

# INTRODUCTION TO RENT COLLECTION COURTYARD

**T**HE "Rent Collection Courtyard", a large group of life-size clay figures acclaimed as a milestone marking a new epoch in sculpture, was born in China's great proletarian cultural revolution. With the intense feelings of the proletariat and powerfully moving artistic images, it indicts the landlord class for its brutality and exploitation and depicts the suffering and struggle of the peasants before the liberation. It is another victory of the revolutionary artists who, guided by the great thinking of Mao Tse-tung, have resolutely followed the line laid down by him — that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and socialism.

The work was created collectively by eighteen amateur and professional sculptors of Szechuan province. It was put on permanent display in autumn 1965, in the former manor house of Liu Wen-tsai, one-time despot and big landlord of Taiyi county in Szechuan. The place has now become a museum where the blood crimes of the landlord class are exposed as a lesson for the masses in class struggle. The figures are on exhibit in the very court-

yard where rent was collected in the old days.

## AN IMMORTAL WORK

The work possesses a sharp and clear political content. The figures, divided into six sections, unfold a picture of the bitter class struggle in old China's countryside. Starting from the first section, where a group of indignant and miserable peasants are carrying their grain into the courtyard to pay their rent, the peasants' anger and hatred grow as they go step by step through the process of "examining the rent", "measuring the grain", "reckoning the accounts" — all cruel devices of the landlord for exploitation. And this anger and hatred reaches its height in the section "forcing the payment". Whether the young man pressganged into the army "to pay for his debt" or the mother put in the private jail of the landlord, all the victims show a burning class hatred and fury. In the last section, the rage and hatred have grown into a determined fighting spirit. The will to revolt is not only shown in the hate-filled eyes and clenched fists, but also in the muscles of

face and body, standing out with the ready tension of wrath.

From beginning to end the figures make the people feel keenly the revolutionary strength of the peasant masses. Though the landlord and his henchmen look ruthless and ferocious, surrounded by a sea of the fury and hatred of the peasants, they are actually extremely feeble. Through the whole group runs the red revolutionary line: Wherever there is oppression, there will be revolt and struggle!

## **LEARNING FROM THE PEASANTS**

The art of the "Rent Collection Courtyard" draws its source from the actual class struggle of the peasant masses. The artists resolutely followed Chairman Mao's instruction that writers and artists must integrate themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers and learn from them. They lived and worked in the courtyard where rent had been collected. They created the entire group of figures right among the former tenants of Liu Wen-tsai, now commune members in the neighbourhood. The artists first became modest pupils of these former poor and lower middle peasants, listening attentively to their past sufferings and struggles and consciously trying to learn their noble revolutionary qualities. In going deep among the labouring people and learning from them, the artists' own thoughts and feelings gradually changed, until they could really take the stand of the former poor and lower middle peasants and intensely hate the exploiting classes and all systems of exploitation. Only in this way

could they have created works with such strong class feeling.

## **CLASS STRUGGLE THE CENTRAL THEME**

The artists seriously studied Chairman Mao's theories of classes, class contradiction and class struggle, and used his thinking to analyse the class relations in the rural areas of old China. Thus, through the outer appearance of the collecting of rent in this one courtyard, they could grasp the inner and real essence of the life-and-death struggle between the peasants and the landlord class. With class struggle as the central theme, they succeeded in making their work show the ruthless exploitation and oppression of the peasants not only by a particular landlord but all the landlords as a class, the contradiction not only between one landlord and his own tenants but between the landlord class and all peasants, the hatred and struggle not only in one rent collection courtyard but of all the peasants as a class. This way of treating the main theme enables their work to play an important role in the socialist education of the viewers, who are reminded never to forget that class enemies still exist and that they must never forget the class struggle.

The artists kept constantly in mind Chairman Mao's instruction that "whom to serve" is a fundamental question, and created their works always with a view to meeting the needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Precisely because of this attitude, they dared to scorn the bourgeois "authorities", to break through all the foreign rules that shackle revolutionary creativeness and to create new and original socialist proletarian works.

The artists cast aside the rules and conventions followed in making statues with plaster, marble, granite or bronze, and critically adopted the traditional techniques of making clay figures loved by the common folk in China. The figure is supported by a wooden frame over which clay mixed with straw is added, the outer coat being a combination of clay, sand and cotton. The use of black glass for eyes and the treatment of some of the drapery lines also come from this tradition. On the other hand, they critically took over some of the modern carving techniques that give these figures a greater realism than the ancient clay figures. Their experience serves as an example for other artists in making the past serve the present, making what is foreign serve China.

Of greater importance is the fact that this experience has blazed the trail in turning sculpture to the countryside to directly serve China's 500 million peasants. These clay figures not only meet the aesthetic demands of the labouring people but are much cheaper and quicker to do than statues in plaster and other materials. Straw and clay are available anywhere in the countryside. With such methods, amateur and professional artists can create and exhibit their works on the spot, whether they want to depict revolutionary history or reflect the life and struggle of socialist society today.

The artists completed the 114 figures in only four and a half months, about one figure a day. They were put on exhibition on National Day, October 1, 1965, in the former landlord's manor house. The exciting news caused many peasants

to travel one or two hundred kilometres to see them. Their general comment was, "These figures are made for us! On our behalf, they accuse the landlords of their crimes. They speak for us!"

In autumn 1966, to satisfy the demand of the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers and young Red Guards, the Szechuan sculptors, with the cooperation of other revolutionary artists, made a complete new set for the capital, the original 114 figures being increased to 119. Of the many changes made, the greatest is found in the last part. Here the sculptors worked from Chairman Mao's teaching that "**political power grows out of the barrel of a gun**", and developed the general spirit of resistance of the previous figures into a stirring scene of armed struggle led by the Chinese Communist Party. To integrate this change with the whole series, the sculptors introduced new touches to figures in other sections, strengthening their spirit of resistance and heightening the impact of the images. The improvements have brought "Rent Collection Courtyard" to a still higher ideological and artistic level.

