# CHINESE LITERATURE

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# Regret for the Past

*— Chuan-sheng's Notes*

I want, if I can, to record my remorse and grief, for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own.

How silent and empty it is, this shabby room in a forgotten corner of the hostel. Time certainly flies. A whole year has passed since I fell in love with Tzu-chun and, thanks to her, escaped from this silence and emptiness. On my return here, as ill luck would have it, this was the only room vacant. The broken window with the half-withered locust tree and old wistaria outside it and the square table in front of it are unchanged. Unchanged too are the mouldering wall and wooden bed beside it. At night I lie alone, just as I did before living with Tzu-chun. The past year has been blotted out as if it had never been, as if I had never moved out of this shabby room to set up house, in a small way but with high hopes, in Lucky Lane.

Nor is that all. A year ago there was a difference in this silence and emptiness for it held expectancy, the expectancy of Tzu-chun's arrival. The tapping of high heels on the brick pavement, cutting

into my long, restless waiting, would galvanize me into life. Then I would see her pale round face dimpling in a smile, her thin white arms, striped cotton blouse and black skirt. And she would bring in to show me a new leaf from the half-withered locust tree outside the window, or clusters of the mauve wistaria flowers that hung from a vine which looked as if made of iron.

But now there is only silence and emptiness. Tzu-chun will never come back — never, never again.

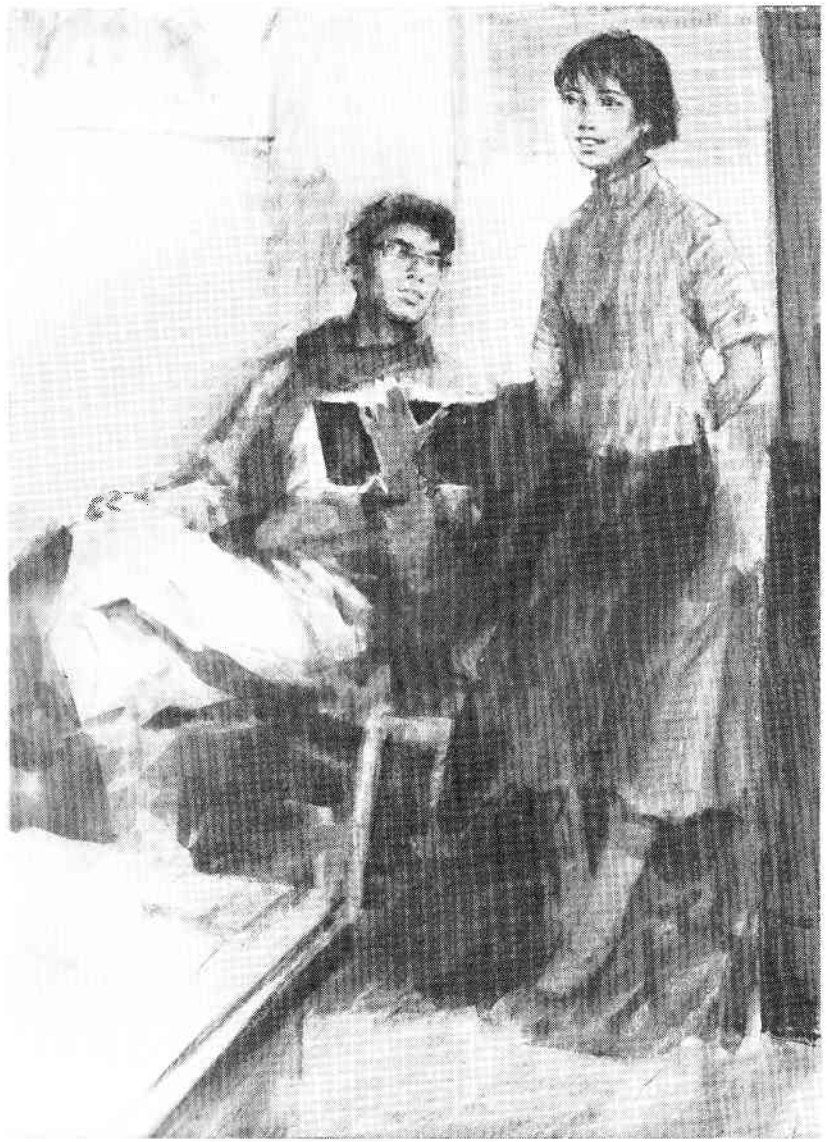
When Tzu-chun was not here, I could see nothing in this shabby room. Out of sheer boredom I would pick up a book — science or literature, it was all the same to me — and read on and on till it suddenly dawned on me that I had turned a dozen pages without taking in a word. My sense of hearing, however, was so acute that I seemed able to hear all the footsteps outside the gate, including those of Tzu-chun, gradually approaching — but all too often they faded away again to be lost at last in the medley of other footfalls. I hated the steward's son who wore cloth-soled shoes which sounded quite different from those of Tzu-chun. I hated the little wretch next door who used face-cream, often wore new leather shoes, and whose steps sounded all too like those of Tzu-chun.

Could her rickshaw have been upset? Could she have been run over by a tram?...

I would want to put on my hat to go and find her, but her uncle had cursed me to my face.

Then, abruptly, I would hear her draw nearer, step by step, so that by the time I went out to meet her she would already have passed the wistaria trellis, her face dimpling in a smile. Probably she wasn't badly treated after all in her uncle's home. I would calm down and, after we had gazed at each other in silence for a moment, the shabby room would gradually be filled with the sound of my pronouncements on the tyranny of the family, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore and Shelley.... She would nod her head, smiling, her eyes filled with a childlike look of wonder. On the wall was pinned a copperplate reproduction of a bust of Shelley, cut out from a magazine. It was one of the best-looking like-





nesses of him, but when I pointed it out to her she only gave it a hasty glance, then hung her head as if in embarrassment. In matters like this, Tzu-chun had probably not freed herself completely from the trammels of old ideas. It occurred to me later that it might be better to substitute a picture of Shelley drowning at sea, or a portrait of Ibsen. But I never got round to it. And now even this print has vanished.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me."

She came out with this statement clearly, firmly and gravely after a thoughtful silence, following a conversation about her uncle who was here and her father in the country. We had known each other then for half a year. By that time I had told her all my views, all about myself, and what my failings were. I had hidden very little, and she understood me completely. These few words of hers stirred me to the bottom of my heart and rang in my ears for many days afterwards. I was unspeakably happy to know that Chinese women were not as hopeless as the pessimists made out, and that we should see in the not too distant future the splendour of the dawn.

Each time I saw her out, I kept several paces behind her. And each time the old wretch's face, bewhiskered as if with fish tentacles, would be pressed so hard against the dirty window-pane that the tip of his nose was flattened. And each time we reached the outer courtyard, against the bright glass window there was the little wretch's face, plastered with face-cream. But looking neither right nor left as she walked proudly out, she did not see them. And I walked proudly back.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me." Her mind was completely made up on this point. She was by far the more thoroughgoing and resolute of the two of us. What did she care about the half pot of face-cream or the flattened nose tip?

I cannot remember clearly how I expressed my true, passionate love for her. Not only now: my impression just after the event itself was hazy. Thinking back that night, I recollected only a few disjointed

scraps; while a month or two after we started living together, even these vanished like dreams without a trace. All I can remember is that for about a fortnight beforehand I had considered very carefully what attitude to take, how to make my declaration, and how to behave if turned down. But when the time came it was all in vain. In my nervousness, something constrained me to use a method seen in films. The thought of this makes me thoroughly ashamed, yet it is the only thing I remember clearly. Even today it is like a solitary lamp in a dark room, showing me clasping her hand with tears in my eyes and going down on one knee....

At the time I did not even notice Tzu-chun's reaction clearly. All I knew was that she accepted my proposal. However, I seem to remember that her face first turned pale then gradually flushed red, redder than I ever saw it before or after. Sadness and joy mingled with apprehension flashed from her childlike eyes, although she tried to avoid my gaze, looking ready in her confusion to fly out of the window. Then I knew she accepted my proposal, although not knowing what she said or whether she said anything at all.

She, however, remembered everything. She could reel off the speech I made as if she had learned it by heart. She described my conduct in detail, to the life, like a film unfolding itself before her eyes, including of course that trashy scene from the movies which I was only too anxious to forget. The night, when all was still, was our time for review. I was often interrogated and examined, or ordered to repeat everything said on that occasion; yet she often had to fill in gaps and correct my mistakes as if I were a Grade D student.

Gradually these reviews became few and far between. But whenever I saw her gazing raptly into space, a tender look dawning on her dimpling face, I knew she was going over that old lesson again and feared she was visualizing my ridiculous act from the movies. I knew, though, that she must be visualizing it, that she insisted on visualizing it.

But she didn't find it ridiculous. Though I thought it laughable, even contemptible, to her it was no joke. And I knew this beyond a doubt because of her true, passionate love for me.



Late spring last year was our happiest and also our busiest time. I had calmed down by then, although bestirring my mental faculties in step with my physical activity. This was when we started walking side by side in the street. We went several times to the park, but most of our outings were in search of lodgings. On the road I was conscious of searching looks, sarcastic smiles or lewd and contemptuous glances which unless I was on my guard set me shivering, so that at every instant I had to summon all my pride and defiance to my support. She, however, was completely fearless and impervious to all this. She continued slowly and calmly on her way, as if there were no-one in sight.

It was no easy matter finding lodgings. In most cases we were refused on some pretext or other, while we ourselves turned down a few places as unsuitable. To start with we were very particular — and yet not too particular either, because we saw that most of these lodgings did not look the sort of place where we could live. Later on, all we asked was to be tolerated. We had looked at over twenty places before we found one we could make do: two rooms with a northern exposure in a small house in Lucky Lane. The owner was a petty official but an intelligent man, who occupied only the central and the side rooms. His household consisted simply of a wife, a baby girl not yet one year old, and a maid-servant from the country. As long as the child didn't cry, it would be very quiet.

Our furniture, simple as it was, had already taken the greater part of the money I had raised; and Tzu-chun had sold her only gold ring and ear-rings too. I tried to stop her, but when she insisted I didn't press the point. I knew that unless allowed to make a small investment in our home she would feel uncomfortable.

She had already quarrelled with her uncle, so enraging him in fact that he had disowned her. And I had broken with several friends who thought they were giving me good advice but were actually either afraid for me, or jealous. Still, this meant we were very quiet. Although it was getting on for dusk when I left the office and the rickshaw man always went slowly, at last the time came when we were together again. First we would look at each other in silence, then relax and talk intimately, and finally fall silent again. We both bowed

our heads pensively then, without anything particular in mind. Little by little, body and soul alike, she became an open book to me. In the short space of three weeks I learned more about her, overcoming many impediments which I had fancied I understood but now discovered to have been real barriers.

As the days passed, Tzu-chun became more lively. She had no liking for flowers though, and when I bought two pots of flowers at the market she left them unwatered for four days so that they died neglected in a corner. I hadn't the time to see to everything. She had a liking for animals, however, which she may have picked up from the official's wife; and in less than a month our household was greatly increased as four chicks of ours started picking their way across the courtyard with the landlady's dozen. But the two mistresses could tell them apart, each able to identify her own. Then there was a spotted peke, bought at the market. I believe he had a name of his own to begin with, but Tzu-chun gave him another one — Ahsui. And I called him Ahsui too, though I didn't like the name.

It is true that love must be constantly renewed, must grow and create. When I spoke of this to Tzu-chun, she nodded understandingly.

Ah, what peaceful, happy evenings those were!

Tranquillity and happiness will grow stale if unchanged, unrenewed. While in the hostel, we had occasional differences of opinion or misunderstandings; but even these vanished after we moved to Lucky Lane. We just sat facing each other in the lamplight, reminiscing, savouring again the joy of the new harmony which had followed our disputes.

Tzu-chun grew plumper, her cheeks became rosier; the only pity was that she was too busy. Housekeeping left her no time even to chat, much less to read or go for walks. We often said we would have to get a maid.

Another thing that upset me on my return in the evening was her covert look of unhappiness, or the forced smile which depressed me even more. Luckily I discovered that this was owing to her secret feud with the petty official's wife, the bone of contention



being the two families' chicks. But why wouldn't she tell me outright? People ought to have a home of their own. A lodging of this kind was no place to live in.

I had my routine too. Six days of the week I went from home to the bureau and from the bureau home. In the office I sat at my desk copying, copying endless official documents and letters. At home I kept her company or helped her light the stove, boil rice or steam rolls. This was when I learned to cook.

Still, I ate much better here than in the hostel. Although cooking was not Tzu-chun's forte, she threw herself into it heart and soul. Her ceaseless anxieties on this score made me anxious too, and in this way we shared the sweet and the bitter together. She kept at it so hard all day, perspiration made her short hair cling to her brows, and her hands began to grow rough.

And then she had to feed Ahsui and the chicks... no-one else could do this chore.

I told her I would rather go without food than see her work herself to the bone like this. She just glanced at me without a word, looking rather wistful, so that I couldn't very well say any more. But she went on working as hard as ever.

Finally the blow I had been expecting fell. The evening before the Double Tenth Festival, I was sitting idle while she washed the dishes when we heard a knock on the door. When I opened it, the messenger from our bureau handed me a mimeographed slip of paper. I had a good idea what it was and, when I took it to the lamp, sure enough it read:

> By order of the commissioner, Shih Chuan-sheng is discharged.
> The secretariat, October 9th.

I had foreseen this while we were still in the hostel. Face-Cream, being one of the gambling friends of the commissioner's son, was bound to have spread rumours and tried to make trouble. I was only surprised that this hadn't happened sooner. In fact this was really no blow, because I had already decided that I could work as a clerk somewhere else or teach, or even, though it was more difficult, do some translation work. I knew the editor of *Freedom's*

*Friend,* and had corresponded with him a couple of months previously. But all the same, my heart was thumping. What distressed me most was that even Tzu-chun, fearless as she was, had turned pale. Recently she seemed to be weaker, more faint-hearted.

"What does it matter?" she said. "We can make a fresh start. We...."

Her voice trailed off and, to my ears, it failed to carry conviction. The lamplight, too, seemed unusually dim. Men are really ludicrous creatures, so easily upset by trifles. First we gazed at each other in silence, then started discussing what to do. Finally we decided to live as economically as possible on the money we had, to advertise in the paper for a post as clerk or teacher, and to write at the same time to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* explaining my present situation and asking him to accept a translation from me to help tide me over this difficult period.

"Suit the action to the word! Let's make a fresh start."

I went straight to the table and pushed aside the bottle of sesame oil and saucer of vinegar, while Tzu-chun brought over the dim lamp. First I drew up the advertisement; then I made a selection of books to translate. I hadn't looked at my books since we moved house, and each volume was thick with dust. Last of all I wrote the letter.

I hesitated for a long time over the wording of the letter. When I stopped writing to think, and glanced at her in the dusky lamplight, she was looking very wistful again. I had never imagined a trifle like this could cause such a striking change in someone so firm and fearless as Tzu-chun. She really had grown much weaker lately; this wasn't something that had just started that evening. More put out than ever, I had a sudden vision of a peaceful life — the quiet of my shabby room in the hostel flashed before my eyes, and I was just about to take a good look at it when I found myself back in the dusky lamplight again.

It took me a long time to finish the letter, a very lengthy letter. And I was so tired after writing it that I realized I must have grown weaker myself lately too. We decided to send in the advertisement and post the letter the next day. Then with one accord we



straightened up silently, as if conscious of each other's fortitude and strength, able to see new hope growing from this fresh beginning.

Indeed, this blow from outside infused new spirit into us. While in the bureau I had been like a wild bird in a cage, given just enough bird-seed by its captor to keep alive but not to thrive; doomed as time passed to lose the use of its wings, so that if ever released it would be unable to fly. Now, at any rate, I had got out of the cage. I must soar anew through the boundless sky before it was too late, before I had forgotten how to flap my wings.

Of course we could not expect results from a small advertisement right away. However, translating is not so simple either. You read something and think you understand it, but when you come to translate it difficulties crop up everywhere, and progress is very slow. Still, I was determined to do my best. In less than a fortnight, the edge of a fairly new dictionary was black with my fingerprints, which shows how seriously I took my work. The editor of *Freedom's Friend* had said that his magazine would never ignore a good manuscript.

Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Tzu-chun was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our place was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls, so filled with smoke, that it was impossible to work steadily there. But of course I had only myself to blame for not being able to afford a study. On top of this there were Ahsui and the chicks. The chicks, moreover, had now grown into hens and were more of a bone of contention than ever between the two families.

Then there was the never-ending business of eating every day. All Tzu-chun's energies seemed to go to this. One ate to earn and earned to eat, while Ahsui and the hens had to be fed too. Apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned, and did not realize that she was interrupting my train of thought when she called me to meals. And although I sometimes showed a little displeasure as I sat down, she paid no attention at all, just went on munching away quite unconcerned.

It took her five weeks to realize that my work could not be restricted by regular meal-times. When the realization came she was probably annoyed, but she said nothing. After that my work did go forward faster, and soon I had translated 50,000 words. I had only to polish the manuscript, and it could be sent in with two already completed shorter pieces to *Freedom's Friend*. Those meals were still a headache though. I didn't mind the dishes being cold, but there wasn't enough to go round. Although my appetite was much smaller than before now that I was sitting at home all day using my brain, even so there wasn't always even enough rice. It had been given to Ahsui, sometimes along with the mutton which I myself rarely had a chance of eating recently. Ahsui was so thin, she said, it was really pathetic; besides it made the landlady sneer at us. She couldn't stand being laughed at.

So there were only the hens to eat my left-overs. It was a long time before I realized this. I was very conscious however that my "place in nature",* as Huxley describes it, was only somewhere between the peke and the hens.

Later on, after much argument and insistence, the hens started appearing on our table and we and Ahsui were able to enjoy them for over ten days. They were very thin though, because for a long time they had been fed only a few grains of sorghum a day. After that, life became much more peaceful. Only Tzu-chun was very dispirited and often seemed sad and bored, or even sulky. How easily people change!

But we couldn't keep Ahsui either. We had stopped hoping for a letter from anywhere, and Tzu-chun had long had not even a scrap of food with which to get him to beg or stand on his hindlegs. Besides, winter was fast approaching, and we didn't know what to do about a stove. His appetite had long been a heavy liability, of which we were all too conscious. So even the dog had to go.

**Man's Place in Nature*, published in 1863, is one of T.H. Huxley's well-known works.



If we had tied a tag to him and put him on sale in the market, we might have made a few coppers. But neither of us could bring ourselves to do this. Finally I muffled his head in a cloth and took him outside the West Gate, where I let him loose. When he ran after me, I pushed him into a pit — not a very deep one.

When I got home, I found the place much more peaceful; but Tzu-chun's tragic expression quite staggered me. I had never seen such a look on her face before. Of course it was because of Ahsui, but why take it so to heart? And I hadn't told her about pushing him into the pit.

That night, something icy crept into her tragic expression.

"Really!" I couldn't help blurting out. "What's got into you today, Tzu-chun?"

"What?" She didn't even glance at me.

