wilderness and dream-like quality of the night, not only convey an exotic atmosphere but help to bring out the character of the hero. At the end of the story, the author is eager to meet this indomitable man who has worked so indefatigably to build up the cattle farm, but the director has already gone out early in the morn-

ing on business. The story ends with the following description, leaving much to the imagination of the reader:

Blue, crystal sky blurs into rosy morning clouds, reaching down to meet an expanse of misty white grassland, the contrasting colours melting into each other. Between the rosy clouds and the grassland a rider jolts along through the white mist like a tall pine on a snow-clad mountain, powerful and majestic. In a minute, he is hidden from view by the crystal palace. . . .

Odsor's stories are unmistakably Mongolian in colour with a distinct flavour of the grasslands. This is due to his successful descriptions of beautiful grassland scenery, the use of vivid local idioms and old sayings and his reflection of the customs and habits of the Mongolian people. His profoundly truthful depiction of their pursuit of happiness and love of labour shows us the new type of Mongolian people today and is the result of the author's devotion to the herdsmen in this area and his familiarity with the life here.

— Wen Shih-ching

Chronicle

Bicentennial of Tsao Hsueh-chin's Death

An exhibition commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of Tsao Hsueh-chin, author of the famous Chinese classical novel the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, was formally opened on August 17 in the Hall of Literary Splendour of the old imperial palace in Peking. This novel, filled with a democratic and realist spirit, has an outstanding position in the history of Chinese literature. Set against the background of the decline and fall of four families, the Chias and their relatives the Shihs, Wangs and Hsuehs, it has as its central theme the tragic love of Chia Pao-yu and Lin Tai-yu. On a wide canvas it paints a truthful picture of the social reality of eighteenth-century China, exposing the corruption of the feudal ruling class and making a powerful attack on the feudal system. This novel stands unrivalled among classical Chinese fiction for its brilliant construction on an epic scale and its realistic and highly individual characterization.

The exhibition presents the age of the novel in great detail, reflecting the class contradictions and class struggles of the feudal society of that period and exposing the iniquity of the ruling class. It is divided into six sections with more than two thousand exhibits. The first section covers the author's life and family. Eleven paintings depict Tsao Hsueh-chin's childhood in an official family, the fall from imperial favour and confiscation of the family's wealth which turned rich young Tsao Hsueh-chin into a poor scholar and helped him to grasp the injustice of that time, his life in a village not far from Peking where he spent ten years working on his masterpiece, and the poverty, hardships and death of his young son which combined to kill the author before he was fifty. Three contemporary painters, Liu Tan-chai, Ho Yu-chih and Lin Kai, worked together on these paintings of Tsao Hsueh-chin. They depict the writer in a simple blue cloth gown, yet bring out his dignity and pride, his gallant spirit and his indignation. This section includes much material about the rise and fall of the Tsao family. There are imperial decrees conferring honours upon its members, various me-

morials and tributes they sent to the emperor, relevant imperial edicts, including the one ordering the confiscation of the 'Tsaos' property, and the newly discovered genealogy of the family.

The second section presents Chinese society at the time of the novel. Here we see how the Ching government persecuted scholars in order to stop the spread of opposition ideas. The literati of that time could have their whole families wiped out if they wrote one disloyal word, and hundreds of them were killed. Other exhibits show the government used the system of civil service examinations to control intellectuals, so that scholars who wanted fame or riches spent their lives studying the futile "eight-section" essays with stereotyped themes chosen from classics. Minute copies of the classics less than two inches square were smuggled into the examination hall by some candidates, while others wore inner garments completely covered with writing. These exhibits illustrate the dishonesty of scholars sitting for the examination and the corruption of the examination system.

This section also presents the prosperous development of mercantile industry in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the ceaseless revolt of the peasants and handicraft workers who found their position intolerable. Pawnshop tickets, land contracts, the purchase deeds of slaves and old paintings of famine victims hold up a mirror to those wretched times when thousands were bankrupted by usurers, died of hunger, lost their land or were forced to sell their children to noble families as slaves.

We see the wanton luxury of the nobles who batted on the blood and sweat of the people. One exhibit is an inventory of the property of Ho Shen, a powerful minister who controlled the government for twenty years at the end of the eighteenth century. When finally his estate was confiscated, his ill-gotten wealth was equivalent to the state revenue over a period of ten years! This is the social reality described so penetratingly in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, whose characters are drawn against just such a background.

We are also shown the background of the tragedy of Lin Tai-yu and Chia Pao-yu, the central figures of the novel, who, although deeply in love, could not get married, for the Ching legal code laid down that marriage must be entered into with the parents' consent, after introduction by a go-between and a due exchange of gifts. The cruel moral code for girls and repressive method of educating them reflect the oppressive feudal ethics of that period.

The third section displays rare editions of the novel, including the earliest manuscript copies extant, the woodblock editions and translations into foreign languages. There are also studies of the novel and commentaries dating from the end of the eighteenth century onwards.

The exhibits in the fourth section are of things described in the novel, articles of daily use in wealthy households, costumes, trinkets, paintings and models of the gardens and architecture of those days. The fifth and sixth sections present the dramas and films based on the novel, as well as examples of folk and industrial art inspired by it.

The *Dream of the Red Chamber* has had such a profound influence in China that thousands of people every day flocked to this exhibition, which makes a valuable contribution to our study and understanding of the life and work of Tsao Hsueh-chin.

Literary and Art Workers in the Countryside

Since March this year hundreds of literary workers and art troupes have gone to mountainous regions and villages all over China to perform for the peasants.