The work has been seen by several million visitors in Peking. That a work of sculpture has such an impact on the people has no precedent in history. Its success has once again demonstrated the greatness and brilliance of Mao Tse-tung's thinking. Only when art is in the service of proletarian politics, when it becomes a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people, for hitting and destroying the enemy, can it be enthusiastically appreciated by the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers.

# FIRST MAKE THE REVOLUTION IN IDEOLOGY, THEN MAKE THE REVOLUTION IN SCULPTURE

BY THE GROUP WHO CREATED THE 'RENT COLLECTION COURTYARD'

## SCULPTURE AND REVOLUTION

**C**HAIRMAN MAO teaches revolutionary writers and artists in his *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art* that ". . . all our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use".

For years, however, our literature and art was under the control and influence of the top Party person in authority taking the capitalist road and a handful of counter-revolutionary revisionists in those circles such as Chou Yang, Lin Mo-han, Chi Yen-ming, Hsia Yen, Tien Han, Shao Chuan-lin. They did not carry out Chairman Mao's line on literature and art, in fact they resisted it and openly opposed it. They persisted in a bourgeois, revisionist line which was against the Party, socialism and Mao Tse-tung's thought. Take the art of sculpture. A handful of bourgeois "specialists" and "authori-

ties" in sculpture stubbornly held to their old ways, insisting that "politics cannot produce art", and tried in every way to halt the revolution in sculpture. But the revolutionary comrades who make up the majority held that "politics must take command over art", that "with the socialist revolution making great progress, sculpture must also carry out a big revolution in order to keep up with the situation". The essence of the issue is what road sculpture is to take—whether it is to serve proletarian politics or bourgeois politics.

"Rent Collection Courtyard" was the first assignment in which we had consciously used Chairman Mao's thought on literature and art to guide our creative work, and the first time we had portrayed directly such an important theme of class struggle. Mao Tse-tung's thought is the acme of Marxism-Leninism in the present era. Once we are armed with Mao Tse-tung's thought, we dare to scorn the so-called pinnacles of world art. Works either of the Renaissance of the West or China's "golden age", the Tang period,

were at best works of the feudal classes and the bourgeoisie, not of the proletariat. They were neither so very extraordinary nor unsurpassable. We firmly believed that as long as we advanced in the direction pointed out by Chairman Mao in his *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art*, we could scale new world heights.

Chairman Mao teaches us that we are doing things never done before by those who went before us. We must firmly follow Chairman Mao's teachings, dare to think, to charge ahead, to do, to blaze a trail of our own, to undertake the completely new cause of the proletariat. Revolutionaries have always advanced fully aware that they would come across difficulties. Only cowards hang back in front of difficulties.

A leading comrade from the Party put it very well. He said, "Don't be afraid of failure when you are making the revolution in sculpture. Even the biggest failure amounts only to spoiling a pile of clay. Review your experience and try again!" He also taught us to rely firmly on three treasures: Chairman Mao's works, the Party's leadership and the help of the peasants. With these, there is no difficulty we cannot surmount.

## A CHANGE IN FEELINGS

Chairman Mao says: **"If our writers and artists who come from the intelligentsia want their works to be well received by the masses, they must change and remould their thinking and their feelings. Without such a change, without such remoulding, they can do nothing well and will be misfits."** In creating the "Rent Collection Courtyard", we came to feel

most deeply that only when we go among the masses and learn from the workers, peasants and soldiers with the strong urge to remould our ideology, only when we have made changes in our thoughts and feelings and come to love what the workers, peasants and soldiers love and hate what they hate, can we create sculpture imbued with proletarian feeling. And only sculpture imbued with proletarian feeling can be of class-education value to the viewers.

Our work on "Rent Collection Courtyard" was completed in the months of June through October in 1965, from the time of transplanting, through the reaping and the transporting of tax grain. On the open ground in front of the courtyard where we worked, the commune's winnowing machines rumbled and trains of people carrying grain on shoulder poles passed by on their way to deliver tax grain to the state. Group after group of commune members, their faces bright with happy smiles, came into the courtyard to watch us work, then left with tears of agitation in their eyes. What a sharp contrast it was—the hell of pre-liberation days and the heaven of post-liberation days! It was something hard for us young sculptors, who averaged less than thirty years old, to understand or imagine.

The peasants said, "Now when we hear the noise of the winnower, we are infinitely joyful. But before the liberation, the sound of the winnower meant that the landlords were gathering mountains of gold while the peasants had nothing but rivers of tears."

The peasants said, "Now when we hold a sickle in our hand, it means we

are reaping a bumper harvest. But before the liberation, as soon as we put down our sickles, we had to pay the rent and go out to beg."

The peasants said, "When we take grain to the state grain station, we walk swiftly as if our feet had wings. But before the liberation, taking grain to the landlord's courtyard was like carrying a mountain on our backs."

A commune member cried bitterly when she told us how she was dragged to the landlord's compound and thrown into the water prison because she could not pay all her rent. Another woman showed us the scars on her nipples and accused Liu Wen-tsai of his crime of forcing her to be his "nursemaid" because he wanted to drink human milk "for nourishment" and how, when she refused, he bit her nipples until the blood flowed. An old woman broke into sobs as she related how her husband was pressganged and how she had to go begging, dragging her children along. Elderly peasants told us the story of thousands of them marching to the magistrate's office, carrying the body of a peasant who had been murdered by the landlord, and of many of them going into the hills to become guerrilla fighters.