"The way you look...."

"It's nothing — nothing at all."

Eventually I guessed from her behaviour that she considered me callous. Actually, when on my own I had managed all right, although too proud to mix much with family connections. Since my move I had become estranged from my former friends. But if I could only take wing and fly away, I still had plenty of ways to make a living. The wretchedness of my present life was largely due to her — getting rid of Ahsui was a case in point. But Tzu-chun seemed too obtuse now even to understand that.

When I took an opportunity to hint this to her, she nodded as if she understood. But judging by her later behaviour, she either didn't take it in or else she didn't believe me.

The cold weather and her cold looks made it impossible for me to be comfortable at home. But where could I go? I could get away from her icy looks in the street and parks, but the cold wind there cut like a knife. Finally I found a haven in the public library.

Admission was free, and there were two stoves in the reading room. Although the fires were very low, the mere sight of the stoves made one warmer. There were no books worth reading: the old ones were out of date, and there were no new ones to speak of.

But I didn't go there to read. There were usually a few other people there, sometimes as many as a dozen, all thinly clad like me. We kept up a pretence of reading in order to keep out of the cold. This suited me down to the ground. In the streets you were liable to meet people you knew who would glance at you contemptuously, but here there was no uncalled-for trouble of that kind, because my acquaintances were all gathered round other stoves or warming themselves at the stoves in their own homes.

Although there were no books for me to read there, I found quiet in which to think. As I sat there alone thinking over the past, I realized that during the last half year, for love — blind love — I had neglected all the other important things in life. First and foremost, livelihood. A man must make a living before there can be any place for love. There must be a way out for those who struggle, and I hadn't yet forgotten how to flap my wings, although I was much weaker than before....

The reading room and the readers gradually faded. I saw fishermen on the angry sea, soldiers in the trenches, dignitaries in their cars, speculators at the stock exchange, heroes in mountain forests, teachers on their platforms, night prowlers, thieves in the dark.... Tzu-chun was nowhere near me. She had lost all her courage in her resentment over Ahsui and absorption in her cooking. The strange thing was that she didn't look particularly thin....

It grew colder. The few lumps of slow-burning hard coal in the stove had at last burnt out, and it was closing time. I had to go back to Lucky Lane to expose myself to that icy look. Of late I had sometimes been met with warmth, but this only upset me more. One evening, I remember, from Tzu-chun's eyes flashed the childlike look I had not seen for so long, as she reminded me with a smile of something that had happened at the hostel. But there was a constant look of fear in her eyes as well. I knew she was worried by the fact that my behaviour recently had been colder than her own; so sometimes, to comfort her, I forced myself to talk and laugh. But each forced laugh and remark at once rang hollow. And the way this hollowness immediately re-echoed in my ears, like a hateful sneer, was more than I could bear.



Tzu-chun may have felt this too, for after this she lost her wooden calm and, though she tried her best to hide it, often showed anxiety. She treated me, however, much more tenderly.

I wanted to speak to her plainly, but lacked the courage. Whenever I made up my mind to speak, the sight of those childlike eyes compelled me, for the time being, to force a smile. But my smile turned straightway into a sneer at myself and made me lose my cold composure.

After that she revived the old questions and started new tests, forcing me to give all sorts of hypocritical answers to show my affection for her. Hypocrisy became branded on my heart, so filling it with falseness that it was hard to breathe. I often felt, in my depression, that really great courage was needed to tell the truth; for a man who lacked courage and reconciled himself to hypocrisy could never open up a new path in life. What's more, he just could not exist.

Then Tzu-chun started looking resentful. This happened for the first time one morning, one bitterly cold morning, or so I imagined. I laughed up my sleeve with freezing indignation. All the ideas and intelligent, fearless phrases she had learnt were empty after all; yet she had no inkling of their emptiness. She had given up reading long ago, so did not understand that the first thing in life is to make a living and that to do this people must advance hand in hand, or else soldier on alone. All she could do was cling to someone else's clothing, making it hard for even a fighter to struggle, and bringing ruin on both.

I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break. The thought of her death occurred to me abruptly, but at once I reproached myself and felt remorse. Happily it was morning, and there was plenty of time for me to tell her the truth. Whether or not we could make a fresh start depended on this.

I deliberately brought up the past. I spoke of literature, then of foreign authors and their works, of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea*. I praised Nora for being strong-minded.... All this had been said the previous year in the shabby room in the hostel, but now it rang hollow. As the words left my mouth I could not

free myself from the suspicion that an unseen urchin behind me was maliciously parroting everything I said.

She listened, nodding agreement, then was silent. And I wound up abruptly, the last echo of my voice vanishing in the emptiness.

"Yes," she said presently, after another silence. "But.... Chuan-sheng, I feel you're a different person these days. Is that true? Tell me honestly."

This was a head-on blow. But taking a grip of myself, I explained my views and proposals: only by making a fresh start and building a new life could we both avoid ruin.

To clinch the matter I said firmly:

"... Besides, you can go boldly ahead now without any scruples. You asked me for the truth. You're right: we shouldn't be hypocritical. Well, the truth is it's because I don't love you any more. Actually, this makes it much better for you, because it'll be easier for you to go ahead without any regret...."

I was expecting a scene, but all that followed was silence. Her face turned ashy pale, as pale as death; but in a moment her colour came back and that childlike look darted from her eyes. She gazed around like a hungry or thirsty child searching for its kindly mother. But she only stared into space, fearfully avoiding my eyes.

The sight was more than I could stand. Fortunately it was still early. Braving the cold wind, I hurried to the public library.

There I saw *Freedom's Friend,* with my short articles in it. This took me by surprise and breathed a little fresh life into me. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I reflected. "But things can't go on like this."

I started calling on old friends with whom I had long been out of touch, but didn't go more than once or twice. Naturally their rooms were warm, yet I felt chilled to the marrow. And in the evenings I huddled in a room colder than ice.

An icy needle was piercing my heart so that it kept aching numbly. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I reflected. "I haven't



forgotten how to flap my wings." The thought of her death occurred to me abruptly, but at once I reproached myself and felt remorse.

In the library the new path ahead of me often flashed before my eyes. She had faced up bravely to the facts and boldly left this icy home. Left it, what's more, without any sense of grievance. Then light as a cloud I floated through the void, the blue sky above me and, below, mountain ranges, mighty oceans, sky-scrapers, battlefields, motor-cars, thoroughfares, rich men's mansions, bright busy shopping centres, and the dark night....

What's more, indeed, I foresaw that this new life was just around the corner.

Somehow we managed to live through the fearful winter, a bitter Peking winter. But like dragonflies caught by mischievous boys who tie them up to play with and torment at will, although we had come through alive we were prostrate — the end was only a matter of time.

I wrote three letters to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* before receiving a reply. The envelope contained nothing but two book tokens, one for twenty cents, the other for thirty cents. So my nine cents spent on postage to press for payment and my whole day without food had all gone for nothing.

Then what I had been expecting finally happened.

As winter gave place to spring and the wind became less icy, I spent more time roaming the streets, not getting home generally before dark. On one such dark evening I came home listlessly as usual and, as usual, grew so depressed at the sight of our gate that my feet began to drag. Eventually, however, I reached my room. It was dark inside. As I groped for the matches and struck a light, the place seemed extraordinarily quiet and empty.

I was standing there in bewilderment, when the official's wife called me outside.

"Tzu-chun's father came today and took her away," she said simply.

This was not what I had expected. I felt as if hit on the back of the head, and stood speechless.

"She went?" I finally managed to ask.

"Yes."

"Did — did she say anything?"

"No. Just asked me to tell you when you came back that she'd gone."

I couldn't believe it; yet the room was extraordinarily quiet and empty. I gazed around in search of Tzu-chun, but all I could see were some shabby sticks of furniture scattered sparsely about the room, as if to prove their inability to conceal anyone or anything. It occurred to me that she might have left a letter or at least jotted down a few words, but no. Only salt, dried chilli, flour and half a cabbage had been placed together, with a few dozen coppers at the side. These were all our worldly goods, and now she had solemnly left these all to me, mutely bidding me to use them to eke out my existence a little longer.

As if repelled by my surroundings, I hurried out to the middle of the courtyard where all around me was dark. Bright lamplight showed on the window-paper of the central room, where they were teasing the baby to make her laugh. My heart grew calmer as by degrees I glimpsed a way out of this heavy oppression: high mountains and marshlands, thoroughfares, brightly lit banquets, trenches, pitch-black night, the thrust of a sharp knife, utterly noiseless footsteps....

Relaxing, I thought about travelling expenses and sighed.

As I lay with closed eyes I conjured up a picture of the future, but before the night was half over it had vanished. In the gloom I suddenly seemed to see a pile of groceries, then Tzu-chun's ashen face appeared to gaze at me beseechingly with childlike eyes. But as soon as I pulled myself together, there was nothing there.

However, my heart was still heavy. Why couldn't I have waited a few days instead of blurting out the truth to her like that? Now she knew all that was left to her was the blazing fury of her father — to his children he was a heartless creditor — and the cold looks of



bystanders, colder than frost or ice. Apart from this there was only emptiness. What a fearful thing it is to bear the heavy burden of emptiness, walking what is called one's path in life amid cold looks and blazing fury! This path ends, moreover, in nothing but a grave without so much as a tombstone.

I ought not to have told Tzu-chun the truth. Since we had loved each other, I should have indulged her to the last with lies. If truth is precious, it should not have proved such a heavy burden of emptiness to Tzu-chun. Of course lies are empty too, but at least they would not have proved so crushing a burden in the end.

I had imagined that if I told Tzu-chun the truth she could go forward boldly without scruples, just as when we started living together. But I must have been wrong. Her courage and fearlessness then were owing to love.

Lacking the courage to shoulder the heavy burden of hypocrisy, I thrust the burden of the truth on to her. Because she had loved me she would have to bear this heavy burden amid cold looks and blazing fury to the end of her days.

I had thought of her death.... I saw that I was a weakling who deserved to be cast out by the strong, honest men and hypocrites both. Yet she, from first to last, had hoped that I could eke out my existence....

I must leave Lucky Lane, which was so extraordinarily empty and lonely. To my mind, if only I could get away, it would be as if Tzu-chun were still at my side; or at least as if she were still in town and might drop in on me at any time, as she had when I lived in the hostel.

However, all my letters went unanswered, as did applications to friends to find me a post. There was nothing for it but to seek out a family connection whom I had not visited for a long time. This was an old classmate of my uncle's, a highly respected senior licentiate* who had lived in Peking for many years and had a wide circle of acquaintances.

*A successful candidate of a certain grade in the official examination system of the Ching Dynasty.

The gatekeeper eyed me scornfully, no doubt on account of my shabby clothes. When finally I was admitted, my uncle's friend still acknowledged our acquaintance but treated me very coldly. He knew all about us.

"Obviously you can't stay here," he told me coldly, after being asked to recommend me to a job elsewhere. "But where will you go? It's extremely difficult.... That, h'm, that friend of yours, Tzu-chun, I suppose you know, is dead."

I was dumbfounded.

"Are you sure?" I blurted out at last.

He laughed drily. "Of course I am. My servant Wang Sheng comes from the same village as her family."

"But — how did she die?"

"Who knows? At any rate, she's dead."

I have forgotten how I took my leave and went home. I knew he wouldn't tell a lie. Tzu-chun would never come back as she had last year. Although she had thought to bear the burden of emptiness amid cold looks and blazing fury till the end of her days, it had been too much for her. Fate had decreed that she should die believing the truth I had told her — die in a world without love.

Obviously I could not stay there. But where could I go?

Around me was a great void and deathlike silence. I seemed to see the darkness before the eyes of those, each one in turn, who died unloved; to hear all their bitter, despairing cries as they struggled.

I was waiting for something new, something nameless and unexpected. But day after day passed in the same deathlike silence.

I went out much less than before, sitting or lying in the great void, allowing this deathlike silence to eat away my soul. Sometimes the silence itself seemed afraid, seemed to recoil. At such times there flashed into my mind nameless, unexpected new hope.

One overcast morning when the sun had failed to struggle out from behind the clouds and the very air was tired, sounds of pattering paws and snuffling made me open my eyes. A glance around the room revealed nothing, but looking down I saw a tiny creature perambulating the floor. It was thin, covered with dust, more dead than alive....



When I took a closer look, my heart missed a beat. I jumped up.

It was Ahsui. He had come back.

I left Lucky Lane not just because of the cold glances of my landlord, his wife and their maid, but largely on account of Ahsui. But where could I go? There were many ways open to me of course, this I knew, and sometimes I glimpsed them stretching out before me. What I didn't know was how to take the first step.

After much cogitation and weighing of pros and cons, I decided that the hostel was the only possible lodging place for me. Here is the same shabby room as before, the same wooden bed, half-withered locust tree and wistaria vine. But all that formerly gave me love and life, hope and happiness, has vanished. Nothing remains but emptiness, the empty existence I exchanged for the truth.

There are many ways open to me and I must take one of them, because I am still living. I still don't know, though, how to take the first step. Sometimes the road seems like a great grey serpent, writhing and darting at me. I wait and wait, watching it approach, but it always vanishes suddenly in the darkness.

The early spring nights are as long as ever. Sitting idle as the time drags, I recall a funeral procession I saw in the street this morning. There were paper figures and paper horses in front and, behind, weeping like singing. Now I see how clever they are — this is so simple.

Then Tzu-chun's funeral springs to my mind. She bore the heavy burden of emptiness alone, advancing down the long grey road only to be swallowed up amid cold looks and blazing fury.

If only there really were ghosts, really were a hell! Then, no matter how the infernal whirlwind roared, I would seek out Tzu-chun to tell her of my remorse and grief, to beg for her forgiveness. Failing this, the poisonous flames of hell would engulf me and fiercely consume all my remorse and grief.

In the whirlwind and flames I would put my arms round Tzu-chun and ask her pardon, or let her take her revenge....

However, this is emptier than my new life. I have nothing now but the early spring night which is still as long as ever. Since I am living, I must make a fresh start. And the first step is just to record my remorse and grief, for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own.

All I have is weeping like singing as I mourn for Tzu-chun, burying her in oblivion.

I want to forget. For my own sake, I do not want to remember the oblivion I gave Tzu-chun for her burial.

I must make a fresh start in life. Hiding the truth deep in my wounded heart, I must advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide....

21 October 1925

*Illustrated by Huang Ying-hao*



# What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?

*— A Talk Given at the Peking Women's Normal College, 26 December 1923*

My subject today is: What happens after Nora leaves home?

Ibsen was a Norwegian writer in the second half of the nineteenth century. All his works, apart from a few dozen poems, are dramas. Most of the dramas he wrote during one period deal with social problems and are known as social-problem plays. One of these is the play *Nora*.*

Another title for *Nora* is *Ein Puppenheim,* translated in Chinese as *A Puppet's House*. However, "puppe" are not only marionettes but also children's dolls; in a wider sense the term also includes people whose actions are controlled by others. Nora originally lives contentedly in a so-called happy home, but then she wakes up to the fact that she is simply a puppet of her husband's and her children are her puppets. So she leaves home — as the door is heard closing, the curtain falls. Since presumably you all know this play, there is no need to go into details.

*Chinese translation for *A Doll's House*.

What could keep Nora from leaving? Some say that Ibsen himself has supplied the answer in *The Lady from the Sea*. The heroine of this play is married but her former lover, who lives just across the sea, seeks her out suddenly to ask her to elope with him. She tells her husband that she wants to meet this man and finally her husband says, "I give you complete freedom. Choose for yourself (whether to go or not). On your own head be it." This changes everything and she decides not to go. It seems from this that if Nora were to be granted similar freedom she might perhaps stay at home.

But Nora still goes away. What becomes of her afterwards Ibsen does not say, and now he is dead. Even if he were still living, he would not be obliged to give an answer. For Ibsen was writing poetry, not raising a problem for society and supplying the answer to it. This is like the golden oriole which sings because it wants to, not to amuse or benefit anyone else. Ibsen was rather lacking in worldly wisdom. It is said that when a number of women gave a banquet in his honour and their representative rose to thank him for writing *Nora,* which gave people a new insight into the social consciousness and emancipation of women, he rejoined, "I didn't write with any such ideas in mind. I was only writing poetry."

What happens after Nora leaves home? Others have also voiced their views on this. An Englishman has written a play about a modern woman who leaves home but finds no road open to her and therefore goes to the bad, ending up in a brothel. There is also a Chinese — how shall I describe him? A Shanghai man of letters, I suppose — who claims to have read a different version of the play in which Nora returns home in the end. Unfortunately no one else ever saw this edition, unless it was one sent him by Ibsen himself. But by logical deduction, Nora actually has two alternatives only: to go to the bad or to return to her husband. It is like the case of a caged bird: of course there is no freedom in the cage, but if it leaves the cage there are hawks, cats, and other hazards outside; while if imprisonment has atrophied its wings, or if it has forgotten how to fly, there certainly is nowhere it can go. Another alternative is to



starve to death, but since that means departing this life it presents no problem and no solution either.

The most painful thing in life is to wake up from a dream and find no way out. Dreamers are fortunate people. If no way out can be seen, the important thing is not to awaken the sleepers. Look at the Tang Dynasty poet Li Ho whose whole life was dogged by misfortune. When he lay dying he said to his mother, "The Emperor of Heaven has built a palace of white jade, mother, and summoned me there to write something to celebrate its completion." What was this if not a lie, a dream? But this made it possible for the young man who was dying to die happily, and for the old woman who lived on to set her heart at rest. At such times there is something great about lying and dreaming. To my mind, then, if we can find no way out, what we need are dreams.

However, it won't do to dream about the future. In one of his novels Artzybashev* challenges those idealists who, in order to build a future golden world, call on many people here and now to suffer. "You promise their descendants a golden world, but what are you giving them themselves?" he demands. Something is given, of course — hope for the future. But the cost is exorbitant. For the sake of this hope, people are made more sensitive to the intensity of their misery, are awakened in spirit to see their own putrid corpses. At such times there is greatness only in lying and dreaming. To my mind, then, if we can find no way out, what we need are dreams; but not dreams of the future, just dreams of the present.

However, since Nora has awakened it is hard for her to return to the dream world; hence all she can do is to leave. After leaving, though, she can hardly avoid going to the bad or returning. Otherwise the question arises: What has she taken away with her apart from her awakened heart? If she has nothing but a crimson woollen scarf of the kind you young ladies are wearing, even if two or three feet wide it will prove completely useless. She needs more than that, needs something in her purse. To put it bluntly, what she needs is money.

*Russian novelist (1878-1927).

Dreams are fine; otherwise money is essential.

The word money has an ugly sound. Fine gentlemen may scoff at it, but I believe that men's views often vary, not only from day to day but from before a meal to after it. All who admit that food costs money yet call money filthy lucre will probably be found, on investigation, to have some fish or pork not yet completely digested in their stomachs. You should hear their views again after they have fasted for a day.