Each group consists of a couple of dozen cultural workers, including writers, directors, actors, stage artists, musicians and lecturers on general scientific subjects. Carrying simple stage properties, lantern slides, books, magazines and art reproductions, they trek across mountains and hills to put on small shows for the peasants or carry out other cultural activities. They perform in county towns and market-places as well as in the fields, on threshing-floors or in village tea-houses. Wherever the call comes, there they go. They have performed in the yurts of Inner Mongolia and on the fishermen's boats in southern China. In addition to popular traditional items, they put on new pieces using local material and stories. Their activities are helping to spread the influence of the modern drama, modern ballet and music among the villagers accustomed to traditional operas. At the same time these cultural workers and professional artists are learning much themselves from their stay with the peasants.

These cultural teams and art troupes have established extensive contacts with the cultural and art groups in the villages. During their spare time they help the local artists. For example, the film workers have organized short-term training classes to teach villagers

how to operate film projectors, while the stage artists have helped local drama clubs to make simple stage settings and have passed on their own repertoire to them. In this way they are encouraging the growth of cultural activities in the countryside.

A Play About Lei Feng

Recently plays and operas, both traditional and modern, based on the true story of a soldier named Lei Feng have appeared on the Chinese stage. Lei Feng was the son of a farm hand in the province of Hunan. He lost his parents in the dark days of Kuomintang rule and was only ten years old at the time of liberation. The people's government sent him to school. When he grew up, he joined the People's Liberation Army and became a model soldier. Unfortunately he died in the execution of his duty last year.

This ordinary soldier left nine diaries written in simple, everyday language to describe his life, thoughts and feelings. In all he did he sacrificed himself for others, so that his apparently commonplace life has an extraordinarily rich content. After his death his diaries were published, and a movement started to learn from his example. Then playwrights used him to typify the new men in China today.

The Shenyang Resistance Repertory Company has put on a play called *Lei Feng* in six scenes, which has been enthusiastically received. This play deals mainly with his life in the army, showing his growth into a heroic character. Humour is provided by the contradictions and conflicts between him and some other soldiers with different temperaments and ideas, to bring out the fine moral qualities of Lei Feng. The playwright has drawn freely on the material in the recently published diaries, so that the dialogue is intimate and fresh. Since the actors have first-hand experience of army life, their performance is convincing and moving.

Exhibition of New Oil-paintings and Sculptures

Sixty-four works by thirty-two research students from the Sculpture and Oil-painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts were on display recently in the National Art Gallery, Peking. These works, very different in style, share the common characteristic of having a rich flavour of life.

Ploughing, by Wu Wan-ming, is a striking granite sculpture in bold, clear-cut lines of a peasant driving an ox. *The Rice Smells Fragrant for a Thousand Li* by the young sculptor Tien Chin-to shows a Korean woman, sickle in hand, staring with rapture at the promising crops. *Grassland Militia* by Sun Chi-yuan is a finely chiselled figure in plaster of a Kazakh girl who is standing guard with a rifle. *A Tai Girl*, in plaster by Yu Sung, conveys a charming sense of serenity.

By the River Yen, an oil-painting by Chung Han, shows Chairman Mao Tse-tung chatting and strolling with an old peasant by the River Yen one summer evening. This intimate scene is notable for its attractive composition and free brushwork. *A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land* by Liu Ching is a painting of thirteen Korean women in white fording a river with ammunition for the Chinese People's Volunteers. This picture is a tribute to the Korean people's militant spirit and their internationalism. In *Sailing down the Yellow River* Tu Chien presents the critical moment when boatmen have to struggle with all their might against the rapid current of the Yellow River. *In the Kaoliang Fields* by Ku Chu-chun shows young peasants setting off to work in the green fields. *Spring Water* by Li Jen-chieh is a painting of the villages south of the Yangtse, while *On the Plateau* by Ma Chang-li is a scene from Tibet. Both are excellent works reflecting real life.

This exhibition testifies to the efforts made by sculptors and painters to achieve a national yet varied style. The standard attained in conception, composition, modelling or the effective use of oils is evidence that a new generation of Chinese artists is reaching maturity.

A Fourth-century Tomb in Yunnan

A fourth-century tomb was excavated recently in Chaoting County, northeast Yunnan Province, on the southwest border of China. Its murals depicting the life of the national minorities of that age are in fairly good condition. These were evidently first sketched in ink or colour, after which light ink washes and dark red or yellow colouring were applied. A private band of troops, such as were commonly maintained by powerful individuals of that period, is drawn on the west wall. In the front row, holding long iron swords, stand Han soldiers. Behind them are three rows of minority soldiers, with felt cloaks around them but nothing in their hands. They are barefooted and their hair is combed up into a

knot like the Yis living there today. The east and front walls are painted with a procession, a crow with three legs, a mythological symbol of the sun god, palaces and other buildings. The style of these murals is the same as that of the Han tombs discovered in Szechuan. In the middle of the back wall is a portrait of the deceased sitting cross-legged. Inscriptions show that he served as governor and prefect in the provinces of Yunnan, Kweichow and Szechuan in the southwest of China. He was first buried in Chengtu and moved to Chaotung during the Tai-yuan period (A.D. 376-396) of the reign of Emperor Hsiao-wu of the Eastern Tsin dynasty more than fifteen hundred years ago.

These murals shed light on the social life, costumes, architecture, and relations between the Han and the national minorities of that time and the cultural relations between Yunnan and central China. Artists in Yunnan have made copies of all the murals and numerous pictures have been taken of them. Models have also been made of the tomb, while the necessary repair work was done to preserve this ancient tomb in good condition.

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