The contrast between the old and new days brought out the peasants' intense love and hatred. They not only provided for us a wealth of raw material from life but, more important, gave us a profound lesson in class struggle as well as in remoulding our thoughts and feelings. All through our work, the peasants had given us an education in ideology and material support; they had urged and

helped us, and served as our models. Some of the comrades who had once gone to the countryside to "experience life" and gather raw material for the purpose of personal fame and fortune now felt deeply ashamed. This also made us understand why the sculpture we had done in the past lacked feeling and why the feeling was not that of the labouring people.

In the past we had often put on the airs of "artists". We had styled ourselves "observers" of life and "educators" of the masses. Actually we had been reversing the order of things. Reviewing our former experience and following Chairman Mao's teachings and the leaders' instructions, we could see that we must follow a correct orientation and adopt a correct attitude. This required us to study Chairman Mao's works first before working on our specialization, to make the revolution in ideology first before making the revolution in sculpture, receiving education first before educating others. To sum up, we must put Mao Tse-tung's thought in command over specialization and over everything. So the first thing we did after arriving at the landlord's manor house, now an exhibition hall, at Tayi in Szechuan province, was to study Chairman Mao's works. Work started only after this. Then, instead of acquainting ourselves with conditions in our role as artists, we first got an education through viewing the articles on display exposing Liu Wen-tsai's exploitation and persecution of the peasants. We visited the peasants, concentrated not on collecting raw material but on getting an education in class struggle and soaking up the feelings of the labouring people.

Because we had undergone a change in thought and feeling and had begun to shift our stand to the side of the workers, peasants and soldiers, we were able to take them as our teachers and consider everything from their point of view. This was true both in designing the whole set of figures and in treating details. We made the utmost effort to enable the peasants to see, understand and appreciate our work.

The course of creating "Rent Collection Courtyard" was a process of ideological remoulding, a training course in the study of Chairman Mao's works and in sculpture. We grew to feel even more deeply the tremendous significance of studying Chairman Mao's works and learning from the workers, peasants and soldiers, and the truth that once we give prominence to politics, we can solve everything.

## **CLASS STRUGGLE, CLASS VIEWPOINT, CLASS FEELING**

Chairman Mao says: **"When we look at a thing, we must examine its essence and treat its appearance merely as an usher at the threshold, and once we cross the threshold, we must grasp the essence of the thing; this is the only reliable and scientific method of analysis."**

When we first came to the rent collection courtyard, we did not cross the threshold—even though we lived in it—for we had not yet understood the essence of the thing this place represented. We knew it only as a place where the peasants paid, and the landlord collected, the rents. The study of Chairman Mao's works raised

our political understanding. Then contact with almost a thousand peasants enabled us to gradually understand and feel that this was a place soaked through with the blood and sweat of countless peasants. The houses of carved beams and painted columns in which the landlords lived were built on the white bones of humans, the delicacies they ate were bought with blood and tears. The rent collection courtyard was a main toll-gate where the landlords exploited the peasants. It was as the peasants said, "The landlord's rent collection courtyard is the poor people's gateway to death. At one end of the courtyard was debauchery and baseness, wealth and extravagance; at the other end was separation and death, broken families and dead people. What a sharp and irreconcilable contrast were the brutality and sinister smiles of the landlord and his bullies on the one hand and the peasants' grief, misery and hatred on the other, all existing at the same time in the courtyard."

The rent collection courtyard was a battleground of class struggle, a focal point where those who exploited and oppressed clashed with the exploited and oppressed—a determining of life and death. The process of rent collection was the process of the landlord class's economic exploitation and political oppression of the peasants. Paying the rent was the appearance, class struggle was the essence. Only when we had a deep understanding of this were we able to grasp the essence and raise our creation to the level of principle.

Now that we had grasped the essence—class struggle—we needed a thread to link the 114 figures which were to spread out in a space of 96 metres and present

a complex picture. What should it be? A thread easily found was the process of "bringing the rent — examining the rent — winnowing the grain — measuring the grain — reckoning the accounts". But this was only the visible line. What was the ideological line, the not-easily-grasped line that we wished to express through this process?

We tried to understand and arrange a step-by-step development by applying the viewpoint and dialectical method given in Chairman Mao's *On Contradiction*. The process of rent collection was the process of class struggle, the process of the development of contradiction. In the beginning the poor peasants come, watched over by the landlord's thugs, forced to bring the landlord the fruit of their whole year's labour reaped on half-empty stomachs. How they smoulder with hatred at the sight of the thugs! The contradiction is yet under cover. Through the examining of the rent, winnowing and measuring of the grain, the landlord's cunning and ferocious methods of exploitation kindle the peasants' suppressed anger. Contradiction gradually unfolds. By the time of the reckoning of the accounts, the contradiction has developed to white heat and the two sides confront each other in sharp conflict — the peasants on one side and big landlord and despot Liu Wen-tsai and his henchmen on the other. With military and political power in the hands of the reactionaries, the peasants meet savage oppression — the forcing of the payment. But contradiction does not end. New contradictions are in ferment — the peasants going toward the road of struggle and revolution. This gradual transformation from

low to high tide, and from high to still higher tide, was portrayed not merely to achieve artistic effect but because it is itself the inevitable law of the development of things. From the first elderly peasant woman, weighed down with misery and suffering, to the last middle-aged peasant who has awakened to the understanding that revolution is the only way out, the contradiction develops from spontaneous to conscious struggle, from the risking of a single life to making the revolution, from quantitative change to qualitative change.