Thus the crucial thing for Nora is money or — to give it a more high-sounding name — economic resources. Of course money cannot buy freedom, but freedom can be sold for money. Human beings have one great drawback, which is that they often get hungry. To remedy this drawback and to avoid being puppets, the most important thing in society today seems to be economic rights. First, there must be a fair sharing out between men and women in the family; secondly, men and women must have equal rights in society.

Unfortunately I have no idea how we are to get hold of these rights; all I know is that we have to fight for them. We may even have to fight harder for these than for political rights.

The demand for economic rights is undoubtedly something very commonplace, yet it may involve more difficulties than the demand for noble political rights or for the grand emancipation of women. In this world countless small actions involve more difficulties than big actions do. In a winter like this, for instance, if we have only a single padded jacket we must choose between saving a poor man from freezing to death or sitting like Buddha under a Bo-tree to ponder ways of saving all mankind. The difference between saving all mankind and saving one individual is certainly vast. But given the choice I would not hesitate to sit down under the Bo-tree, for that would obviate the need to take off my only padded jacket and freeze to death myself. This is why, at home, if you demand political rights you will not meet with much opposition, whereas if you speak about the equal distribution of wealth you will probably find yourself up against enemies, and this of course will lead to bitter fighting.



Fighting is not a good thing and we can't ask everybody to be a fighter. In that case the peaceful method is best, that is using parental authority to liberate one's children in future. Since in China parental authority is absolute, you can share out your property fairly among your children so that they enjoy equal economic rights in peace, free from conflict. They can then go to study, start a business, enjoy themselves, do something for society, or spend the lot just as they please, responsible to no one but themselves. Though this is also a rather distant dream, it is much closer than the dream of a golden age. But the first prerequisite is a good memory. A bad memory is an advantage to its owner but injurious to his descendants. The ability to forget the past enables people to free themselves gradually from the pain they once suffered; but it also often makes them repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. When a cruelly treated daughter-in-law becomes a mother-in-law, she may still treat her daughter-in-law cruelly; officials who detest students were often students who denounced officials; some parents who oppress their children now were probably rebels against their own families ten years ago. This perhaps has something to do with one's age and status; still bad memory is also a big factor here. The remedy for this is for everyone to buy a notebook and record his thoughts and actions from day to day, to serve as reference material in future when his age and status have changed. If you are annoyed with your child for wanting to go to the park, you can look through your notes and find an entry saying: "I want to go to the Central Park." This will at once mollify and calm you down. The same applies to other matters too.

There is a kind of hooliganism today, the essence of which is tenacity. It is said that after the Boxer Uprising some ruffians in Tientsin behaved quite lawlessly. For instance, if one were to carry luggage for you, he would demand two dollars. If you argued that it was a small piece of luggage, he would demand two dollars. If you argued that the distance was short, he would demand two dollars. If you said you didn't need him, he would still demand two dollars. Of course hooligans are not good models, yet that tenacity is most admirable. It is the same in demanding economic

rights. If someone says this is old hat, tell him you want your economic rights. If he says this is too low, tell him you want your economic rights. If he says the economic system will soon be changing and there is no need to worry, tell him you want your economic rights.

Actually, today, if just one Nora left home she might not find herself in difficulties; because such a case, being so exceptional, would enlist a good deal of sympathy and certain people would help her out. To live on the sympathy of others already means having no freedom; but if a hundred Noras were to leave home, even that sympathy would diminish; while if a thousand or ten thousand were to leave, they would arouse disgust. So having economic power in your own hands is far more reliable.

Are you not a puppet then when you have economic freedom? No, you are still a puppet. But you will be less at the beck and call of others and able to control more puppets yourself. For in present-day society it is not just women who are often the puppets of men; men often control other men, and women other women, while men are often women's puppets too. This is not something which can be remedied by a few women's possession of economic rights. However, people with empty stomachs cannot wait quietly for the arrival of a golden age; they must at least husband their last breath just as a fish in a dry rut flounders about to find a little water. So we need this relatively attainable economic power before we can devise other measures.

Of course, if the ecomomic system changes then all this is empty talk.

In speaking as I have, however, I have assumed Nora to be an ordinary woman. If she is someone exceptional who prefers to dash off to sacrifice herself, that is a different matter. We have no right to urge people to sacrifice themselves, no right to stop them either. Besides, there are many people in the world who delight in self-sacrifice and suffering. In Europe there is a legend that when Jesus was on his way to be crucified he rested under the eaves of Ahasuerus's house, and because Ahasuerus turned Jesus away he became accursed, doomed to find no rest until the Day of Judgment. So since then



Ahasuerus has been wandering, unable to rest, and he is still wandering now. Wandering is painful while resting is comfortable, so why doesn't he stop to rest? Because even if under a curse he must prefer wandering to resting; that is why he keeps up this frenzied wandering.

But this choice of sacrifice is a personal one which has nothing in common with the social commitment of revolutionaries. The masses, especially in China, are always spectators at a drama. If the victim on the stage acts heroically, they are watching a tragedy; if he shivers and shakes they are watching a comedy. Before the mutton shops in Peking a few people often gather to gape, with evident enjoyment, at the skinning of the sheep. And this is all they get out of it if a man lays down his life. Moreover, after walking a few steps away from the scene they forget even this modicum of enjoyment.

There is nothing you can do with such people; the only way to save them is to give them no drama to watch. Thus there is no need for spectacular sacrifices; it is better to have persistent, tenacious struggle.

Unfortunately China is very hard to change. Just to move a table or overhaul a stove probably involves shedding blood; and even so, the change may not get made. Unless some great whip lashes her on the back, China will never budge. Such a whip is bound to come, I think. Whether good or bad, this whipping is bound to come. But where it will come from or how it will come I do not know exactly.

And here my talk ends.

# On Women's Liberation

Confucius said: "Only women and low-class men are hard to keep. If allowed to approach you, they show no respect; if kept at a distance, they complain."* Here women and low-class men are lumped together, but there is no knowing whether this included his own mother or not. Although the later orthodox Confucians have always treated their mothers with a show of respect, those women who are mothers in China are still slighted by all men who are not their sons.

After the 1911 Revolution,** in order to have her share of political power, the celebrated Miss Shen Pei-chen*** kicked over a guard at the entrance to parliament. Only I have a strong suspicion that the guard fell down himself, and that if one of us men had kicked him he would have kicked back several times. But this is

*A quotation from the *Analects*. The teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.) upheld the interests of the ancient slave-owners.

**China's bourgeois-democratic revolution which overthrew the Ching Dynasty.

***A native of Hangchow who organized the Women's Northern Expeditionary Corps at the time of the 1911 Revolution, she later became an adviser to Yuan Shih-kai.



one advantage of being a woman. Again, certain married ladies today can stand beside their plutocratic husbands to be photographed with them on docks or in conference halls; or before the launching of some steamship or aircraft they can step forward to smash a bottle of wine. (This may be the prerogative of unmarried ladies: the details are beyond me.) This is another advantage of being a woman. In addition, there are various new professions. Apart from women factory workers, whom the bosses like to employ because their pay is low and they do as they are told, in the case of others, although they are described as "flower vases" we often see the honourable announcement: "You are served by an all-female staff", and this no doubt is just on account of their sex. If men want to soar to such dizzy heights, to rely simply on being masculine will not do: they will have to turn into dogs at the very least.

These are the achievements since the May 4th Movement* and the campaign for women's liberation. But we often hear the bitter lamentations of professional women and the gibes of critics at the New Women. By stepping out of their boudoirs into society, they have in fact supplied new material for general gossip and jokes at their expense.

This is because, although in society, women are still "kept" by others. If others "keep" you, you have to allow them to scold you or even insult you. We have seen how Confucius scolded, and know that was because he found women "hard" to "keep", neither keeping them "close" nor keeping them "at a distance" proving entirely satisfactory. This is the complaint of most male supremacists today. It is the affliction of most women too. Until the dividing line between "keeper" and "kept" is done away with, there can be no doing away with these complaints and afflictions.

In this still unreformed society, every single new fashion is just so much window-dressing. In point of fact nothing has really changed. If you take a small bird which has been caged and let it perch on a pole, its status appears to have changed; but actually it

*The revolutionary movement opposing feudalism and imperialism which started on May 4, 1919.

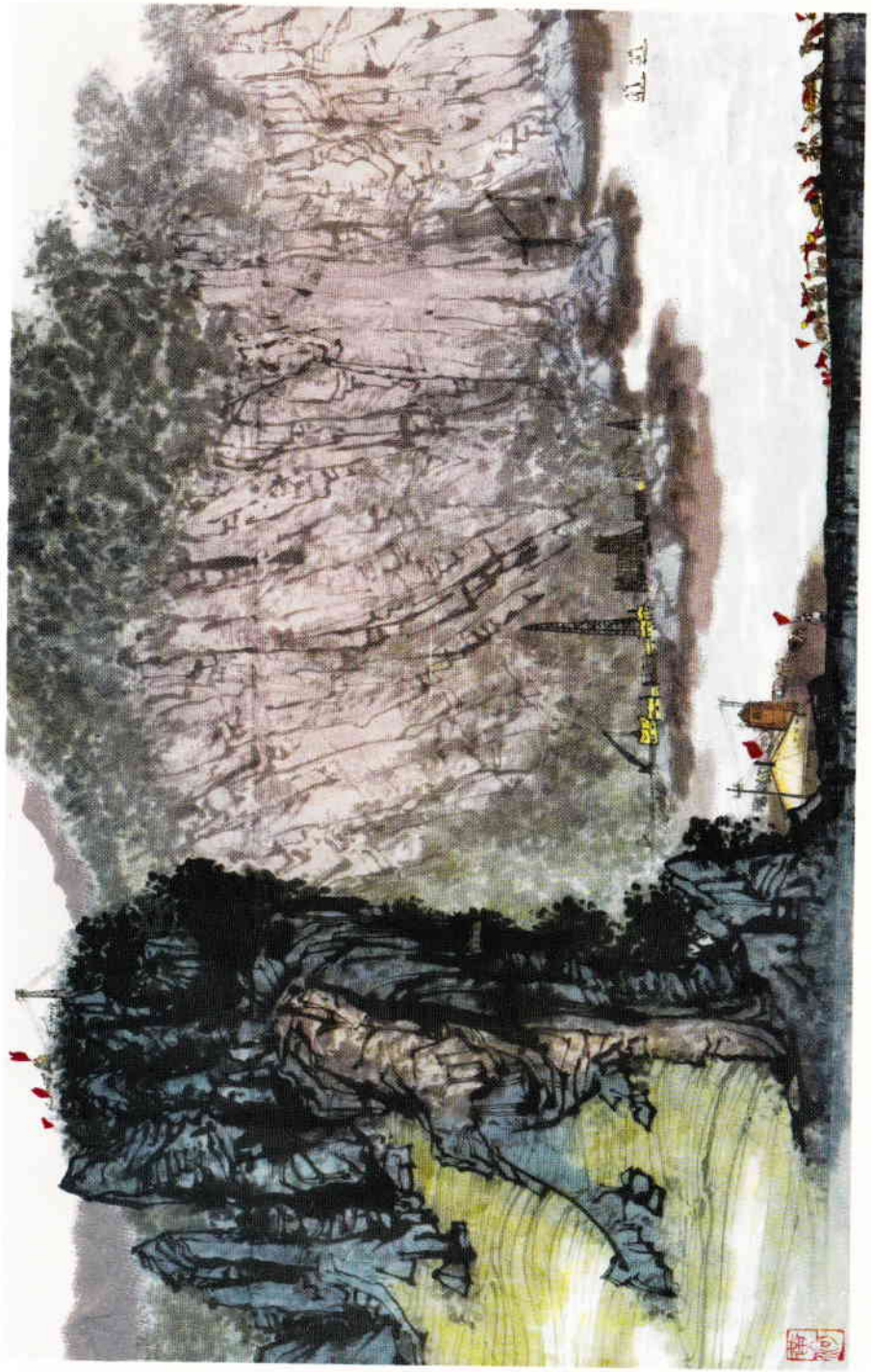
is still the plaything of men, at the beck and call of others. This is what is meant by the proverb: Accept a meal and accept orders. So before all women win the same economic rights as men, I regard all fine-sounding titles as empty talk. Of course, there are biological and psychological differences between men and women, as indeed there are between members of the same sex; but their status should be equal. Only after their status is equal shall we have real women and real men and do away with complaints and afflictions.

Before true liberation there will be fighting. I am not saying, however, that women should take up arms like men or suckle their infants with one breast only, leaving the other half of the responsibility to men. All I mean is that we should not rest content with the present temporary situation, but fight unceasingly for liberation in the realm of ideas, the economy and other fields. When society is liberated, we ourselves will be liberated too. But of course it is also necessary to fight against present-day fetters which are exclusively women's.

Never having made a study of women's problems, when constrained to express my opinion on the subject these few idle words are all I have to say.

21 October 1933





*Marching to New Construction Sites* (from "New Paintings of the Yellow River") ▶

***Shih Min***

# Hidden Reef

"Weigh anchor!" bawled Tiger Chu, burly skipper of the *Vanguard*. As he strode to the survey vessel's bridge, the siren sounded and the spruce, stream-lined craft cast off and headed briskly out of the harbour. Under the bright October sun the *Vanguard* ploughed quickly through the calm blue sea, leaving behind her a long wake of white foam.

It was unusually fine weather for surveying, but Chu seemed in no mood to enjoy it. Looming over the steering-wheel like an iron pillar, brows knit, lips pursed, he gazed into the distance. From his irate voice and clouded face it was clear to the crew that he was in a temper. And the reason for his annoyance had not escaped his two sharp young subalterns Tao and Hsiao who were on the bridge beside him. His eyes on the placid ocean, Tao was humming the song *I Love the Blue Sea*. Abruptly tugging the peak of his

Shih Min is a young worker in the Shanghai Navigation Bureau. In his spare time he has written a number of short stories about the life of hydrographic surveyors and the changes which have taken place on the docks.

cap he winked at Hsiao and, glancing at Tiger, said, "Look, it's come over cloudy." By way of answer Hsiao jerked his head towards the girl in a faded naval uniform who was leaning quietly against the bulwark.

The girl, Chin Hua, a twenty-five-year-old Communist recently demobbed from the navy, had come to the *Vanguard* the previous day as Chu's second in command. It was on this account that the skipper's face had clouded over.

Tiger Chu, at thirty-four, had ten years of surveying experience behind him, had cruised all the China seas and seen a good deal of the world. His promotion to captain had taken place in the cultural revolution. He knew his job and had tremendous drive, but was quick-tempered and flared up easily. His previous second in command, honest Old Chen, worked hard and got on with him well. Between them they had put such pep into the *Vanguard*'s crew that it was regularly cited as an advanced unit. Not long ago Old Chen had been transferred, since when Chu had been hoping for another mate of the same calibre. He had never expected a girl. Of course, he didn't look down on girls. He knew that women made up half the population and among them were not a few pilots and navigators, to say nothing of surveyors. But the *Vanguard* was something special. She had a reputation to keep up. Besides, their present assignment — the location of a hidden reef — was a task of vital importance.

Owen Reef which the *Vanguard* was going out to find had first been charted by the Kuomintang customs authorities in 1948. After Liberation, in 1964, a hydrographer sent to verify the position of this reef had failed to find it. He simply added a question-mark in brackets behind the name Owen Reef on the chart, to warn all ships passing that way to be on their guard. This was an irresponsible way out. After the cultural revolution our maritime transport expanded rapidly, and rich submarine oil resources were discovered in the vicinity of Owen Reef, making it imperative to open a channel here for navigation. The authorities had given the *Vanguard* a fortnight to complete the location survey. It was a tall order. And now they had sent him a girl. . . .



Tiger turned to glance at Chin Hua, still leaning over the bulwark. Her bobbed hair ruffled by the breeze, she looked the picture of health and confidence. He snorted.

Chin Hua remained motionless, her eyes fixed on the horizon. Had she no inkling of the skipper's annoyance? Far from it. She understood the reason for Chu's snort and his irate bellow. But instead of being offended, she was amused.

Chin Hua's job in the navy had been to survey navigation channels. When she started serving her apprenticeship some men had predicted: "She'll never stick it out." For the work involved constant cruising through reefs and shallows, and exposure to hurricanes and other dangers. But the arduous, adventurous life enthralled her. She often said to her mates: "We're blazing new trails." Before being posted to the *Vanguard*, she had been told that Tiger Chu was a good comrade who went all out in his work but was a bit overbearing. While doing her best to help him, she must be prepared for some cold-shouldering. . . .

The sound of a bell cut into Chin Hua's reflections. This was the signal for muster. She hurried below.

## 2

"We're nearing the survey area. Let's make our dispositions," said Chu at the end of the meeting. He assigned men to take position measurements, make records, keep a look-out . . . . Soon all tasks were assigned except sounding and navigating. The former required little technical skill, but the latter was highly complex. In Tiger's view, it called for "special leadership qualities." He had always done the navigating himself. But now he proposed:

"You navigate, Comrade Chin Hua. I'll do the sounding. All right?"

He had two purposes in mind: to show his modesty and to gauge the girl's capabilities. For he thought: "She can talk all right, but the real test comes in action."

Chin Hua, understanding this, answered with a smile: "No, you navigate, I'll do the sounding."

Tiger didn't insist, thinking to himself: "She isn't up to it."

When they reached the survey area the *Vanguard* slowed down. Tiger gave the order to start.

"Port 52.45," "Starboard 47.22," reported Tao and Hsiao simultaneously. Then Chin Hua gave the sounding: "Twenty-one metres."

The survey went steadily ahead, with a determination of the ship's position every minute. The atmosphere on board was tense.

But then a sudden accident disturbed the efficient routine: Hsiao got something in his eyes which blurred his vision. He asked the skipper to relieve him for a while.

Tiger Chu hesitated for a second, reluctant to leave his post. In the old days, whenever something of this sort happened, he asked his second in command to take over. But Old Chen had left — he should never have let him go.

"Go ahead, skipper," cried Chin Hua. "I'll stand in for you."

"You?" asked Tiger dubiously, but Chin Hua had already signed to Young Wang, the look-out man, to take her place.

"Let me have a try." Chin Hua took the positioner and pencil from Chu's hand, then called crisply and clearly:

"Report position angles!"

Young Tao and Tiger Chu responded promptly. Still uneasy in his mind, the skipper peered at the girl. He was astonished by the speed and dexterity with which she fixed the bearings on the positioner, put it lightly on the chart and with a brisk stroke of her pencil determined the ship's position. She then shouted to the helmsman: "Hold the course, forward!" The girl's quiet confidence took Chu's breath away. He himself could have done no better. He shouldn't have underestimated her.

After some time another problem cropped up. Young Tao, the starboard observer, announced that he could no longer see the coastal landmarks distinctly. At once Chu cried: "Avast!" For Chin Hua, he thought, being new to this coast, would need time to set new bearings; and unless the ship stopped at once, they would drift off course. But Chin Hua countermanded: "No need to



stop. Hold course at the same speed." Before the skipper could say a word, she announced:

"Attention! Change of landmarks. The mark to the left is Two-goat Isle; in the centre, Half-cloud Mountain; to the right, the Pagoda. Get set!"