Thus a logical dialectical relation connects the cause and effect of the story. Not only is the story clear, the red thread of class struggle running through it also becomes clear. Without Mao Tse-tung's thought as the guide, the 114 figures in "Rent Collection Courtyard" would not have been able to find their correct places and would have been just a disorderly mass of figures. But using Mao Tse-tung's thought as our guide, we hold the key that opens ten thousand locks.

Before studying Chairman Mao's *On Contradiction and Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society*, we held such mechanical views as "Liu Wen-tsai was just Liu Wen-tsai" and "a rent collection courtyard was just a courtyard where rent was collected". Studies of these writings helped us correct these views and to see that Liu Wen-tsai did not exist in isolation but had complex class and social relations. He was a big despot who was at once warlord, big official, landlord and ringleader of reactionary religious cliques. He was also a capitalist and had connections with the imperialists. He held the guns in one hand

and the seal of authority and power in the other. He was a typical product of semi-feudal and semi-colonial China. It was very important to express this. Actually the rent collection courtyard was a miniature of the old society.

When designing the evil characters for the scene of pressganging and confiscating family possessions in the part "forcing the payment", we at first used only two landlord's thugs. But after gaining an understanding of the class and social relations in the old society, we were able to produce more characters. Instead of just the thugs, we had 11 different kinds of bad characters. The people guarding Liu Wen-tsai include a reactionary officer, a bandit chief, thugs from the reactionary religious cliques, an accountant who is a "high-class" henchman and the operator of the winnowing machine who is a "low-class" henchman. The portraying of these different evil characters gives a more profound reflection of the essence of classes and society and also results in a richer variety of images. Rent collection is a typical thing, the rent collection courtyard a typical environment, and Liu Wen-tsai a typical character. Only when we grasp the typical to reveal the essence, only when we express the general through the particular, can we reveal the whole of society through depicting one rent collection courtyard.

What sort of reaction did we wish to arouse in the viewers? Some comrades at first thought only of making people cry. They felt that the sculpture was a success if it could move the viewers to tears. But was this our aim? No. Had not some

bad works also cheated the viewers into tears with bourgeois humanitarianism?

In our first drafts, we had designed such scenes as the peasants begging for mercy from the landlord. The aim was to move the viewers to tears, but such scenes ran entirely counter to the poor people's spirit of a stiff backbone, their spirit of revolt and struggle. Some comrades were for portraying all of Liu Wen-tsai's methods of torture, such as gouging the eyes, cutting off the ears and disemboweling. The aim here was also to move the audience. But such a way of expression was one-sided and superficial, a hunt for stimulation of the senses. It could not expose the essence — class struggle, economic exploitation and political oppression — in a profound way, but would mean sliding into the pit of naturalism, old realism and the bourgeois "theory of human nature".

Chairman Mao says: "**In class society there is only human nature of a class character; . . .**" Our audiences today are audiences of the socialist age. They come to view "Rent Collection Courtyard" to receive class education, not just to shed tears. They are revolutionary people living in the socialist society and recalling the misery of the old society in order to help them carry out socialist revolution and construction, and to fight for the complete liberation of mankind. That is to say, the audiences stand in the present and recall the past for the purpose of the future. Unless we make clear the relations between the present, the past and the future, not only will we be unable to employ the creative method of combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanti-

cism, we will make mistakes and serious ones at that.

Through studies and debates we raised our political understanding. From trying to arouse tears only, we came to aim at arousing tears, hatred and strength. In other words, the aim was to help people recall the misery of the old society, to hate the reactionaries, love the Party and Chairman Mao, and go all out to fight for the Chinese revolution and world revolution. To sum up, the sculpture had to express both the brutality and savagery of the landlord class and their weaknesses and fears, both the peasants' sorrow and suffering and their hatred and spirit of revolt, both the cruel reality of those days and the forecast of a bright future. The sculpture had to enable the audience not only to see a rent collection courtyard, but through viewing it to think of the entire old society and then the revolutionary struggle of the world today.

Chairman Mao says, **"In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class."** This was the guiding thought in our analysis, understanding and creation of the characters in "Rent Collection Courtyard". The brand of class is stamped both on one's thoughts and feelings and on his appearance and postures. The relations of the inner and the outer are: the inner decides the outer, the outer expresses the inner.

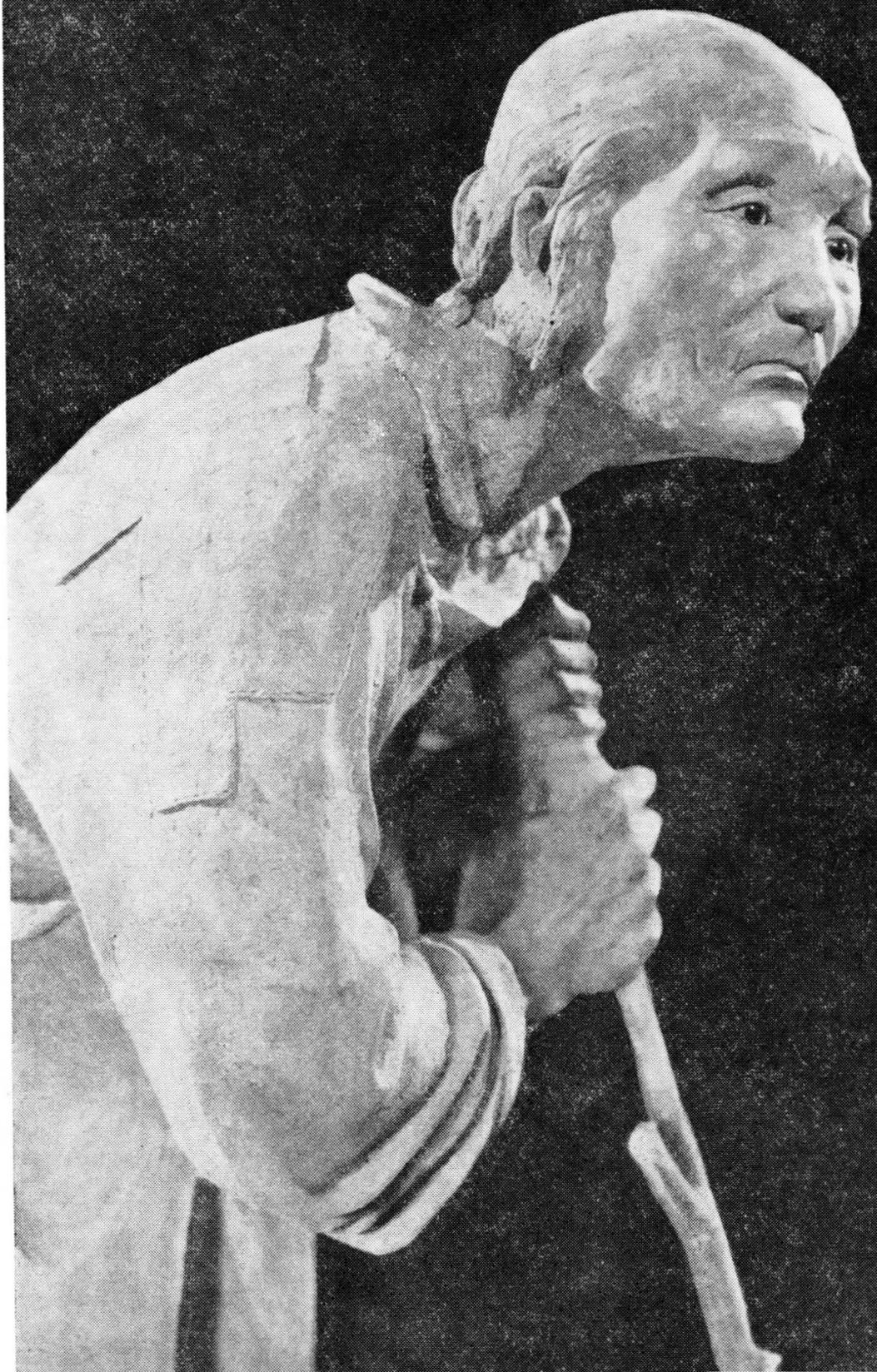
Take the blind old peasant. He is blind and a poor peasant and must have the characteristics of a labouring man. He has been forced to sell his granddaughter because he cannot pay all his rent. He is filled with grief, bitterness and hatred,

emotions that must be expressed in his movements from head to foot. Take the middle-aged peasant at the end of the last group of sculptures. He is filled with class hatred and has awakened to the fact that revolution is the only way out. Or take the soldier guarding the door. He is apathetic, spiritually empty and seems to be utterly unaware of what is happening at his side, our class brothers being dragged in through the door alive and carried out dead. A depraved man, he stares vacantly with drooping eyelids. He is portrayed precisely to expose the particularly evil soul of his kind.