Tiger Chu was impressed by these clear, accurate directions. By now the medical orderly had attended to Hsiao's eye, enabling him to return to his post again. He took the sextant back from the skipper, who exclaimed: "That girl's a born commander!"

"There's no such thing," Hsiao retorted. "All ability comes from practice."

"Practice! What practice does she have?" scoffed Chu. "This is her first trip on the *Vanguard*, her first cruise in these waters."

"There's no mystery about it," Young Hsiao chuckled. "I had the watch after midnight yesterday, and saw the light on in the steering house. While you were snoring in your bunk, skipper, Chin Hua was studying the navigation chart and the landmarks in this area."

Chu stared at him speechlessly.

## 3

A week went by. Countless soundings were made in the vicinity of the place where Owen Reef was charted. The average depth of water was twenty metres; not a trace of any reef could they find. Staring out across the rolling waves, Chu reflected anxiously: "This is like searching for a pin on the ocean bed." He had two alternatives. The first was to conclude that no reef existed. But he must have ample grounds for such a conclusion; otherwise, if any accident happened in future, as the officer in charge of the survey he would be responsible. The second alternative was to extend the survey area. After careful consideration he decided on this course. Taking up his set-square and red pencil, he drew a bigger circle around the original one and added thirty more sounding lines to the chart. As soon as the sun rose over the sea the next morning, the *Vanguard* resumed the search, not stopping until stars were twin-

kling in the sky. When three more days had passed without any results, Chu was frantic, his crew was downcast.

For ten whole days now they had not gone ashore, dropping anchor wherever they were when darkness fell. On the eleventh day they put in to Gold-flower Island for fresh supplies. This small island where lived little more than a hundred families of fisherfolk had no harbour, and so the *Vanguard* anchored in the bay. Usually, after the cook went ashore the rest of the crew followed to stretch their legs. But this time no one had a mind to go — they had only four days left for their survey.

Cupping his chin in his hands, Chu stared unwinkingly at the words "Owen Reef (?)" on the chart. His depression had infected the others on board. Tao had stopped singing *I Love the Blue Sea*, and Hsiao had stopped cracking jokes, while Chin Hua was staring out of the window in silence.

"Where can this confounded Owen Reef have gone?" Tao muttered.

"Could there have been an earthquake here?" Hsiao wondered.

"What have earthquakes to do with it?" demanded Tao.

"A lot," was the reply in a tone of authority. "I've read in a geography book that big changes are caused in the ocean bed by earthquakes. Take the areas near the equator in the Pacific Ocean, for example. Earthquakes take place there so often that the small islands and reefs seamen see on their outward passage are gone when they return. So they call them ghost islands. Maybe Owen Reef. . . ."

"I checked up before we set out," put in Chin Hua. "There's been no earthquake here."

"It's no use talking. We must get on with our search." Chu jumped up and squared his shoulders as if ready for a fight. He rolled up his sleeves, picked up his set-square and red pencil, and with a few strokes doubled the sounding area. "I'm going to find this damn reef," he swore, "even if it means diving down to the ocean bed."

Young Tao rolled up his sleeves too, as though preparing to plunge into the sea.

"Comrade Chu," said Chin Hua calmly, "shouldn't we talk over the best steps to take next?"



"Talk?" Tiger Chu knit his brows, a scathing retort on the tip of his tongue. He suppressed it, however, for working with Chin Hua these days had given him a healthy respect for her know-how and her courage. So he merely said: "We must go all out — work harder."

"We can't go on this hit-and-miss way." Chin Hua, though calm and unruffled, spoke very firmly.

"Hit-and-miss?" Tiger was annoyed. "To make surveys we have to burn up diesel oil to make soundings. So long as this reef exists, we're bound to find it."

"Of course. But how long will it take us? We've only four days left."

Tiger had no reply to that. Shifting to the defensive he said, "Well, let's hear your proposal."

"Take the mass line. Consult some fishermen."

Tiger curled his lip as if to say: "I thought you'd some good suggestion. Is that all?" Pushing back his cap he replied, "Comrade Chin Hua, we're on the high seas, not in the streets of Shanghai. If we were in Shanghai and wanted to find Takuangming Cinema, we could ask someone the way. But who can we ask here?" Indicating the radar, depth sounder and other instruments around him, he added, "We've all this modern electronic equipment. . . ."

"Of course, modern equipment is important; but we mustn't forget the masses."

"It takes time to visit fishermen, but all we have is four days. The *Vanguard* can do thirteen knots an hour. The time needed for visiting the islanders would be enough to make several dozen more soundings. Probably . . . ."

"That's not the way to look at it, comrade," said Chin Hua patiently.

"All right." Knowing he was no match for her in argument, Chu beat a hasty retreat. "I may be wrong." Since the cook had not yet returned, he thought: "We may as well take this chance to go ashore and have a look around." He told Chin Hua, "We'll do as you suggest: go ashore and take the mass line. I'm not counting on any results, though."

They went ashore by motor-boat. The tide was in and the islanders had gathered on the golden sands. Bare-footed children holding baskets and tins were busy collecting shells and digging up mussels. Fishermen in baggy trousers were humming and laughing as they carried nets and floats to the boats drawn up on the beach.

"See how busy they all are." Chu glanced at Chin Hua. "Who's the best person to ask?"

Without answering, Chin Hua walked toward a group of girls.

These light-hearted fisher-girls were singing gaily as they wove two large nets. The bright morning sun shining through the nets on to the golden beach and on to their healthy young bodies made a beautiful picture.

Chin Hua stepped forward and called out a cheerful greeting. The girls smiled back at her shyly.

"Let me have a try," she begged as she took a shuttle from a plump girl with big eyes.

"Think you can do it?" the latter asked curiously.

"I can at least try." Chin Hua sat down on a stool and began to weave. Her left leg crooked and her right leg extended, leaning forward from the waist, she nimbly plied the shuttle. The snow-white net in front of her grew apace.

Tiger Chu, Tao and Hsiao looked on in surprise. So Chin Hua had another skill they had never suspected. If not for her faded naval uniform, she could have been taken for a fisherman's daughter.

The girls crowded round exclaiming:

"Where did you learn to weave nets?"

"Why, you're an old hand!"

"I once worked on a fishing boat," Chin Hua told them with an artless smile. "But I haven't had a shuttle in my hands for nearly eight years."

"Is it true that you're charting a channel here?" asked Fatty, now that they considered Chin Hua as one of themselves.

"Yes." Chin Hua nodded. She explained how important it was to locate Owen Reef, then asked, "Have you ever heard of this reef?"

Tiger stepped nearer and pricked up his ears.

"Owen Reef?" The girls looked at one another blankly.

"Never heard of it." Fatty shook her head.

The skipper sighed. Chin Hua sensed his exasperation but, ignoring it, went on with her weaving and asked:

"Are there any old fishermen here who know this part of the sea well?"

"Yes," replied Fatty. "There's Old Water-root."

"Old Water-root? Where can we find him?" asked Chin Hua eagerly.

"On Silver-flower Island." Fatty pointed out to sea. "You can easily find him. Everybody hereabouts knows him. He's a mine of information, a living chart."

## 4

"It's more than thirty nautical miles away." Chu pointed toward Silver-flower Island on their left. "The trip there and back would take half a day, and more time would be needed to find this old fisherman. Two whole days would be used up. Besides, does Old Water-root really know where the reef is? Even if he does, suppose he's away from home?" Fingering the red sounding lines he had added to the chart, he went on: "I'm in favour of sticking to our old method: Use the time to make more soundings. Then we may find the reef." As Hsiao opened his mouth to speak, the skipper roared:

"Starboard the helm!"

"Port the helm!" exploded Hsiao.

"Hey!" protested Ah-lung, the old helmsman. "One says starboard, the other says port. Which direction is it?"

"Who's running this ship?" demanded Chu, his face an angry red.

"I suggest we cast anchor," proposed the chief engineer. "Let's hear what the crew has to say."

Chin Hua nodded.

"Very well. Drop anchor!" Tiger bellowed.

The ship rocked as the huge anchor crashed into the sea, then came swiftly to a stop.



"I declare the meeting open," announced Tiger. "Speak up frankly; don't pull your punches."

"All right, I'll start off," the engineer said slowly. "Tiger, you and I became crew-mates ten years ago, when you were a surveyor and I was a stoker. We worked side by side. Just before the cultural revolution both of us were transferred to the ship *Surveyor*, you as skipper, I as chief engineer. Remember that tub, Tiger?"

"How could I forget that old hulk?" Tiger puffed at his cigarette. "It was a wreck. It leaked badly, and could do no more than two knots an hour against the current. Its only navigational instruments were one azimuth compass and two sextants."

"You, Tiger, old Ah-lung and I are the only ones here who served on that boat," continued the engineer. "But in those days, I remember, whenever a problem cropped up you talked it over with the rest of the crew. Sometimes you consulted seamen in the navigation department too, or the local fishermen. But now. . . ."

"Now times have changed," cut in Ah-lung, pointing at the array of shining instruments. "We've all this modern electronic equipment and the latest, twentieth-century, high-speed ship. What's more," he turned to indicate the certificates of merit on the walls, "we've won all these handsome awards. We've no time now for the masses, no patience with people who disagree with us."

Tiger buried his head on his arms. His ears were burning.

"What's the matter, Tiger?" asked Chin Hua with concern.

"I get your point, but the fact is. . . ."

"You can take time to think it over," she said earnestly. "The way I see it, no matter how times have changed, no matter what modern equipment we've got or how successful we've been, we must never for one minute forget the masses."

Tiger nodded and stood up slowly. With a glance at his watch he said, "Well, let's weigh anchor for Silver-flower Island. But. . . ."

"But what?" asked Ah-lung.

"Never mind. . . . Set course for Silver-flower Island."

"Not so fast." Chin Hua stopped him.

"What now?" demanded Hsiao.

"We'll go to Silver-flower Island," Chin Hua said, "but we must continue our survey at the same time."

"We only have one ship."

"The motor-boat can go to Silver-flower Island."

Everyone felt this was a good idea and admired the way Chin Hua considered all sides of a problem. A trip taking several hours in a small open boat might prove extremely exhausting, still all volunteered to go.

"Let's have no more argument." Chu raised his hand for silence. "Young Tao, the engineer and I will go."

"No!" Chin Hua cut him short, then said with determination, "You stay on the *Vanguard* in charge of the surveying. I'll go with the other two to Silver-flower Island." She put on her life jacket, picked up a canteen and ration bag, and said to Tao:

"Let's go."

Tiger gazed after Chin Hua for a long, long time, until the little boat was lost to sight.

## 5

The sea was preternaturally calm that morning. Coils of mist drifting over the water and wreathing the base of green islands looked like huge white mushrooms floating on the sea.

Tiger Chu in waders, his unbuttoned jacket revealing his striped seaman's vest, had not shaved for nearly two weeks and now sported a beard. Brows knit, he strained his eyes towards Silver-flower Island.

After Chin Hua's departure the previous morning, the *Vanguard* had gone full speed ahead with the survey. They anchored when darkness fell, having made over a dozen new soundings but failed again to find the reef. Usually, Chu started snoring as soon as his head touched the pillow, but that night he found it impossible to sleep. He recalled his mates' criticism of him at the meeting and Chin Hua's concern for him. The contemptuous way he had treated her preyed on his mind, and he wondered how she and the other two were faring. Had they found Old Water-root? If so,

with what result? He tossed and turned in his bunk the whole night long.

Suddenly a shark leapt out of the water just in front of him. It was followed by another, then another. The sea, so calm a moment ago, started seething as the huge fish plunged and thrashed, whipping up foaming waves. Seamen have a saying: When sharks cavort and play, a storm is on its way. Chu looked at the barometer: it had dropped to 900 millibars. The air was briny and moist.

Tiger sighed. Just two days to go and a storm was coming. He would have to make a self-criticism after this trip.

"Aren't they back yet, skipper?" asked Old Wang, the cook.

"Not yet," he answered gruffly. "It's no picnic, this trip they're making, Old Wang. You must give them a good rich fish chowder when they get back."

"Don't worry, I'm making a chowder fit for the gods." With a quizzical glance at Chu, Old Wang went on: "They say this new woman comrade is sharp as knives, skipper, and she's given you a real bashing. So why. . . ."

Before Tiger could answer, one of the crew put in: "There's no contradiction there. A bashing is one thing, chowder is another. This shows our skipper's concern for the masses!"

"Skipper!" reported the man on watch. "Look! Isn't that a flare over there?"

"Where?" Tiger leapt to his feet. He raised his binoculars and, sure enough, spotted a faint flare in the distance. "Weigh anchor! We're going to meet them." He bounded up the bridge.

The *Vanguard* sped toward the signal light, which grew brighter the nearer they approached, until finally the motor-boat came into sight bobbing up and down on the waves. The engine, after running so long, had broken down. Hence the signal for help.

"Well, how was it, Comrade Chin Hua?" Tiger grasped the girl's drenched, icy hands as she came aboard.

"Our trip paid off!" cried Tao. "After we went ashore on Silver-flower Island yesterday, a fisherman guided us across two mountains that same night, and we found Old Water-root."



"Come to the point," urged Tiger.

"Old Water-root told us that Owen Reef is the shoal the fishermen call Tiger Reef."

"How come?"

"In 1948, some imperialist warships wanted to pass this way. The Kuomintang customs office sent a foreigner named Owen to make a survey here. His surveying ship moored near Silver-flower Island. Because time was short, the customs authorities promised the crew a big bonus if they finished the job on schedule; and, if they didn't, threatened to dock their pay. But for a fortnight the weather was so stormy that they couldn't take any soundings. Owen grew frantic. When he heard that Old Water-root knew this area well, he tricked him aboard his ship and offered to pay him for information about the reefs and other obstacles here. In the past, imperialists had landed more than once on Silver-flower Island to kill and loot, and many fishing boats had been scuttled by their warships. The mere mention of these pirates made the fishermen grind their teeth. So when Old Water-root learned that Owen was charting a navigation channel for imperialist warships, he told him that there were reefs there, and 'shifted' Tiger Reef from the east to the west. . . ."

"So that's it!" Tiger glanced at the chart showing the area surveyed by the *Vanguard*. "No wonder we couldn't find it. We've been on the wrong track."

"Owen was so pleased with what Old Water-root told him," Tao went on, "he changed the name Tiger Reef to Owen Reef and marked it on the chart. Then having taken a few soundings for the look of the thing, he went back to collect his bonus."

"Where is this Tiger Reef exactly?" asked Chu.

"Here." Chin Hua handed him a slip of paper.

He unfolded it and read: "Upper Mount, Lower Mount; and a shoulder-pole carries the two peaks of Cowshed Mountain."

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"This is the method the old fishermen worked out from experience to locate Tiger Reef. The point in the sea at which Upper Mount and Lower Mount both lie straight ahead while the two peaks

of Cowshed Mountain form a straight line sideways — that's where Tiger Reef is."

"Good!" boomed Tiger. "Comrades, we've only two days left and a storm's blowing up. We must race the storm."

The *Vanguard* changed course for the new survey area and after two hours approached the place where Old Water-root had told them Tiger Reef lay. Dark clouds were gathering in the sky; big waves threw up white foam.

"Ding, ding. . . ." Tiger sounded the alert. The crew braced themselves for battle.

"Comrade Chin Hua, you take command," said Chu earnestly.

"No, skipper, that's your job. I'll handle the depth sounder."

The ship advanced steadily. Tiger fixed his eyes on the sharp silhouettes of Upper Mount and Lower Mount on the distant coast until they came into line; then he turned right to look at Cowshed Mountain. Keeping a close grip on the emergency brake, he was ready to stop the ship at any time. He still had his doubts, however, regarding the accuracy of this method which was based solely on experience, not on measurements by scientific instruments.

Like a scout striking deep into enemy territory, the *Vanguard* moved cautiously and alertly forward. The rhythmic "chatter" of the depth sounder was accompanied by Chin Hua's clear voice: "Depth of water 21 metres, 19 metres, 17 metres . . . 5 metres. Halt!" As Tiger Chu put on the emergency brake, the whole crew cheered:

"Found it! Found it!"

Tiger remarked complacently to Hsiao, "Look, Upper Mount and Lower Mount are in line all right, but not the two peaks of Cowshed Mountain. We must go at least a thousand metres further for that."

Young Hsiao looked round and found that this was true.

"Comrades," called Chin Hua, who had come down to the deck with a sounding lead in her hand. "This isn't a reef, it's a shipwreck."

"What did you say?" Tiger could not believe his ears.

"A shipwreck," she repeated.



"How do you know?"

"Just look at the paint on this." She raised the lead. A spot of green paint had stuck to the grease on it. "What reef has paint on it? And look at the variation of the depth." She dropped the lead into the sea, then made the rope taut, and it showed exactly five metres. Then she took three steps forward to make another sounding, and this time the depth was 17 metres. She commented, "Such a big difference within so short a distance can mean one thing only — a shipwreck."

"Heaven help us!" Tiger scratched his head. "How could there be a shipwreck here?"

Just then a huge wave broke over the *Vanguard*. The cups and ink-bottles on the table clattered to the floor. The storm had come. The sky grew darker and darker. The sunbeams filtering through chinks in the black clouds flickered on the sombre, seething, hissing water.

"What now?" Tiger glanced at Chin Hua.

"Continue forward."

The *Vanguard* braved the storm toward the hidden reef.

"Depth of water 20 metres, 21 metres, 17 metres, 10.5 metres, 6 metres, 3 metres. . . ."

"Good!" With a loud shout Tiger applied the brake.

"Go a little further," urged Chin Hua. "This isn't the peak of the reef."

"Isn't that too risky?" asked Tiger dubiously.

"Don't worry. The tide is flowing," she reassured him. "You can't catch a tiger cub unless you dare go into the tiger's lair. We must get the exact location of the reef."

"Depth of water 2.9 metres, 2.6 metres, 2.4 metres. . . ."

The whole crew cheered.

"Get ready, measure the position!" cried Chin Hua. Young Tao and Hsiao quickly reported the position angles, which Tiger jotted down on the chart. Then he looked out of the window at Cowshed Mountain. Sure enough, its two peaks were in line. He yelled exultantly, "Got it! The exact location of the hidden reef!"

The crew were leaping for joy.

"This has been a really fruitful trip," cried Tao. "We've found not only the hidden reef but a shipwreck as well."

"I've found another hidden reef," announced Tiger bluntly.

"Where?" asked the others in astonishment.

"In here." Tiger tapped his forehead. "I'm from a worker's family, I was tempered in the cultural revolution, I've made a fairly good showing as a surveyor and mastered all these modern instruments. . . . I thought that, with all this, I could never go wrong. All I needed was to work harder. But now I realize. . . ."

Impressed by Chu's self-critical attitude, Chin Hua made up her mind to learn from his revolutionary spirit. She said earnestly:

"What Comrade Tiger says is very significant and has taught me a lesson. Because we're living in class society, our skipper isn't the only one with a hidden reef in his head — each one of us may have one. If not today, maybe tomorrow. Maybe in a different form, which we haven't yet spotted."

Tiger nodded. "This trip has brought home to me that, to make a good job of finding hidden reefs, we surveyors must not only study hard but must first find the hidden reefs in our own heads."

The crew murmured approval. And young Hsiao exclaimed:

"Well said. Spoken like a real poet, skipper!"

The *Vanguard* ploughed through the waves, advancing rapidly in the teeth of the storm.

*Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien*

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*The Railway Bridge* (from "New Paintings of the Yellow River") ▶



# Not Just One of the Audience

Spring comes early south of the Yangtse. And spring was very much in the air in the Worker-Peasant-Soldier Theatre as an announcer in army uniform stepped out from behind the curtain. His face glowing in the spotlight, after a brisk salute he announced: "We now present the revolutionary modern Peking opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*." Then the orchestra struck up the martial strains of the *March of the People's Liberation Army,* the curtain rose, and the performance began.

All eyes were so intent on the stage that no one paid any attention to the curious behaviour of one of the audience. This was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow in his thirties, who appeared to have no seat and to be searching for a suitable place. Although powerfully built he moved lightly, now bending almost double to approach the stage, now skirting the wall at the back. If not for his faded army uniform, he might well have been taken for a gymnast. Presently he raised his head to stare at the amplifier suspended from the ceiling.

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Tuan Jui-hsia is a young worker. This is his first story.

A frown of concentration came over his face as he listened to the music. Clearly he was very interested in the acoustics.

"Are you looking for your seat, comrade?" asked an attendant with a torch in his hand.

"I've got a place up front, thanks," was the somewhat embarrassed reply. Then this odd theatre-goer went quietly to the front and sat down in an empty seat there.

"Where have you been all this time, Old Chi?" a plump fellow next to him asked.

"Just looking around.... Well, how do you find it, Old Su?"

"Not bad. Especially the actor playing Yang Tzu-jung,"* replied Su keeping his eyes fixed on the stage.

"It's a fine opera all right. What a pity...."

"What's a pity?" Su looked at him with surprise.

Chi pointed to the microphone above the stage. "Good resonance, but not enough clarity. Hear all that background noise?"

Su listened carefully, then said: "There's something wrong with the high pitch too."

Chi nodded. "The best thing would be to listen to the singing close at hand and make a comparison."

Su nodded in turn and made no further comment. They went on watching the opera.

The performance ended not too late, and Chi suggested: "Come on, let's go backstage." Su made no objection to accompanying him.

They found the players changing and removing their make-up, while some of them tidied up. At their request, they were taken to see the young actor Cheng Ta-hsiung who had played the main part.

"We're from Feiyao Radio Equipment Plant," said Chi, who had shown so much interest in the sound effects. "It seems to us there's something wrong with your sound-amplifying system. Do you mind singing something for us, so that we can compare your real voice with the sound relayed in the auditorium?"

Young Cheng eyed them with interest and readily agreed. "Sure. What shall I sing?"

*Leader of a PLA scout platoon and the chief character in the opera.



"How about that passage 'The greater the danger the more bravely I advance'?"

After a moment's pause to get into the spirit of his part, the actor threw back his head and sang: "Though I see clearly there are dangers ahead, the greater the danger the more bravely I advance...." His voice vibrant with emotion, conveying the fearlessness of a Communist, had a powerful impact on his two listeners, who cried out in admiration.

"You're young to sing so well," remarked Su. "Who taught you?"

"I'm in Cast B. Comrade Lin Ying who's in Cast A has gone on a performance tour abroad. Lin's a better singer than I am. As for who taught me, my teachers are the workers, peasants and soldiers. We can't sing well unless we really enter into their feelings. And that's why I still can't play a hero's part well. Lin told me a moving anecdote about this, when coaching me in this passage. But that's a long story...."

"We've fallen down on our job, comrade," cut in Chi. "We must revolutionize your sound-amplifying equipment, or it will affect your performance."

"Of course, this is your line." After a moment Cheng added reflectively: "I heard that, three years ago, our sound technicians asked a research institute to design us a high-fidelity loud-speaker system. At first the technician who received us agreed; but after learning our requirements he backed out, saying that such equipment had to be imported and couldn't yet be made in China. Later, he helped us overhaul and slightly improve our old equipment. We had to be content with that."

"Why don't you come to our factory and discuss it with us workers?" suggested Chi.

Cheng's face lit up. Grasping the other's hand he asked: "What's your name, comrade?"

By way of answer, Chi produced a notebook, tore out a page and wrote on it: "Chi Chang-chun, Feiyao Radio Equipment Plant."

"Chi's a member of our Party committee and head of the Trial Production Section," said Su.

Gripping Cheng's hand Chi assured him earnestly: "We look forward to hearing from you."

It was already eleven by the time the two workers left the theatre. The night wind was chilly, but warmth filled Chi's heart as he swung along with great strides. His friend Su, less volatile, followed in thoughtful silence. Neither said a word till they parted at the corner to take different buses home. Then Su warned Chi: "You know, this theatre's requirements are very high. I imagine they want equipment as good as any made abroad."

"I expect so. It will be a challenging job. But even if the difficulties pile up as high as Tiger Mountain, we must learn from Yang Tzu-jung and overcome them."

"Well, we can discuss it tomorrow," was Su's ambiguous answer.

## 2

The next morning Chi rose earlier than usual. After washing in cold water, he did exercises on the balcony. Although already demobbed for several years, he retained a number of old army habits and still thought of himself as a soldier. Wherever the tide of revolution swept him, he knew how to man his post and how to find a target for attack. While watching the opera he had discovered another enemy stronghold to take by storm. It had been his habit in the army, when confronted by some difficult task, not to lie awake at night worrying over it but to analyse the problem first thing the next morning. He now decided to report the matter to his workshop's Party committee, ask for permission to tackle it, and then enlist the help of his mates in making high-fidelity sound equipment. The designing, the materials required, and the division of labour would all present problems. Chi jotted these down as they occurred to him, and carefully thought them over. He must consult vice section chief Su again, for Su as an experienced technician was bound to have some valuable suggestions. Taking deep breaths of the fresh morning air, Chi finally closed his notebook. Of course, the idea was sure to meet with resistance. Building a brave new world, a magnificent future for the Chinese people, would naturally involve



plenty of difficulties. But revolution means braving storms; a soldier's life can never be plain sailing.

Putting his notebook back into his pocket, he hurried to the workshop.

After hearing his report, the Party committee agreed to support the project. Then Chi went to consult Su.

Rubbing his chin rather dubiously, Su said: "Though the leadership has agreed to try this out, we must go about our planning carefully. We have to work out a schedule and calculate when we can deliver the goods and what standard we can reach. We must be scientific and make a full assessment of difficulties."

"Right. We must make a correct analysis of problems too. Here are some problems that have occurred to me." Chi handed over his notes.

After reading them Su nodded. "You've thought of all the things I had in mind. Now I feel reassured." He agreed readily to Chi's proposal to call a meeting of the section to discuss the plan.

The other workers took a lively interest in the project.

"Trial production in a vacuum's no use," said one.

"Our stage art's outstripped our technique," put in another. "People have a right to say: You workers in electronics have fallen down on your job. It's really shaming."

"Just feeling ashamed won't do," retorted another. "That research institute apologized too, didn't it? It's up to us workers to take effective action."

"Right. We must revolutionize our old equipment," chimed in several others.

Although stirred by their keen response, Su demurred: "But their technical requirements are very high. As far as I know, we haven't yet manufactured such high-fidelity equipment in China. So. . . ."

Chi cut in: "So we've got to raise our standards."

It was after working hours, but now Chi and Su were called to the administration office where the opera company's sound technicians had arrived to sign a contract for the new equipment.

"All right, the meeting's adjourned. Let's go, Old Su," proposed Chi.

Su had been lost in thought. Now he said hastily: "Suppose you go. I must get home early today.... I have some business." With that he picked up his kit.

"All right," said Chi, rather surprised. "I'll tell you the details later."

As Su was hurrying out he turned back to call, "Mind you leave us some margin, Old Chi."

"Of course I will."

After signing the contract that evening, Chi went to Su's home. The technician, sitting in an easy chair, offered him some tea. Su was nearing fifty, and decades of hard work had turned his hair grey and etched lines on his forehead. Slow and sure was his motto. He undertook no job unless confident that he could carry it through. Su had signed plenty of work contracts in his time but this present contract struck him as injudicious. Chi had even guaranteed "optimum performance" — this was promising too much. He could have kicked himself for not helping draw up the contract. As his eye fell on Chi's signature at the end of it, he grimly shook his head. "I warned you to leave some margin. Now you've stuck your neck out."

"It's our customers who need a margin," retorted Chi.

"Each clause of a contract should be completely explicit, but here you've guaranteed 'optimum performance'. A promise of this sort is asking for trouble. We should have left ourselves more leeway."

"It's our job to open up new paths. The greater the risks, the harder we should press forward, like the scout leader in the opera. If we just think of leaving ourselves some way out, we'll never blaze a new trail."

As Su had no answer to this, he simply laughed drily. Then he raised another objection. "Their original requirement was for no more than 1 per cent distortion, wasn't it? How come that's been changed to 0.5 per cent?"



"That was my suggestion. The old target was too low. We should aim higher," said Chi. Inwardly he was wondering how Su, who had not been present at the signing of the contract, knew the original requirement.

"That's too steep. It's easier said than done. This isn't a wooden table we're making, Old Chi. It's a high-fidelity loud-speaker system, involving hundreds of components. Of course high specifications sound good, and to sign a contract is easy; but what if we can't produce the goods on time?" The technician was worked up.

"Then we shall lose face. Right?" Chi answered cheerfully. "That would be a big defeat. We won't allow it. But we shall lose more face if we shirk this challenge and dare not storm this stronghold. Sure, there are difficulties ahead, but there are favourable factors too. In the first place, since this is a special assignment, the Party committee has mobilized the whole plant and everybody's keen to do the job. And then, we've produced sound equipment here for years, so that we have a good deal of experience. What other countries can do, we should be able to do too — and better. If we all throw fuel on the flames, they will rise high. Provided we work together, we can move mountains."

Su lit a cigarette and started smoking in silence. Chi, finding the atmosphere oppressive, opened a window.

"Maybe I'm too conservative, Old Chi," resumed Su slowly. "But I still think you've been too hasty, and we're taking a big risk. I've learned from experience that to be scientific we must be cool-headed."

Chi did not answer at once, but picked up his cup and took a deep draught of tea. He then said earnestly: "I've been a soldier, I can only talk bluntly. Don't be offended by my frankness, Old Su. I agree that we should be cool-headed, realistic; but I think it's still more important to have high political enthusiasm. It's drive we need, and the determination to forge ahead for the sake of the revolution. We must go all out to build socialism better, faster and more economically. This isn't an ordinary task we've taken on! We're fighting to defend Chairman Mao's line on revolutionary art. Your

idea about contracts is wrong. Just think, in the old society what chance did working people have to see operas? My dad was a rickshaw-man. He pulled customers to theatres in Shanghai every evening, but never set foot in a theatre himself. When I was a kid, I used to scavenge for cinders. Once, hearing the music from a small theatre, I tried to get a peep inside; but a fat fellow in a long gown seized me by the ear. 'Get out, scum!' he swore. 'This is no place for you.' That's what it was like in the old days. After Liberation Liu Shao-chi, Chou Yang and their clique controlled the literary and art circles, putting on decadent feudal, bourgeois and revisionist operas which helped pave the way for the restoration of capitalism. It was not until the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution achieved victory that the true masters of the arts, the workers, peasants and soldiers, took their rightful place on the stage, and now we have our own new operas. Our artists are doing their best to present our heroes on the stage. We must help them perfect their productions, not snarl them up. Don't you see, this isn't a purely technical job?"

"True enough," conceded Su. "But I was thinking of our plant's reputation.... Isn't there a safer way?"

"Of course there is. Tell them we can't produce such equipment. They must make do with what they have."

"Nonsense!" protested Su hotly.

"Or advise them to buy equipment from abroad."

"That wouldn't do either."

"Quite. We workers can't give them either of those answers. Our answer can only be: We accept the challenge."

Su thought this over, then stubbed out his cigarette. "I suppose there's no backing out now."

"As long as we're on the right track, Old Su, we can forge straight ahead," declared Chi incisively, clapping his hand on the table.

## 3

Two months went by. With full support from the Party committee, the workers went all out to produce a top-quality sound-amplifying



system. Su studied all the reference books on this subject in their library, as well as material from other organizations. He was deeply stirred by the workers' enthusiasm and infected by Chi's energy, which made him seem a human dynamo.

Chi was the commander-in-chief of this campaign. A tense battle of this sort suited him down to the ground. He was in his element. Whenever a difficulty cropped up, he was sure to be there, taking notes. He couldn't work miracles, of course, or solve all problems at once; but he would check up after a couple of days. "Is your problem solved? No? Then go and see Wang about it." Or "Go to such-and-such a factory. They have this know-how." Sometimes, naturally, youngsters who groused met with a rebuff. "You're not that stupid. Go back and use your brain."

After two months of hard work they finally produced a new sound-control panel the size of a piano, impressive, shining, stream-lined. But Su, sitting by the new equipment, looked gloomy. He had been in high spirits that morning when the job was finished, and had phoned the opera company to come and try it out. Just then, however, Chi had carefully checked the equipment. He attached an amplifier and, pressing his ear to this, cried out in dismay. "No, that's not good enough!"

"What?" demanded Su.

"Come and listen. There's some interference."

But all Su could detect was the faintest of murmurs, as unobtrusive as a wisp of cloud floating across a clear sky.

"That? It's nothing — softer than a sigh," Su protested. "With all the noise in the theatre, who'd catch this tiny sound? Besides, people don't press their ears to the amplifiers."

"What about the times when there's silence on stage? This would spoil the effect."

Su flared up. "We can't be such perfectionists. The delivery date is almost here, remember. Don't forget the contract you signed."

"Of course, we must speed up to meet our deadline. I'll go and tell the comrades that we'll have a meeting after work to discuss this. We must guarantee high quality." Chi strode off without waiting for Su to reply.

"Why attempt the impossible?" The technician plumped down on his chair, quite unconvinced. To eliminate that faint murmur meant endless trouble. The wiring in the new equipment was as complex as a man's circulatory system. Any readjustment now would be no joke. Why did Old Chi always think in terms of warfare? Why keep on the offensive all the time? After sweating their guts out for two months, why not deliver the goods with no further ado? He must find some way to talk the fellow round.... Su sat there moodily, marshalling arguments.

"Is Comrade Chi Chang-chun here?" A voice interrupted his thoughts.

Su turned and saw two young men at the door: the actor Cheng and a stranger. He rose to greet them.

Cheng who recognized Su introduced the other man to him. "This is Comrade Lin Ying, who plays the scout leader's part. He's just back from abroad to take part in the performance to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Chairman Mao's *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*. Our sound technicians are busy today, so we've come in their place. Besides, Old Lin here wants to see Comrade Chi."

"Chi will be here soon. My name's Su. Please take a seat. The equipment is basically ready. I'll put on a tape-recording for you to hear." Su hoped this try-out would meet with their approval.

After hearing a recording of music, the two visitors exchanged elated glances.

"Now I'll switch off the tape," said Su, "to hear whether there are any disturbing sounds."

As they listened carefully, Su concentrated on watching their expressions.

"Well? Is it satisfactory?" he asked them.

"It certainly is." Cheng was beaming. "You must have worked hard."

"Well, the contract guarantees 'optimum performance'." Su chuckled complacently.

"We're all working for the same goal," put in Lin. "We had a wonderful reception abroad in our last performance tour. But our



foreign friends probably don't realize how much our socialist art owes to the hard work and enthusiastic support of our workers, peasants and soldiers. Whenever I sing that passage, 'The greater the danger the more bravely I advance', I always remember what I learned from Old Chi."

"What you learned from Old Chi?" Su was puzzled.

Lin smiled and nodded.

Cheng explained: "I told you last time, didn't I, that there was a story attached to singing that passage? Well, it seems your Old Chi was the hero of that story."

"I'd like to hear it," said Su eagerly.

"All right. It happened four years ago," began Lin. "I went that summer to live with a naval unit on the coast. After one performance, a PLA man came to give me some criticism. He said I didn't bring out the scout leader's heroic spirit well enough, that my interpretation of the role wasn't lifelike. That man was Chi Chang-chun, then in charge of a radar squad. But I couldn't take his criticism at first.

"One evening I went out with a torpedo-boat. In calm weather it would have been a pleasant outing, but that day a storm blew up. The PLA men welcomed this chance to train under tough conditions, but I felt very sorry for myself as I huddled on the deck, sea-sick. Above me, on a mast over ten metres high, the radar antenna was revolving slowly. The sight of it made me dizzy. Squad Leader Chi took pity on me and helped me to the cabin.

"The torpedo-boat ploughed boldly through the waves till suddenly the radar operator reported that he had lost track of the target. The aerial had broken down. What was to be done? Without the radar, the vessel was like a blind tiger. Normally, a man could have climbed up to repair it; but the boat was tossing so badly that the crew could hardly keep their footing on deck, let alone climb the mast in such a raging storm. All looked in dismay at the captain, whose brows were knit.

"'Better turn back,' I suggested feebly.

"Chi threw me a disapproving glance, then quickly assembled his tools and started out.

"'It's too dangerous!' I tried to stop him.

"'This is war, understand?' Stripped to his vest, he flexed his powerful muscles.

"I protested, 'No, it's only an exercise.'

"'Listen, comrade,' he said. 'You're an actor. Can you play the part of a hero well on the stage if all the time you remember you're only acting?' Then he ran to the captain and volunteered to repair the aerial.

"With him giving the lead, several other men volunteered too. The captain examined Chi's safety-belt and said firmly: 'To smash the enemy, go ahead. But be careful.' At once Chi started climbing the mast. Great waves were tossing the boat so savagely that the long pole rocked and swayed like a pendulum. I watched with bated breath. When at last he reached the top, all eyes were riveted on his sturdy figure as, buffeted by the gale at that perilous height, he calmly got on with the job. Before long he started down again, and we surged forward to meet him.

"'Report, captain! Repairs completed,' he cried in a ringing voice as he reached the deck. At an order from the captain, the radar started scanning again. As everyone crowded round to congratulate Chi I gripped his hand, too moved to speak. But Chi just smiled and went back to his post. Then I felt something wet on my hand, and when I looked I found it stained with blood....

"That's how Chi taught me by example, and showed me how to advance in the teeth of danger. Since then, when I play the part of Yang Tzu-jung, I remember Chi's fine spirit. On my return from abroad, Cheng told me how Old Chi had volunteered to improve our sound equipment. So I'm very keen to see him again, and to know how a hero like that has made out in your factory."

Moved by this anecdote, Su blinked back tears. "He's just the same still. Nothing can hold him back."

At this moment the subject of their talk strode in. Looking at him with new eyes, Su exclaimed "Old Chi!" while Lin bounded forward to grip his old friend's hands.

"This equipment you've made is fine, Squad Leader Chi. We're simply delighted with it."