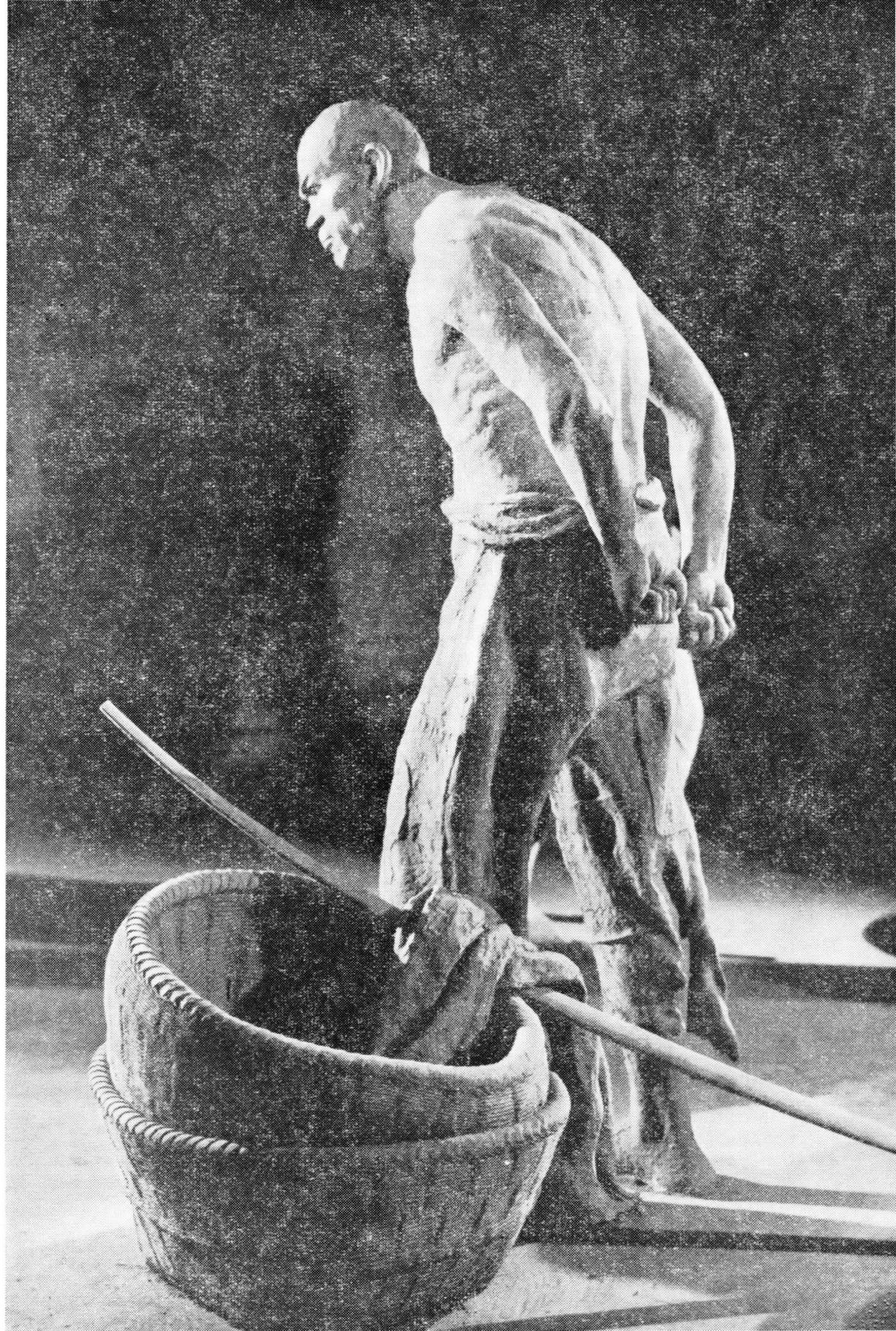
## VICTORY FOR MAO TSE-TUNG'S THOUGHT

The success of "Rent Collection Courtyard" is a victory for Mao Tse-tung's thought, an achievement in the great proletarian cultural revolution, a product of the integration of leaders, masses and artists during its creation, a crystallization of the collective labour of professional and amateur sculptors. Through the work, we have come to understand: Only art created according to Chairman Mao's instructions can be proletarian revolutionary art. Only works approved by the workers, peasants and soldiers are good revolutionary works. The life of the workers, peasants and soldiers is the source of our creation; the workers, peasants and soldiers are our audience and best critics.

The Mao Tse-tung era is the era of heroes. We must give the era and its heroes warmhearted eulogies. We must hold high the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought, firmly carry out Chairman Mao's line on literature and art and march courageously forward.







# Comments from the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers

**R**ENT Collection Courtyard", the large group of clay sculptures, has won the warm welcome and high praise of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers of the capital. Many people, with tears in their eyes, saw it four or five times or more. Some came back several days in a row, each time reluctant to leave the exhibition. Attendance reached several million. Such public enthusiasm is unprecedented in the history of art, Chinese or foreign.

The spectators praised this distinguished new group of sculptures, never seen in China or abroad either in the past or the present, as a living example of the revolutionization of the art of sculpture, an epoch-making milestone in sculptural art and a brilliant victory for the great thinking of Mao Tse-tung. It has opened the epoch of proletarian revolutionary sculpture.

The spectators said that this was the first time they had seen such a good art exhibition in the 17 years of liberation, and the first time that revolutionary sculptural art had so deeply moved them with such stirring power. This group of sculptures, they said, is like a torch that lights the flames of class hatred in the hearts of the workers, peasants and soldiers, powerfully stirs their revolutionary enthusiasm and inspires their revolutionary fighting spirit. "This is real art!" they said in praise, "This is art we labouring people need! It truly says what's in our hearts!"

Worker, peasant and soldier spectators unanimously consider the successful creation of "Rent Collection Courtyard" as another brilliant victory achieved by

following the great thinking of Mao Tse-tung in the great cultural revolution and a heavy and telling blow to the lordly bourgeois "authorities" who attempted to occupy the positions of sculptural art.

The workers, peasants, and the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were indignant that for thousands of years clay sculpture had portrayed only emperors, kings, warriors, ministers, scholars, ladies, idols, demons and gods — all poisons which the exploiting classes used to spread feudal and superstitious ideas and corrupt the people's revolutionary fighting will. Foreign sculptures likewise rarely portray workers, peasants and soldiers. The workers, peasants and soldiers had no desire whatsoever to look at them. This time the revolutionary artists have boldly spoken up for us proletariat. With the invincible weapon of Mao Tse-tung's thought, they have done what their predecessors had never done.

## A GOOD SCHOOL FOR CLASS EDUCATION, A LIVING TEXTBOOK OF CLASS STRUGGLE

The "Rent Collection Courtyard" exhibit is an excellent school for class education and a living textbook of class struggle. Looking at it enraged the workers, peasants and soldiers, provoking their hatred of the landlords, bourgeoisie, imperialism and modern revisionism. They were reminded of the oppression and exploitation that made their life miserable generation after generation. They accused on the spot the landlords and capitalists and the dark rule of the reactionaries in the old society for their crimes. A woman

commune member from Anhwei province, pointing to the sculpture of the little girl taken away and sold to the landlord as a slave, said just one sentence, "I was the same as she!" and burst out weeping. In tears, she accused the landlord of every kind of cruel enslavement, oppression and persecution in the decade in which she had been a slave girl to him. Hearing her story filled the spectators with irrepressible anger and indignation. There were endless moving examples like this in which the spectators and the sculptured character became one in thought and feeling. "Rent Collection Courtyard" has become a platform from which the most powerful accusation is made against the criminal old society and the exploiting class which killed people without blinking.

A soldier of the P.L.A. said that the group of sculptures is a picture of tens of thousands of rent collection courtyards in the rural areas of old China. It gave people a deeper sense of the truth that if one does not understand classes, and does not understand exploitation, one cannot understand revolution. It made them see better the great significance of Chairman Mao's teachings on classes and class struggle.