"No, it's not up to scratch. There are still distracting noises, but we're going to fix that for you." It was Su who said this. As Chi stared in pleased surprise, Su turned and told him, "I'm learning from you how to tackle difficulties."

"We must all learn from your spirit," chimed in Cheng. "That technician from the research institute ought to come and learn from you too."

"He has," said Su quietly. This puzzled everyone. Mopping his face, which had suddenly flushed, Su added, "I was that technician, if you want to know. Later I studied for a time in the cadre school, then was transferred here to work. I'm remoulding myself and learning from the workers."

"So that's how it is!" Chi was genuinely glad.

"What a coincidence!" was Cheng's reaction.

"Not only a coincidence but one with significance," amended Lin.

That evening Chi, Su and the other workers set about further improving the new equipment. They checked the different components painstakingly till they located and ironed out the last snag. Little by little the noise intrusion faded, to be swallowed up in the silence of the spring night.

## 4

In May the Worker-Peasant-Soldier Theatre celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of the *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art.* Like blossoms in spring, the revolutionary modern operas symbolized a fresh, glorious flowering of proletarian literature and art. During one enthralling performance, all eyes were so intent on the stage that nobody noticed two members of the audience testing the high-fidelity loud-speaker system.

At the end of the opera they went backstage again. Cheng and Lin, still in stage costumes, gave them an enthusiastic welcome.

"The sound was first-rate," cried Cheng. "We've the working class to thank for this."

"We've done no more than our duty," answered Chi. "It's good to see an audience of workers, peasants and soldiers watching a play about themselves."

"Your singing was tremendous," Su told Lin. "Especially that passage 'The more bravely I advance'. It's an inspiration for us in our work."

"We must keep learning from the audience and improving our technique," replied Lin. "Art has to be closely linked with real life. We ought to ask our script-writers to write an opera about the two of you."

"You're kidding," laughed Chi. "We're just two of the audience."

"Just two of the audience? No. The life of the workers, peasants and soldiers is the inexhaustible source of our art. In our audience there are many real-life heroes. They're the real masters of our theatre."

"Hear, hear!" cried Cheng.

"In that sense," said Chi thoughtfully, "none of the workers, peasants and soldiers here are 'just one of the audience', because all of us are involved in the fight against decadent bourgeois art. I say, Su, that's a subject for the spare-time correspondents in our plant."

"Right. And I'm another subject they can write up. Because only when intellectuals like myself really integrate with workers, peasants and soldiers do they have a future that grows brighter and brighter." Su, his eyes glowing, rounded out the discussion.



*Paddy Fields by the River* (from "New Paintings of the Yellow River") ▶

# Little Dragon

I walked along the sea dike happily.

I was on my way to my first assignment since my transfer from the army to a county's militia contingent. I was to inspect the work of a militia battalion in Fighting Dragons Brigade. To my delight, this offered me a chance to see my former company commander Chao Ta-kuei again. I remembered his small son Little Dragon too, an interesting but remarkably timid child. Once when his mother brought him to visit his father, someone took him to the drill ground during rifle practice. But the sound of firing scared him and he ran off showing a clean pair of heels. Even in the barracks he shut the door and windows and asked his mother to cover his ears with her hands.

"Look, comrade, do you think he'll ever make a fighter?" Old Chao's anxious voice still rang in my ears.

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Liu Pen-fu is a young soldier who writes in his spare time.

It was midsummer. The sandy road along the beach was hot. Although I took off my jacket and cap and walked in the shade of the willows, I was sweating. I thought of stopping for a rest when — plop! — something thudded down just behind me. Before I could turn to look, someone called out:

"Halt!"

There stood a young "paratrooper" of about thirteen in shorts with a bare suntanned back. He had jumped down from the branches of a willow. From under his camouflage, a crown of willow leaves, he stared at me, his red-tasselled spear pointing right at my nose. I took an immediate fancy to this young warrior, who reminded me of myself twenty years ago.

"Who're you?" he asked.

"I'm merely taking a stroll," I said nonchalantly.

"A stroll? Why are you looking around then?" He glanced at the defence works near the dike.

So it was because of my looking around that he was treating me as an enemy.

"Nice scenery you have here," I rattled away. "That big dike has been built between two seas: outside is the Yellow Sea, inside a sea of paddy fields."

Unable to find any fault with this, the boy drew back his spear but did not let me pass. He still suspected me.

To test him, I pointed to the concrete defence works and asked, "What are those things? How many are there?"

That put the lid on it! The suspicion in his eyes turned into certainty. He promptly put his thumb and forefinger in his mouth and gave a shrill whistle. Immediately about ten other boys and girls came jumping down from the willow trees and surrounded me closely. I had no idea that the boy had so many "paratroopers" at his command.

He signalled to them with his hand before striding off, confident as a seasoned commander, towards the side of the dike. Four of the older youngsters immediately scurried after him. They put their heads together and conferred in whispers. After that he waved his hand again saying, "Go back to your posts." Some took up



creels and made for the beach to catch crabs. Others climbed into the willows again. Only five of them were left with me, and they seemed to have relaxed their vigilance and become rather friendly.

"Hey, why don't you have a rest," suggested the youngest girl who wore her hair in a braid. Selecting a shady place I sat down with my bag beside me.

But where had that boy gone? Looking around I heard a rustling in the reeds below the dike and saw him stooping to pluck a tall reed. Then he poked a wire through the hollow stalk to make sure there was nothing blocking it before he ran towards the river.

The estuary here was about eighty metres wide. The boy swiftly took off his camouflage, put one end of the reed in his mouth, and jumped into the river. The top of the reed was all I could see above water.

After resting for a while I stood up, meaning to go on, but the girl with the braid caught hold of my shirt-tail. Big eyes sparkling, in a voice as clear as a bell, she said, "Hey, have you seen the big crabs we catch here on the coast?" I shook my head.

"They're enormous, as big as bowls." She tightened her hold on my shirt. "A nip from their iron pincers hurts for hours!"

One of the boys then gave me the low-down on lobsters, after which a chubby youngster described a turtle as big as a cauldron that his grandpa had caught. . . .

Not having lived by the sea I found all this so interesting that I lit a cigarette and sat down again to listen.

The eyes of the little girl shone like two raindrops on a lotus leaf. After scanning me from head to foot, they fixed on the lighter in my hand. She gave Chubby a nudge and whispered:

"Look, it may be a small camera to take photos of our defence works."

Chubby bent forward and scrutinized my lighter. "No, I don't think so." He shook his head.

"Where's your vigilance? I'm sure it's a camera," she insisted, pursing her lips.

I realized then how I had been taken in. These children were keeping me there deliberately. No wonder the girl had greeted

me with a "Hey" instead of calling me comrade. To them I was still a suspicious character. No doubt they were acting on the boy's instructions.

Just as I had decided to go on anyway, two people came down from the bridge. The taller one seemed familiar while the shorter was the boy who had challenged me. He came running ahead and waved to the children, saying:

"You've done your work well. Our battalion commander's come."

My guess had been correct. The children had deliberately detained me.

I went to meet the tall man who turned out to be my former company commander Chao Ta-kuei, now commander of the local militia battalion. We ran towards each other and clasped hands, then began to pummel each other.

The boy platoon leader thought that we were fighting. He whistled. The young "paratroopers" once again jumped down from the willow trees.

"It's been five years!" "Good to see you again!" Chao and I exclaimed almost simultaneously.

"I was nabbed the moment I set foot on your Fighting Dragons territory," I joked. "I'm glad you've come to 'liberate' me."

Chao turned to the children.

"I must introduce you. This is Uncle Wu Hsiao-kang. Once, with only a rolling-pin, he forced the enemy out of a tank. Now he's a PLA man transferred to our county militia."

When the children heard this they gathered round me, but in a friendlier way this time. Only after their young leader gave the order, "Man your posts," did they disperse.

As the girl with the braid ran off, the battalion commander called out to her, "Has Lu Hua come back from her course yet?"

"No. Sis is still at the commune." With this the little girl ran off.

But the young platoon leader still stood there and said to me seriously, "I'm sorry for the misunderstanding just now, Uncle Wu."

"I saw you plunge into the river with a reed in your mouth. Why didn't you cross by the bridge?" I asked him.



"There're plenty of bridges," the boy answered earnestly. "But if war comes, the enemy will bomb them to block the river. If I practise swimming now in ordinary times I'll be able to take messages in war-time."

I patted his tanned back and said approvingly, "Good boy, you've the right stuff in you."

He smiled shyly at that, then turned to Chao. "Comrade battalion commander, now that this uncle from the county has come, my problem can be solved." And then he dashed off.

Going down to the bridge, I remembered Chao's timid little son. "How is Little Dragon getting along?" I asked.

My old comrade-in-arms chuckled. "Slow in the uptake, aren't you? He's the one who took the lead in detaining you."

"He!" How could I have recognized the timid child in this capable young leader?

Chao slapped me on the shoulder and reminded me, "People develop and things change, don't they?" Then he went on, "During the cultural revolution my father showed the youngsters the tattered padded coat he'd worn for seventeen years in the old days and some of the shrapnel left from the Japanese bombardment of our village. He told them what bitter class oppression he'd endured and how, under the leadership of Chairman Mao, the people took up arms and seized state power so as to become the masters of the country and lead a happy life. It was then that Little Dragon began to change. He started going to the drill ground. When the militiamen practised throwing imitation hand-grenades, he volunteered to bring them back and got in a few throws himself. He set up the targets for their rifle practice, and managed to fire a few shots with a spare rifle. When they drilled with bayonets, he followed suit with a stick. Some militiamen joked, 'Little Dragon, you're like a monkey, always copying people.' But what do you think he replied? 'The monkey just does it for fun. I'm learning how to defend my country.' This summer, when school broke up, he led a platoon of Little Red Soldiers to guard the defence works during the day."

"What did he mean by saying that his old problem could be solved?" I asked.

"It's a question of principle, not so easy to solve," Chao sounded embarrassed. "He'll bring it up to you." This rather worried me. How could I, a newcomer, solve a problem which the battalion commander had been unable to solve?

It was already past noon when I ate my mid-day meal at Chao's home. He still maintained his old army efficiency, speed and drive. As I took up my bowl, he suggested, "While you're eating, suppose I put you in the picture." He told me much about the local militia and its combat readiness which was good to hear. Suddenly Little Dragon came into the room and saluted me. I thought the young imp was going to bring up his problem.

"Uncle Wu, we've heard that in the Huai-Hai Campaign* a Kuomintang tank driver mistook your rolling-pin for a bangalore torpedo and was frightened into surrendering. Were you a militiaman then?"

"No, I was only fourteen, under age. So they called me a 'reserve militiaman'."

"A reserve militiaman!" He saw his chance. With dancing eyes he turned to the battalion commander. "Pa, you always say that to lower the age limit for a militiaman is against principles. Will you let me be a reserve militiaman?"

The battalion commander smiled at me. "Well, this is his problem," he said.

Now that I knew the boy's longing to join the militia, I understood why he made such strict demands on himself and his "paratroopers". As his father's old comrade-in-arms, I ought not to damp the boy's enthusiasm.

"All right," I told Little Dragon. "On behalf of the battalion commander I approve your application."

Little Dragon jumped with joy. Going up to the picture of Chairman Mao, he raised one hand and vowed, "Chairman Mao, please set your heart at ease. I'll become a good militiaman, and guard our motherland well."

*A major campaign launched by the People's Liberation Army against the Kuomintang troops in east China between November 1948 and January 1949.



Suddenly a crowd of young "paratroopers" came swarming in clapping their hands. They had been listening outside and heard that their platoon leader had become a reserve militiaman. They felt honoured.

By now Little Dragon was thinking of something else. Tilting his head, he asked me, "Uncle Wu, what are the duties of a reserve militiaman?"

That put me on the spot. I knew the duties of the regular militiamen very well, but not of the reserve.

I was relieved to hear Chao say, "A reserve militiaman must be prepared to take the place of any regular one who is absent."

The boy gave a smile of satisfaction.

In the afternoon the battalion commander and I called the militia cadres together for a meeting in the brigade office where I was staying.

"Report!" I heard a clear voice outside.

"Who is it?" One of our men asked as he opened the door.

"Comrade battalion commander, reserve militiaman Little Dragon has come for an assignment."

"What assignment do you have in mind?" the commander asked.

"To mount guard tonight — in place of Lu Hua."

The commander scrutinized his son as though making his acquaintance for the first time. Little Dragon gazed at his father too as if to say, "Don't look down on me. Even a small diamond can bore a hole in porcelain."

Shaking his head, the commander answered briskly, "Lu Hua hasn't come back from the commune I know, but I'll choose a replacement from the other platoon. It's enough for you to stand sentinel during the day."

"I can take the place of a regular militiaman who is absent, isn't that what you told me?" Little Dragon flared up, then added emphatically, "A commander should keep his promise."

Words failed his father. But one of the cadres suggested, "Young as Dragon is, he often goes to the drill ground with us. Why don't you let him have a try?"

"You know well enough that you can't train a good horse in a small yard and big pines don't grow in flower pots," another chimed in.

The battalion commander looked at me inquiringly.

How well prepared was this eaglet to fly high and withstand the elements? Glancing at the boy's steady expression, I nodded to the commander.

"Comrade Little Dragon," the commander ordered, "you will stand sentinel at No. 4 defence work from two to four a.m. Any questions?"

Little Dragon snapped to attention. "I guarantee to do my duty," he replied.

The commander's weather-beaten face showed signs of some anxiety. He must have realized that Little Dragon needed an experienced partner on night duty. So I quickly offered to accompany the boy.

Little Dragon was beside himself with excitement. Standing guard to defend his motherland — this was the post of honour he had dreamed of!

I got up an hour ahead of time. Little Dragon was at an age when most boys are lively enough in the day but sleep very soundly at night. Afraid that he might oversleep, I started out to wake him. When I opened the door there stood the boy fully accoutred, his clothes wet with heavy dew. Obviously he had been waiting for me for some time.

The stillness of night had fallen over the fishing village. Here and there a phosphorescent light gleamed on the open sea; the dike wound along the coast like a huge serpent.

Little Dragon and I set off together. His rifle with its mounted bayonet was two feet taller than he was, the butt touching his heel as he walked. His cartridge-belt was so long that he had to wind it twice round his slim waist. He was serious and business-like.

At our post he kept a careful watch, even squatting down to listen each time he heard a rustle beneath the dike. He appeared to be listening to the chirping of the insects in the grass.

Before long, storm clouds gathered. After a clap of thunder the rain came down in sheets.



"Lad, you'd better take shelter in that shed," I said, pointing to a straw shed near by, set up maybe by cowherds.

"No," he replied.

Lightning flashed continuously across the sky, thunder pealed and crackled over our heads while the rain came down in bucketfuls. Afraid the boy might catch cold I said, "Go and shelter in that shed, quick. This is an order. I'll stand on guard."

I caught sight of him in a flash of lightning. Lips firmly pressed together, soaked to the skin, his stiff hair flattened over his drenched forehead, he had water dripping from the tip of his nose. But he still kept a sharp look-out.

"Don't worry about me, Uncle Wu. I can take it."

The rain slackened gradually then stopped before another guard came to relieve us. On our way back we heard a conch-shell being blown in the village. It was an emergency call.

Hurriedly I told Little Dragon, "Go on home now. I must answer the call."

"So must I."

"No. This will be a real battle."

"The more reason for me to go there."

As there was no time to argue with him, I turned and hurried off.

This emergency call had been arranged earlier by the battalion commander and me to test the militiamen's skill in shooting at night. As fleet as the wind they came to their posts carrying loaded rifles. In turn they took aim and fired. Bullets filled with hatred went zipping through the night. Many "enemies" were laid low. Finally there were only three bullets left in the commander's hand, the bullets for Lu Hua who had still not returned.

"Report!" A child's clear voice sang out from the post. "I'm ready to shoot."

"Is it you, Little Dragon?" Everyone was amazed.

Watching the boy's deft handling of the gun and his steadiness, the commander gave the bullets to him and ordered:

"Ready — Fire!"

The boy levelled his rifle, and held his breath as he aimed and pulled the trigger. Crack! Crack! Crack!

The result reported back was, "Three hits dead on target!"

On the way home Little Dragon and I brought up the rear. He held his head high and squared his shoulders as he strode along the road, still soaking wet.

"The shed was close beside you," I scolded him, "I ordered you to take shelter, but you were so stubborn you didn't budge an inch."

"A militiaman defending the coast must never retreat one step," he retorted gravely.

"Why not?" I teased him.

"Because behind us is Tien An Men in Peking. Our battalion commander has often told us that."

Right! If a revolutionary fighter always thinks of Tien An Men and keeps his whole motherland in mind, it will give him the ability and courage to overcome all difficulties. This was the source from which Little Dragon drew the strength to take on his slender shoulders the heavy responsibility of safeguarding the motherland.

The sun rose, its rays lighting Little Dragon's road ahead.



*Clothe the Hills in Green* (from "New Paintings of the Yellow River") ▶

***Liu Tsu-tzu***

# *Showers of Gold*

A plane flies past,
A plane with a golden wake,
And lightly, lightly
Rains down golden showers.

Excited children racing like the wind
Bound to the hill-top, singing;
The plane has gone, the sun shines down
As in their small hands
They gather the golden raindrops.

"Come quick, mum!" they call.
"You must smell this, it's so sweet.
These raindrops are plump and round
As the eyes of grasshoppers in the fields."

"Those aren't raindrops, children, but seeds,
Seeds scattered by plane to grow trees;
Next year our commune's hills will all be green,
And birds will come to sing. . . ."

That night the children have a dream:
Rain, crystal-clear, is falling on the hills,
And the myriad mountains of our mighty land
In a flash become a new Great Wall of green.



*Tseng Chih-hua*

# *The Commune Fair*

In early April
When the hills are green
Folk from every side flock to the commune fair:
Troops of lads and lasses,
Groups of men and women.

Take a look at the eye-catching goods
Outside the co-op:
South Village fish, North Village geese,
West Hill gourds, East Mountain fruit,
And minority wares galore —
Tung fiddles, Miao flutes,
Chuang embroideries, Yao baskets. . . .

A girl comes to the fair
Laughing and singing,

Driving a rumbling tractor
To pick up supplies:
Sacks of fertilizer and insecticide
Needed right away in the fields.

A lad comes to the fair, beaming,
Pedalling fast as wind on his bicycle
To buy loads of steel picks and crowbars
Urgently wanted on the construction site.

An old aunt comes to the fair
Talking all the way,
Two crates on her shoulder-pole.
What is she so eager, so delighted to buy?
More pigs mean more manure and higher yields;
She has bought a whole litter of piglets.

An old uncle comes to the fair,
His pipe in his hand
He searches left and right.
What is he looking for?
For Marxist classics, the works of Chairman Mao,
To study hard in the night-school.

Such dazzling displays of goods,
Such streams of people,
Fill the roads with laughter,
Fill the roads with singing. . . .





# *The Lichees Have Ripened*

Our commune's lichees have ripened,
Reddening the green hills for miles around,
Each tree like a rosy cloud.