### **NEVER LET THE TRAGEDY BE RE-ENACTED!**

A worker in the Peking No. 1 Cotton Textile Mill said that after seeing "Rent Collection Courtyard" he understood better the importance of the working people's holding the rifle and the pen in their own hands. He saw more clearly that the current great cultural revolution is a life-and-death class struggle between the bourgeoisie attempting to restore capital-

ism and the proletariat against it, that the cultural revolution is an event of primary importance to the destiny and future of the Party and the country.

A worker of the Peking No. 2 General Machinery Plant wrote in the visitors' book, "If we let the anti-Party and anti-socialist sinister gang carry out their sinister schemes, just take a look at "Rent Collection Courtyard" to see what kind of a world *that* would be like!" Many workers, peasants and soldiers said that "to forget the past means betrayal", that they would never allow the tragedy of "Rent Collection Courtyard" to be re-enacted. They said that the history of decades of revolutionary struggles was the history of the thinking of Mao Tse-tung taking hold of the masses of the workers, peasants and soldiers. It was under the guidance of the thinking of Mao Tse-tung that we have overthrown thousands of Liu Wen-tsais, smashed thousands of rent collection courtyards and built a new socialist China.

A member of the Evergreen People's Commune said, "Today in many countries in the world there are countless Liu Wen-tsais still oppressing and exploiting the labouring people, while those Liu Wen-tsais already overthrown in our country, never willingly accepting their due punishment, will always try to regain their power to again ride roughshod over the people. We must always remember Chairman Mao's teachings, never forget class struggle, never forget the sufferings caused by class oppression, and always remember the debt in blood and tears which the exploiting classes owe the labouring people. Hold fast to the gun, take up the pen, and struggle resolutely

against all class enemies in and out of the country to the end. Sweep away all monsters and thoroughly destroy the old ideology, culture, customs and habits created by the exploiting classes to poison the people for thousands of years. Eliminate all roots of capitalism and revisionism so that all the rent collection courtyards in China will never return, so that all the rent collection courtyards in the world will be smashed forever."

### THE UNITY OF POLITICS AND ART

While praising "Rent Collection Courtyard" for its deep political and ideological content, the workers, peasants and soldiers evaluated its artistic achievement highly. They consider that this new group of clay sculptures has achieved a unity of revolutionary political content and fine artistic form.

They warmly praised the revolutionary sculptors for their creative study and application of Chairman Mao's works and their persistence in following Chairman Mao's direction and line in literature and art for going among the workers, peasants and soldiers and becoming one with them. They said that precisely because the revolutionary artists followed Chairman Mao's teachings, they were able to create a brilliant artistic portrayal of the peasant masses with a clear-cut viewpoint of classes and class struggle and deep proletarian class feeling. They enthusiastically sang the praises of the heroic peasant masses daring to resist and struggle against oppression.

They also said that the artistic images are all well formed, true to life and finely delineated. Though all represent labouring peasants suffering from oppression, yet every image has its own distinct character, expression, attitude and movement, each

seems alive and real, lively and moving. They look as if they would answer when you call and reply if you asked them a question. At the first glance you know what the peasants portrayed are thinking. You seem to be looking at the real person, and to be in the real place and surroundings. "When I saw those man-eating beasts," an athlete of the People's Liberation Army said, "those landlord's lackeys cruelly bullying the peasants, my heart seemed to burst with anger. I gnashed my teeth and raised my fist to strike the villains. I had to tell myself that they were only clay sculptures and not real men before I could force myself to draw back my fist."

Every worker and peasant, and every soldier of the People's Liberation Army who saw "Rent Collection Courtyard" walked out of the exhibition shaken with irresistible emotion. One visitor, unable to express the million words in his heart, wrote only:

*Hate, hate, hate,  
Hate the ten-thousand-times-criminal  
old society;  
Love, love, love,  
Love ten thousand times deeply our new  
China.*

These words express the sincerest feeling of thousands of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Many visitors asked that the large clay sculpture group, "Rent Collection Courtyard", be kept on permanent exhibition in order to teach this and the next generation never to forget class struggle, never to forget the dictatorship of the proletariat, never to forget to give prominence to politics, never to forget to hold high the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought, to make revolution always, never let revisionism emerge, and safeguard our socialist state so it will never change its revolutionary red colour.

## Comments from Foreign Friends

THE GROUP of large clay sculptures entitled "Rent Collection Courtyard" was enthusiastically welcomed and warmly praised by many foreign friends from every continent. They hailed the birth of "Rent Collection Courtyard" as an unprecedented miracle in the world's history of sculpture, a brilliant victory for Mao Tse-tung's thought.

E. F. Hill, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), wrote in the visitors' book: "The exhibition vividly demonstrates the ruthless oppression of the peasants in old China. It shows that the only way out is struggle. The wonderful exhibition also shows how art can and must be a weapon in the struggle for the emancipation of the people. It is truly an inspiration."

V. G. Wilcox, General Secretary of the National Committee of the Communist Party of New Zealand, congratulated the Chinese artists for their distinguished achievements. "To see these stirring clay sculptures of 'Rent Collection Courtyard,'" he said, "is a very extraordinary experience."

José Venturelli, world famous Chilean painter, said, "The bourgeoisie claims that art is above classes and that art which serves class struggle must be mediocre art. However, all the great creations in the world serve class struggle and are created by the advanced class. The road you have taken is very correct. It is of vital importance that art should serve politics. Art must serve definite ideology, serve politics. You are engaged in a very important work,

that is, work for the revolution. You see things in the light of the world revolution, and in this respect you have reached a very advanced level." He added, "Artistically, the sculptures are an outstanding success."

"Rent Collection Courtyard" vividly reflects in a penetrating way the deep misery of the Chinese peasants under the cruel oppression and exploitation of the landlord class before the liberation. It struck a strong chord of sympathy among foreign friends. The miserable life of the Chinese peasants in the past made a group of women visitors from Africa think of the life of the people in their own country today. They said that their people live in extreme poverty and have been suffering the same exploitation and oppression as the peasants of old China. Now they too have gone on the road of struggle as the Chinese people did. The exhibition, the women said, gave them strength in their struggle.

Many foreign guests highly praised "Rent Collection Courtyard" for lauding the spirit of resistance and struggle of the peasants. A Norwegian friend said, "The exhibition tells us the truth that without class struggle there is no victory."

Many foreign friends considered "Rent Collection Courtyard" as the best classroom for studying Chairman Mao's thought and learning class struggle. They called it "a most educational lesson". H. M. Petrela, correspondent for the Albanian paper *Zeri I Popullit*, said, "It is not only a novel creation in sculpture but also a great event in revolutionary work. The exhibition serves as a good

school for educating the younger generation so that they know what life was like in the past and will study harder and work better today."

A. R. Aboukoss, Syrian permanent secretary of the Afro-Asian Journalists' Association, said, "'Rent Collection Courtyard' has great educational meaning. One gains more by seeing this exhibition than by reading a thousand or ten thousand books."

While praising the tremendous part it plays in class education and its immense social meaning, foreign friends rated the artistic achievements of "Rent Collection Courtyard" high. In an enthusiastic letter, a Chilean friend wrote that the group of sculptures "combines outstanding social and educational meaning with art hard to describe with words. . . . The Szechuan artists gave astonishing artistic value to clay. The expression on each face, each unforgettable gesture, and the life these

images portray, make up a deeply moving picture. Every detail contributes to artistic wealth."

Many foreign friends praised the "Rent Collection Courtyard" sculptures as lively and moving. They liked particularly those with "expressions of resistance and struggle" and with "hatred in their eyes".

A Chilean expert who works in China said, "Only those who have a deep understanding of the people and a deep hatred of the enemy can reflect all these through the special properties of art. . . . Through these works we see how the sculptors love and understand the people and place themselves among the masses; how they hate the class enemy who had enslaved the people; how determined they are to eliminate oppression and depart forever from the dark road of the capitalist society of man exploiting man. We also see how the artists express their views freely and live happily in today's China."

## **EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE SIX PARTS OF THE CLAY SCULPTURE GROUP**

### **Part I. Bringing the Rent**

Filled with anger, young and old tenants of the big tyrannical landlord, Liu Wen-tsai, come to pay their rents in grain under the watchful eye of the landlord's thugs. Before the liberation, the exaction of rent by landlords lay like a mountain on the peasants. At rent collection time every year, thousands upon thousands of peasants, hungry and cold, were forced to hand over to the landlords rents in grain,

not one kernel less despite drought or flood, which they had grown throughout the year with blood and sweat.

### **Part II. Examining the Rent**

For the peasants fleeced in a thousand and one ways by the landlords and their henchmen, the rent collection courtyard was the gateway to hell. The tenants were beaten or kicked viciously even if a tiny blade of grass was found in the

grain. One hundred *jin* of the peasants' good grain put into landlord Liu Wen-tsai's "flying wheel winnowing machine" would come out only 70 or 80 *jin*. Feeling the pity of it, a child tries to pick up some grain from the ground, but is struck down by the whip of the landlord's henchman. The indignant grandfather scoops up a handful of grain to reason with the brute, but in the old society in which wolves stalked the land, the poor had no say.

### **Part III. Measuring the Grain**

Tyrannical landlord Liu Wen-tsai used oversized measures when he collected rent but undersized ones when he loaned grain. With this trick alone he fleeced an extra 330,000 *jin* of grain every year from his tenants. A mother with her daughter, carrying a basket of grain which has gone through the "flying wheel winnowing machine", stares at the big measure, swallowing her tears. The peasants used to say, "When we see this measure we tremble all over. It opens its bloody mouth to gulp down our flesh and blood." Anger and hatred rise like burning flames in their hearts.

### **Part IV. Reckoning the Accounts**

Now the accounts are reckoned and the peasants are made to pay. The landlord's bookkeeper runs his fingers over the beads of the abacus. Land rent, house rent, extortionate taxes and levies and the many-times multiplied interest are added up into a debt that costs more than one's life to pay. Liu Wen-tsai, landlord and despot, with prayer beads in his hand but a heart more cruel than a wolf's, orders an old man's son to be seized

on the pretext that the family has not paid all they owed. Ready to burst with anger under this dark, sunless system, the peasants swear: "There will be a day when we will settle all the accounts of wrongs and hatred with you! We will smash this system to pieces!"

### **Part V. Forcing the Payment**

When unable to pay their rent and debts, the peasants were thrown into the water prison and underground cells of the landlord, or put into the Kuomintang state prison, or pressganged into the army. They were forced to sell their children to keep them from starving. Their families were ruined, homes broken up. This young woman is being dragged away to the manor house to provide the landlord with her milk, forced to leave her new baby to starve to death. In that man-eating society, what family among the labouring millions did not have a story of blood and tears, a deep hatred of class oppression?

### **Part VI. Revolt**

Wherever there is exploitation and oppression, there is resistance and struggle. The landlords' persecution and exploitation arouse strong resistance and resolute struggle on the part of the peasants. The flames of revenge rise higher and higher. If they want to be free, to live, they must make revolution, ready to go through mountains of swords or seas of fire, dare to charge forward, to struggle. The broad masses of the peasants, under the brilliant leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao, take up arms and surge forward on the road of revolution, resolved to smash the man-eating system.