On both sides of the hills
Busy fruit-pickers,
Men and women, old folk and children,
Send songs and laughter
Floating through the boughs.

"Take care, young warbler,
Not to burst your lungs."
"Watch out, old fire-brand,
Or you'll split your sides."

The lichees picked, they rush them
To the warehouse,
Speeding up and down through the hills;
Thousands of carrying-poles loaded with fruit
Seem a crimson torrent
Pouring down to the plain. . . .





# *Frogs Croak Overhead*

The moon lights up my way
As through the dew I come
To join the commune members
In my old mountain home.

What's that? Frogs' croaking sounds —
Or used to — from the ground;
Then why do I hear from the sky
That raucous croaking sound?

The seedlings shake their heads
To show they do not know;
The brooklets and the runnels laugh
As gaily on they flow.

To trace the sound I climb
The path in bright moonlight
Beside the irrigation ditch
Which leads me up the height.

In terraced paddy fields
The frogs croak lustily;
Right up the hill it echoes shrill
Their wild cacophony.

Wet fields reflect the stars
Above the mountain top
Where in refrain, with might and main,
Frogs hail a bumper crop.

*Illustrated by Ho Chen-chiang*





***Tang Tao***

# Two Portrayals of Chinese Women in Lu Hsun's Stories

Women's liberation has long been an issue to those interested in social reform. In China, this problem aroused the keen concern of our great writer Lu Hsun (1881-1936), who dealt with it in many of his stories and essays. Lu Hsun described the sufferings of women, inveighed against their cruel fate and by means of heart-rending vignettes and irrefutable facts squarely posed their problem to all advocates of reform. In an essay explaining his aim in writing fiction, Lu Hsun declared: "I drew most of my characters from those unfortunates in our abnormal society, because I wanted to expose certain evils, draw attention to them and have them cured." Obviously aware that women were among the unfortunates in the abnormal society of old China, he reflected their crucial problem from different angles, in a variety of literary forms.

Chairman Mao in his *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* has pointed out that a man in feudal China was usually subject to three authorities: the state or political authority, the clan authority, and the supernatural or religious authority. **"As for**

**women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority, they are also dominated by the men (the authority of the husband). These four authorities — political, clan, religious and masculine — are the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants."** This is the most profound summing-up of the feudal-patriarchal system which oppressed the Chinese people.

In April 1918, on the eve of the May 4th Movement, the magazine *New Youth* published Lu Hsun's *A Madman's Diary*, the first significant short story of the new cultural movement. Exposing the old society as one in which man preyed upon man, *A Madman's Diary* was a stirring call to arms against the feudal and clan systems, as well as against the feudal moral code which bolstered the authority of the reactionary ruling class. Three months later, Lu Hsun wrote his first essay in the vernacular *My Views on Chastity*, directly challenging the authority of the husband and championing the cause of women who had been oppressed for so many centuries. These works shook the ideological and ethical props of China's feudal-patriarchal society.

Lu Hsun's sympathy for the downtrodden led him to study the lot of the village women who were at the bottom of the social scale. He portrayed peasant women of different types but all equally oppressed, a typical example of these being Hsiang-lin's wife in the story *The New Year's Sacrifice*. This simple honest woman gladly works without sparing herself for a bare subsistence, yet she cannot free herself from the toils of the four feudal authorities. Hard as she struggles, she is trapped. Forced to marry a boy ten years younger than herself, her marriage is a wretched farce. After her boy-husband dies she runs away to work as a servant in the family of a Confucian scholar, who despises her because she is a widow. In this family she works very hard, but finds satisfaction in her labour: "gradually the trace of a smile appeared at the corner of her mouth, and her face became whiter and plumper." If nothing happens to disrupt her life, this honest, unassuming woman is content to go on like this; however, in that society a woman, once married, is a chattel of her husband's even after his death; so his family eventually drags



her back and sells her to a man living in the mountains. But this second husband falls ill and dies and her little son is eaten by a wolf. Then, as a childless widow with no rights, she is driven out like a dog.

When we next see Hsiang-lin's wife in the Confucian scholar's household she has become an object of derision; for marrying twice, for a woman, is considered immoral, and the death of her second husband is taken as evidence that she is a "bad character". Her master will not let her join in the preparations for the New Year's sacrifice for fear of defiling the sacrificial dishes; so this time she is victimized by the supernatural or religious authority. Then, with her whole year's wages, she "buys a threshold" in the temple which will be trampled on by countless feet, thinking in this way to atone for her sins and regain the right to work like anyone else. So when the next ancestral sacrifice comes round, she works harder than ever and goes to set out the winecups and chopsticks in the old way. But her mistress calls out: "Hsiang-lin's wife, put those down!" making it clear that she is not yet pardoned by the authorities. In the end the scholar still drives her away and she becomes a beggar, dying alone, unnoticed, a year later amid the festive din of fire-crackers to welcome in the New Year.

In this harrowing tale of a wretched woman's struggles under the four-fold oppression of political, clan, religious and masculine authority, Lu Hsun does not simply reveal the fate of a single peasant woman, Hsiang-lin's wife, but the common fate of millions of oppressed women in the old feudal society.

*Regret for the Past* deals with women's liberation too. Like *The New Year Sacrifice*, it is also a criticism of the feudal-patriarchal system, though its heroine is an educated girl, Tzu-chun. Her lover, Chuan-sheng, is a petty-bourgeois intellectual. Tzu-chun with her modern education is a product of the May 4th Period. Less fettered by old superstitions than Hsiang-lin's wife, she believes in the bourgeois ideal of individual freedom and dares to challenge traditional conventions in her search for personal freedom and happiness. She says: "I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me." This belief in individual freedom is her only

weapon and the force motivating her in her opposition to the old society. Thus this story presents the confrontation between the bourgeois-democratic concept of individual freedom and the traditional ideas of the feudal-patriarchal system.

Two months after the publication of *A Madman's Diary*, *New Youth* introduced some of Ibsen's plays to China; and these, notably *A Doll's House*, caused quite a stir among Chinese intellectuals oppressed by feudalism, especially among educated young women. Social problems such as free marriage, equality between the sexes and the revolutionizing of the family were eagerly debated. At the end of 1923, in his speech *What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?* Lu Hsun proclaimed the need for a radical change in the economic system before women can win genuine liberation. In other words, the system of exploitation and oppression must be overthrown. However, during that period of history, it was impossible for Lu Hsun to state this explicitly; hence he simply warned Chinese women that under the existing social conditions they must fight for the same economic rights as men; otherwise, even if they left home like Nora, they would have only two alternatives: either to go to the bad or to return home. Since Lu Hsun made this speech in the period before he became a Marxist, his understanding was still somewhat limited and he could not point out the correct path for Chinese women's liberation. However, for the ardent young advocates of individual freedom and happiness, this speech had a salutary sobering effect. Lu Hsun put forward these views again in *Regret for the Past* which depicts the tragedy of a young couple in that period.

Nora leaves her husband's home, whereas Tzu-chun leaves her father's home; however, basically they are the same, both sharing the belief in the emancipation of the individual, both seeking individual freedom. When Nora realizes that she is just a puppet in the house, she decides to leave. As the door closes behind her the curtain falls, and Ibsen does not reveal what becomes of her. Lu Hsun, on the other hand, starts his story after Tzu-chun has left home, describing what happens after she joins her lover. Instead of merely raising a problem he makes a concrete analysis of it by presenting a series of conflicts. Chuan-sheng is very fond of Tzu-chun, and she is in



love with him with a more thoroughgoing, fearless and genuine love. The disapproving or contemptuous looks directed at them when they walk out together make the young man acutely uncomfortable; but Tzu-chun walks on calmly, impervious. Both are willing to make sacrifices for the other, but again it is Tzu-chun who bears the brunt and is more self-sacrificing. Her uncle has disowned her yet, since Chuan-sheng has used up most of his savings, she insists on selling all her trinkets and doing the housework to lighten his financial burden. By detailed touches such as these Lu Hsun conjures up a picture of a courageous, resolute petty-bourgeois intellectual whose anti-feudal stand and growing consciousness are admirable. She represents one of the young people with ideals during the May 4th Movement. In *What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?*, Lu Hsun asks the question: "What has she taken away with her apart from her awakened heart?" This story supplies the answer.

Deep in love, Tzu-chun is eager to contribute her share to their life together, a companionship won through hard struggle. Although she has working ability and the bourgeoisie preaches equality for women, she cannot find a job. She therefore becomes a housewife, devoting her whole energy to lighting the stove, cooking, and working hard from dawn till dusk so that her lover can live better and work more contentedly. Of course such a life is trivial, and naturally Chuan-sheng feels dissatisfied. He himself has a job, but because he defies convention to live with the girl of his choice, the forces of reaction clamp down on him and before long he is dismissed. After that he is unemployed. He puts an advertisement in the paper and writes letters asking for an introduction to some clerical or teaching post, meanwhile doing translation work. He comforts himself with the thought that now he is like a bird freed from a cage; but in fact he is not free to fly where he will and can only hope to earn enough to make a bare living. In this way his translation work is not much better than Tzu-chun's cooking. Both of them can only struggle to keep alive. The economic conditions of the petty-bourgeoisie determine their way of life. Like yoked cattle they plod round and round a millstone.

In *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* Chairman Mao points out: **"But the intellectuals often tend to be subjective and individualistic, impractical in their thinking and irresolute in action until they have thrown themselves heart and soul into mass revolutionary struggles, or made up their minds to serve the interests of the masses and become one with them."** Tzu-chun has no high revolutionary aim. Her goal is to share life with the man she loves and she puts up a fearless fight, neither wavering nor compromising, to attain this end; but once this goal has been reached and new problems confront her, she grows irresolute. Indeed, once they are living together the emptiness of their existence is felt, and to fill this vacuum she keeps chicks and a dog to console her in her loneliness and boredom. Getting rid of these pets causes the first rift in their love, making each feel that the other has changed. Chuan-sheng considers the girl as shallow and lacking in understanding, while she thinks him callous and unsympathetic. Neither of them sees the underlying truth.

In a sense, both have changed. In another sense, neither has changed. For Tzu-chun's concern for Chuan-sheng's well-being before she leaves indicates that she is still devoted to him, and the remorse expressed in his notes reveals that he still loves her. Judging by this, we can say that neither has changed. But the emancipation of the individual postulated by the bourgeoisie is a useless weapon against the feudal forces backed by foreign imperialism in semi-feudal, semi-colonial China. A fight with such a weapon is doomed to failure. It is not that Tzu-chun is too shallow, but the weapon she relies on is defective; it is not that Chuan-sheng is too callous, but the combined forces of reaction are too strong. Helpless before such oppression, the two of them react in different ways.

They need to make a fresh start; unfortunately they do not find the right road. Chuan-sheng thinks: "During the last half year, for love — blind love — I have neglected all the other important things in life." But what is important apart from livelihood? He seems to share the idea expressed by Ibsen in a letter to a friend: "The world is like a boat sinking out at sea; the main thing is to save



oneself." Chuan-sheng feels that his boat is sinking, and to save himself he chooses to struggle alone. "But if I could only take wing and fly away, I still had plenty of ways to make a living. The wretchedness of my present life was largely due to her. . . ." To him, Tzu-chun has become a clinging vine, making it hard for him to battle on and bringing ruin on them both. He tells her: "The truth is it's because I don't love you any more. Actually, this makes it much better for you, because it'll be easier for you to go ahead. . . ." This way out which he visualizes is nothing but an escape from reality. As for Tzu-chun, under these circumstances, she has to go back to her father's home, to face his blazing fury and the cold contempt of others, and soon after this she dies. Finally nothing is left but Chuan-sheng's notes expressing his remorse and regret.

This tragedy has a profound significance. It is a social tragedy and at the same time a moral tragedy. "The most painful thing in life is to wake up from a dream and find no way out." Unfortunately they have not truly awakened. In the dark days of a feudalism protected by imperialism, how can they find a small dream world of their own? A home founded on dreams must vanish like a dream. As we can see from *The New Year's Sacrifice*, as long as the peasant problem remains unsolved, there can be no liberation for peasant women. Similarly, a petty-bourgeois girl in town can never attain true freedom until economic and class conditions change; for even if she goes out to work she will only be the subject of jokes and gossip.

Lu Hsun points this out in his later essays too. In the three decades between the May 4th Movement and Liberation, the Chinese bourgeoisie allowed women to enter certain professions, but only when this suited their class interests, or to serve as window-dressing. Peasant women who left the impoverished countryside were taken on in factories because they accepted lower wages than men, while some educated women were employed as "advertisements" or "flower vases" to pander to the vulgar tastes of men who treated women as playthings. Chinese women were still despised and victimized. As Lu Hsun remarks in his essay *On Women's Liberation*, "In this still unreformed society, every single new fashion is just so much window-

dressing. In point of fact nothing has really changed." Not all the new-fangled ideas of the bourgeoisie can bring genuine emancipation to women of the exploited and oppressed masses. The fate of Hsiang-lin's wife and Tzu-chun was the fate of many women in old China. Only when women's liberation becomes a part of the whole revolutionary movement can there be a true change in the position of women. Lu Hsun states correctly that women must fight to emancipate their minds and win economic rights: "When society is liberated, we ourselves will be liberated too." In China today this prophecy has come true.



*Chao Chuan-kuo*

# New Paintings of the Yellow River

Thirty traditional Chinese paintings of the Yellow River today have been reproduced in a series and published by the Shantung People's Publishing House. All are the works of amateur artists: Yu Tai-chang, Liu Pao-chun, Chang Teng-tang, Tsui Shen-lin and Hsieh Wei-chu.

Painting in ink and water-colours is a traditional and widely popular art form in China. Since Liberation in 1949, guided by Chairman Mao's directives that we should adapt ancient forms for present-day use and develop our own new art by weeding through the old, painters of the traditional school have broken fresh ground. These new paintings of Yellow River scenes are some of their recent achievements.

The Yellow River, rising in China's western province of Chinghai, in the northern foothills of the Bayan Kara Mountains, flows eastward for more than 4,800 kilometres to the sea. It is one of China's largest rivers, second only to the Yangtse. Fossils of the Lantien ape-man and Peking man, dating from half a million years ago, show that

this river valley was the site of the earliest paleolithic culture in China. Here too, five or six thousand years ago, were the painted-pottery Yangshao culture and the black-pottery Lungshan culture; while the bronze culture of the Shang Dynasty dating from the sixteenth century B.C. had its centre in the lower reaches of this river. Thus the Yellow River valley is regarded as the cradle of Chinese history and civilization.

In old China, however, the vast potential of this mighty river was never realized. It was, instead, a scourge of the Chinese people. We have records of more than 1,500 floods in the lower reaches of the Yellow River, which changed course twenty-six times. An old folksong ran:

> The Yellow River twists and bends,
> The people's suffering never ends;
> Untamed by man this scourge will stay
> Till earth and heaven pass away.

Today, however, this scourge is being tamed by men. In 1952, when Chairman Mao inspected the Yellow River, he issued the call: **"Work on the Yellow River must be done well!"** In these last twenty years, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the people of the Yellow River valley have prevented flood by building a huge dike 1,800 kilometres long; they have harnessed and utilized the river's resources, using its water to irrigate the fields, dredging large sections, building reservoirs, sluice-gates and hydro-electric stations, and improving communications. This source of devastation in the past has now begun to benefit the people.

Inspired by these new developments, our revolutionary amateur artists have depicted various scenes in the Yellow River valley. The landscapes in this album pulsate with life. Thus in *Marching to New Construction Sites* the contingents advancing to the mountains to harness the Yellow River express the determination of our people to transform their motherland. *Clothe the Hills in Green* and *Spring Comes to the Plateau* show peasants on the banks of the Yellow River planting trees to turn the heights green and verdant. *Transformation of the Gorge*, depicting the construction of a vast dam in the midst



of mountains shrouded in clouds and mist, is a paean to our people's pioneering spirit and sturdy self-reliance. In the painting *A Lake Appears in the Gorge* we see how the Devil's Pass at Sanmen Gorge, once notorious for dangerous rapids, has changed into a lake of calm limpid water. *Paddy Fields by the River* and *The Yellow River State Farm* portray expanses of fertile fields, while *Bumper Harvest* shows the golden wheat being harvested. The vivid images in these paintings reflect the successes in harnessing the Yellow River.

The message of these works is put across by skilful selection of typical scenes from life. For instance, *Huayuankou Pumping Station* draws a striking contrast between the old society and the new. Beyond the dark green foliage of trees is a scene of intense activity: water from the river gushes from the pumping station; in green paddy fields in the distance the peasants are happily transplanting rice-shoots; while school-children are listening to their teacher's account of the history of this district. Huayuankou lies near Chengchow in the province of Honan. In June 1938, the Kuomintang reactionaries deliberately broke the dike here, so that the turbulent river swallowed up more than fifty thousand square kilometres of land and drowned 890,000 people. Now under the leadership of the Party and Chairman Mao, a sluice-gate and pumping station have been built to irrigate the fields, and the villagers call the fortified dyke their Great Wall against floods. Huayuankou has become a region of wealth and plenty. By contrasting the past with the present, the artist pays high tribute to socialism and our people's industry, courage and resourcefulness. In another painting *Surveying*, a weather-beaten pine branch extends in the foreground, while in the distance boats with sails scud past, and surveyors on the bank are hard at work. This combination of images conveys the resolution and confidence of the Chinese people who are harnessing this unruly river and carrying the revolution through to the end.

The ideological depth and artistic effectiveness of these works are due to the fact that the artists have followed Chairman Mao's instruction to go deep among the masses to remould their world outlook, and to their responsible attitude in their work.

These spare-time painters live on the banks of the Yellow River and, having witnessed for themselves the tremendous changes in this region, they have a deep feeling for their subject. But when they first painted river scenes, not comprehending the whole construction project, they were unable to convey in depth this new chapter in the river's history. As a result of the cultural revolution, they made a further study of Chairman Mao's works, especially his instructions on literature and art. They grasped the need to remould their outlook on art and their world outlook by going whole-heartedly to the masses, to the midst of fiery struggles — for this is the only way to do good creative work. With this heightened understanding and resolution, backed by the local Party and government leadership, in the autumn of 1971 they started making long tours of the Yellow River valley to experience life. When they heard from an old boatman how seven members of his family had been drowned in floods in the bad old days, and saw for themselves the old man's happy life and revolutionary spirit today, they were very deeply impressed. This lesson and many others like it aroused in them burning hatred for the old society and deep love for the new, for the Party and Chairman Mao. Then they plunged afresh into creative work, standing for hours in the water or making sketches under the blazing sun. They considered painting scenes of the Yellow River a task entrusted to them by the people to serve the revolution. After the initial education they received from the poor peasants, they were further helped by the masses during their work. When some of them were eager to complete a landscape before sunset, for instance, the local villagers helped them mix their ink and brought them warm food, so that they did not lose time going back for a meal.

To improve the quality of their work and eliminate shortcomings, the artists made a point of consulting the masses. For example, the first draft of *The Railway Bridge* was somewhat stereotyped and failed to project the new features of our age clearly. Then the artists went to live on a construction site and discussed this draft with the workers, who helped them do a better painting, one which conveyed the stirring scene of bridge construction in this mountain region with greater depth and vision.



Through their own experience, the painters realized that "wrinkles", the traditional brushwork used to paint mountains, and the old method of depicting withered trees and rocks were not sufficient to portray our country's landscapes today. New techniques had to be evolved. Accordingly they made bold experiments, adding colour to outlines, or integrating sketched outlines with ink dots and colour washes. When painting mountains they relied mainly on the use of ink dots and colour washes, resorting sparingly to sketched outlines; when painting figures they reversed this process. In this way, the special features of traditional paintings were retained, yet a new feeling was introduced. Techniques from other art forms were also adopted. In the use of colour, for instance, they adopted certain water-colour techniques to convey a sense of luminosity; and in composition they adopted certain woodcut techniques. *The Yellow River State Farm* is a good illustration of this. Here the splendour of our socialist countryside is conveyed with a foreground of bright blossoms on tall trees. The artists, after much research, introduced a new technique to depict the turbulent waters of the river. Since the Yellow River is muddy, its current rapid, although using the traditional brush-pens, colours and porous paper, the painters achieved the effects of light and shade by the use of oil-painting techniques in the depiction of water. Thus in *Fishing* sketched outlines are often dispensed with, but colour washes of the swirling water, contrasting light and shade, convey the rapidity of the current. These artists have also introduced innovations in the painting of trees. Laying emphasis on the whole tree, they often use straight lines to depict the boughs, and the resultant sense of vigour suggests the prosperity of our socialist countryside.

Though this series of new paintings of the Yellow River still shows signs that it is the work of amateurs, who are making tentative experiments, the boldness and originality of these painters in the traditional style are worthy of praise.

*Miao Ting*

# Shihwan Stoneware

Shihwan, a small town in the southern province of Kwangtung, is well-known for its beautiful stoneware. This stoneware, which originated in the twelfth century, ranks among the distinctive types of traditional Chinese ceramics. The Shihwan potters have learned much from ancient Chinese sculpture and excel in the portrayal of figures. Certain features of their products are unique.

One characteristic of Shihwan stoneware is the use of coloured glazes, for the most part grey, green or blue, but sometimes red or purple. Their bright sapphire-blue glaze is especially celebrated. This stoneware is noted for its variegated flambé glazes achieved by the oxidization of metal oxides, which produces an infinite variety of colour effects, some fluid and dynamic, others congealed and opalescent. The soft carambola violet resulting from this process is exquisite, as is the kingfisher-blue. Another scintillating crystal glaze is remarkably impressive. The crystals flecking a blue glaze remind one of constellations in the night sky; on a white glaze, of white plum-blossom in snow; on a green glaze, of pear-blossom in



verdant spring. The kaleidoscopic colouring of the glazes is an important feature of Shihwan stoneware.

The range of pigments used is very large, including pomegranate red, purple, azure, bright yellow, dark green, buff, brown and pale green. The iridescent streaky colour effects give this stoneware its distinctive magnificence.

The Shihwan potters make human and animal figures, representations of flowers and fruit, decorations for buildings, miniature gardens, toys and crockery.

In their modelling the artists aim at realism, but may exaggerate distinctive features to convey the character and spirit of the subject. They say: "The form must comply with the character; the technique with the spirit."

Shihwan stoneware is both decorative and functional. Crockery is made in the shape of birds, beasts, insects or fish, popular examples being a stand for flowers in the form of a fish, a crab-shaped dish for washing writing brushes, and a hanging flower-vase in the form of a lobster. These objects, simple and natural in design, are beautiful as well as useful.

The base of this stoneware is a mixture of fine *kaolin* clay and local siliceous clay which turns grey after firing. A brown clay with a high iron content is sometimes used for the face of human figures or the plumage of birds. Certain parts of the ware are sometimes left unglazed. For example, glaze is seldom applied to the faces of figurines, as this facilitates a clearer, more lifelike delineation of their features and a more realistic expression of their emotions; while the thick glaze on the rest of the figurines imparts depth of colour and a sense of solidity. The combination of bright colours in the glaze and fine sculptured lines forms a harmonious whole.

Since the cultural revolution, the Shihwan potters and designers, guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line on art, have taken part in fiery struggles and learned from the masses; thus they have produced new works reflecting our mighty socialist revolution and construction. Works taking the industrial front as their theme include *Learning from Taching*, *Wang Chin-hsi the Man of Iron* and *Battling Before*

*the Furnace*. These reveal the revolutionary spirit and self-reliance of our industrial workers as they toil selflessly to build socialism. One of the best is *Battling Before the Furnace*. The worker is leaning slightly forward to shovel coal into an open furnace. His resolute expression is well depicted and his attitude conveys his strength and skill.

Works dealing with agriculture include *Tachai Is Marching On*, *Forcing the Stream Uphill* and *Moving Mountains to Make New Fields*, which show the heroism of our peasants in their fight against nature. *Forcing the Stream Uphill* has a story behind it. The potters who made it went to live with the peasants of Haiyen Commune, Taishan County in the province of Kwangtung. This is a poor mountainous district with more rock than soil; but learning from Tachai's example, the peasants cut through the mountains, filled up valleys and led a stream up the heights, transforming a barren mountainous district into a granary. Their heroism inspired the Shihwan artists, who decided to depict the scene when the water first climbed the hills, laying emphasis on the spirit of the peasants. They modelled five peasants of different ages, the central figure being the old man in charge of the distribution of water. In his hands this strongly built old man is cupping the clear water which has just been led up the mountain and talking jubilantly to the people around him. An elated youngster behind him has raised both hands in wonder. This harmonious and realistic group of figures conveys the peasants' joy at their success in transforming nature.

The fine stoneware sculpture *Practising Acupuncture* shows a barefoot girl doctor of the Tai nationality who is practising acupuncture on herself, willing to undergo considerable pain in order to attend skilfully to her patients. This is a compact composition with clean concise lines. The girl doctor is a graceful figure, and the content and form of the work are harmonious. Another good figurine *Mine Warfare* depicts a militiaman holding a landmine and gazing into the distance, about to go into action. The artist has emphasized the resolute expression and powerful arms of the young militiaman, a hero of the War of Liberation.

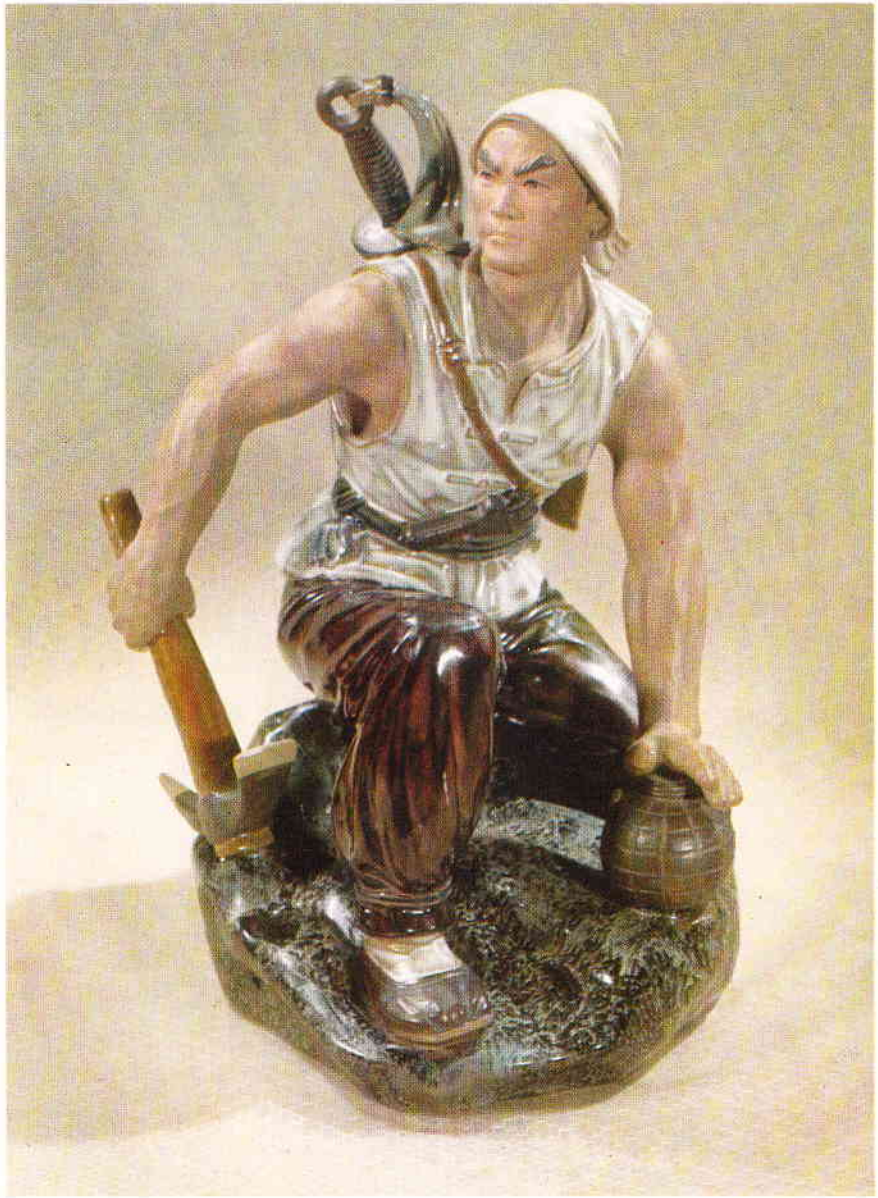


**Battling Before the Furnace**

# Shihwan Stoneware

After Class

Herding Buffaloes



Mine Warfare

**Owl**

By drawing themes from present-day life and reflecting the spirit of our age in their depiction of new heroes, the Shihwan artists have enriched this traditional art form.

Some stoneware has traditional themes to which a new significance has been added. These include representations of well-known characters who played a positive role in Chinese history, scenes of popular struggles against feudal oppression, and ancient legends expressing the people's dreams of a better life. *The Foolish Old Man* portrays a powerful old peasant, one hand on his waist, the other resting on a hoe, as he stands proudly on a rock watching people at work to transform nature. The figure is forcefully executed, the composition simple and uncluttered. *Catching Fish* is based on a popular traditional theme; but in the past the old fisherman wore a look of loneliness and grief, while this old fisherman is healthy, cheerful and full of enthusiasm — a true representative of today's labouring people.

The Shihwan potters have mastered a wealth of fine traditional techniques, and on this basis are producing many exciting original works, making this popular art form with its long history add fresh splendour to Chinese ceramics.

## New Literary and Art Publications in Shanghai

Two new collections of literary works and writings on art have recently appeared in Shanghai. *Morning Clouds*, the first anthology in the series *New Writings from Shanghai*, consists mainly of short stories but also includes some narrative poems, essays and excerpts from novels. Other similar collections of creative writing will be published in due course. The book has a number of coloured illustrations.

The series *New Writings on Art*, meant for a general readership of workers, peasants and soldiers and other art lovers, comprises appraisals of works of art as well as introductions to art and art techniques. This first collection introduces some of the best oil-paintings and sketches shown in the National Fine Arts Exhibition and the Shanghai Art Exhibition during the last year, new works reflecting various scenes of our socialist construction.

## Children's Ballads and Dramas Published

The People's Literature Publishing House in Peking not long ago published *Stage Items*, a selection of songs, dance-dramas and ballads edited by a team in charge of literary and art writings in the Cultural Group Under the State Council. To celebrate Children's Day on June 1st, a second selection has now been published including revolutionary songs, action songs, ballads, short dance-dramas and short plays. The 26 items reflect from different angles the love of productive labour and the collective of New China's high-spirited children. When staged they have proved very popular with young audiences.



## Handicrafts Exhibition in Tientsin

The handicrafts exhibition recently held in Tientsin displayed more than 300 exhibits including clay sculptures, New-Year pictures, kites and carpets.

Coloured clay sculpture is a well-known traditional handicraft. The clay figures modelled by the Chang family in Tientsin are famed for their realism and liveliness, combining the good features of sculptural art with the pleasing colourful effects of pictorial art. Some of the new works depict worker-peasant-soldier heroes, others take popular legends as their subjects. All embody the traditional techniques of the Chang family craftsmen and further develop them.

Carpet-making is another noted Tientsin handicraft. The large carpet in this exhibition *A Hundred Flowers Blossom* measures 20 feet by 10.4 feet and is based on a painting made in 1956 by more than forty artists of the traditional school of Chinese painting. It shows huge old trees and rugged rocks amid which bloom peonies, proud chrysanthemums and wistaria, making up a splendid landscape. A life-like portrayal is given of more than ninety birds of different kinds. The whole effect is that of a garden splendid with flowers.

The wide variety of skilfully made and intricate kites displayed offered good examples of this popular traditional art.

## New Jade Carvings from Hunan

Tungkou County in Hunan Province in central China produces a dark jade quarried in the Hsuehfeng Mountains, which is carved by

local craftsmen into figures and utensils. This is a traditional handicraft having a history of more than three centuries. The main motifs of these skilful carvings are human figures, landscapes, flowers, birds and beasts. Since the cultural revolution the jade-carvers have tackled many new themes and created more than 1,500 designs. Last year they produced more than 300,000 carvings. One of these new works *Transforming Nature*, which has been widely praised, is based on the story of a production team in a Hunan commune whose members dug through mountains to make new fields. In designing this work, the artists broke with past traditions to integrate human figures with the surroundings, organically combining relief carving with carving in the round to present a stirring scene of socialist construction in the countryside within the space of six or seven square inches. The carving shows rocky cliffs wrapped in clouds, terraced mountain slopes and interlacing canals; at the foot of the mountain are rows of houses and electric transmission lines; seven workers are wielding hammers and picks to dig up rocks and move the mountain, and their fighting spirit is vividly expressed.

These artists have also produced some carvings with traditional motifs: well-known historical figures such as the ancient poet Chu Yuan and the pharmacologist Li Shih-chen; and birds and beasts such as swans, swallows, tigers, leopards, lions and elephants.

## Paintings by Luta Workers

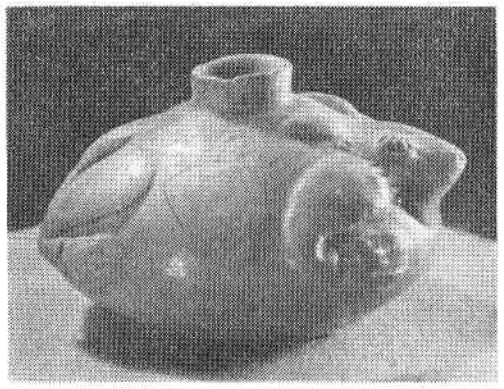
The workers of the city of Luta in China's northeastern province Liaoning are keen amateur artists. They have organized more than twenty spare-time art groups with an active membership of over three hundred artists. In the last few years they have produced several thousand paintings, some of which have now been published in album form by the People's Art Publishing House, Peking.

The New-Year painting *Workers Study Philosophy* reflects the workers' interest in the study of Chairman Mao's philosophical works; the gouache painting *Friendship Between Workers and Peasants* shows how industry is supporting agriculture; the coloured woodcut *New Achievements* mirrors the rapid progress of our ship-building industry; the coloured woodcut *Hunting Whales*, the traditional-style painting *The Line Is Repaired* and the oil-painting *Marine Workers* all reflect our people's selfless labour; the woodcut *Concerted Effort* deals with technical innovations; the coloured woodcut *Battle Manoeuvre* shows the workers training as militiamen. All the works in this album have significant themes and lively images; all are redolent of real life.

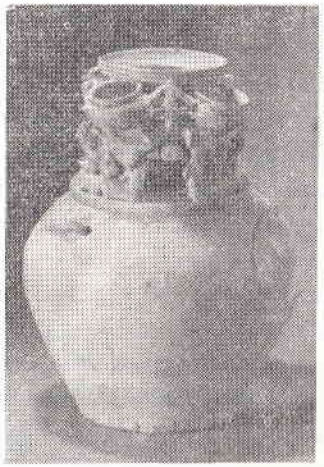


## Third-Century Cultural Relics Unearthed

A large number of precious cultural relics were found recently in a third-century Western Tsin tomb in Juichang County, Kiangsi Province. In this tomb more than three metres wide, ten metres long and two metres high, constructed of grey brick, were probably buried a man and his wife whose corpses have turned to dust. More than a hundred relics discovered here include gold trinkets, bronze, silver and iron utensils and more than sixty pieces of early green porcelain. These, with their rich variety of form and design, are among the finest specimens of early Chinese porcelain. There is a porcelain jar in the shape of a miniature storied building and figures. It has three ventilation holes, through one of which a lizard is



Ewer in the shape of a frog



Jar with building and figures

about to climb; the doorway has double arches and hanging eaves; against the building are four vats with sheep and rats beside them; and the watchmen guarding the granary are driving away sparrows with poles. The whole composition is highly imaginative and thoroughly lifelike. The tomb also yielded an exquisite pale green porcelain ewer in the shape of a frog. The frog with its arched back, looking ahead, seems about to leap through the air.

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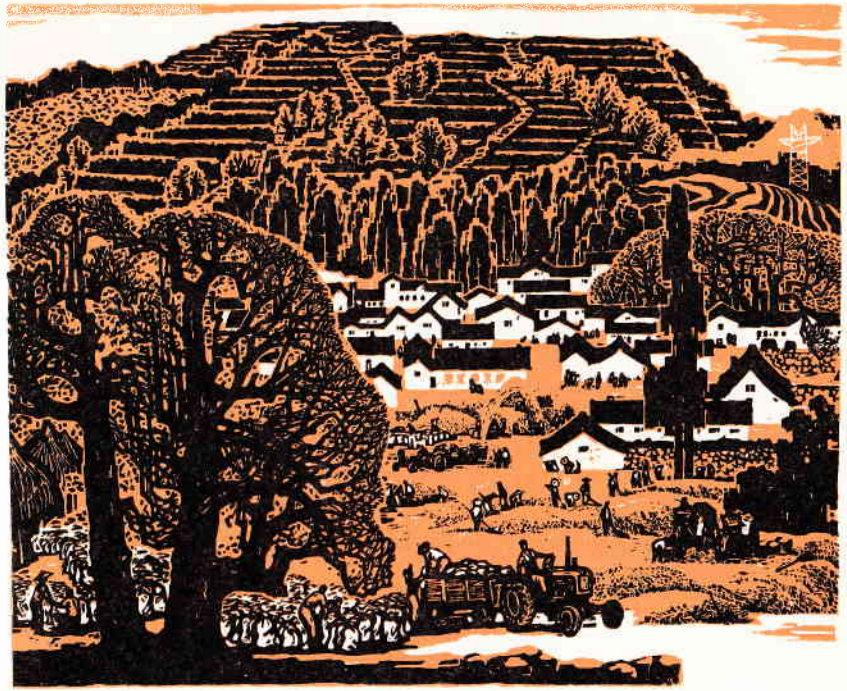

**Autumn in the Mountain Village** (woodcut) **by Tu Ying-chiang**

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