

CHINESE LITERATURE



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STORIES

Kung Keh-yi

Horses for the PLA

Winter had only just come to the Chitengwusu Grasslands when a cold wave swept in from Siberia bringing a snowstorm in its wake. As the gale howled across the vast steppe, snowflakes whirled in the sky like a myriad feathers, then fluttered down, enveloping the earth in what seemed an undulating velvet mantle.

As soon as the storm subsided, our convoy of trucks set out for a PLA unit several hundred *li* away, to deliver over fifty horses that Staff Officer Wang and I had chosen during a two months' tour of the county's communes.

Wang and I were sitting with the driver in the cab of the last truck. It was a tight squeeze as all three of us had on bulky winter clothes.

The highway climbed, then widened and levelled out. Our veteran driver shifted into high gear and the truck put on speed, ploughing through the snow like a launch cutting through frothy waves.

By now, the sun had risen. That vast white expanse stood out against the deep azure sky. What a marvellous world of gleaming

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crystalline shapes — like finely sculptured jade powdered over. The incomparable beauty of the scenery drew Wang's eye and whenever we passed a herd of horses he would ask me jovially, "Hey, do those horses belong to Little Rebel's team?" Then he pressed me to tell him the girl's story.

"Go ahead," the driver chimed in. "See how eager he is. . . . And speak loudly enough for me to hear. My ears don't like being idle either."

"All right," I responded readily, then cleared my throat. "I'll begin with my trip to their brigade to buy horses."

1

Two months ago the county authorities had assigned me the task of helping a certain PLA unit buy horses in our area. I was to go ahead to Abaga Brigade to make the arrangements, and a PLA officer would follow later.

I started out early one autumn morning. The air, more bracing than usual for the season, made my horse so spirited that he raced along the wide highway across the grasslands. A gentle breeze propelled me. Overhead larks were singing. It wasn't yet noon when the grey roofs of Abaga appeared ahead.

Some commune members were busy harvesting the autumn crops. After exchanging greetings, we began to chat.

"Out of the way, quick!" someone suddenly shouted.

A bay horse was charging towards us. Fierce as a lion, it galloped towards a field of shoulder-high top-yield crops.

"The crops! Save the crops!" the commune members cried, dashing over to stop the horse.

"Not one grain will be harmed!" a voice called out. And, with a resounding crack of her whip, a plump girl riding a chestnut horse blocked the stampeding bay's way. With a flick of the wrist she brought the whip down again, and then again. Checked, the horse turned slowly round — the fire had left its eyes and its tail drooped. It followed the girl clip-clopping along as meekly as a lamb.

"Well done!" cried the bystanders.

I stared, admiring the girl's horsemanship and sense of responsibility. She looked familiar but I couldn't recall where I'd seen her before.

"... She's as tough as ever," a man commented, "but in a different way now."

That remark brought it all back to me in a flash. "Why, it's Little Rebel!" I exclaimed.

I'd met her a little over a year ago — last summer to be exact — and it's a story well worth telling. . . . I'd barely entered the village when someone with a Tientsin accent called out:

"Can I borrow your horse to ride, comrade?"

I looked down. A chubby-faced girl with thick pigtailed stood there blinking her big bright eyes. From her pale-blue school uniform I guessed she was one of the youngsters who'd just come from Tientsin to settle down in the grasslands.

"What do you want my horse for?" I challenged her.

"To go for a ride!"

"A horse kicks up a dust when its reins change hands," I teased. "My horse isn't the kind you can play with. Better go back to your skipping-rope."

She flared up at that, shaking her little fist and snorting, "Riding isn't all that difficult. You can't scare me!"

"Who's talking big!" a man's voice boomed. "... Like a tiger wanting to gulp up the sky." It was Chang the Abaga stock-raising team leader, a walking tower of a man. He smiled at me in greeting, then turned to the girl. "It's the busy season now. Go and work off your energy in the fields!"

The girl stared back at him stubbornly.

I went with Chang to stable my horse then followed him to the brigade office, where he filled the kettle and picked up some firewood.

"This new lot of school-graduates have plenty of guts and drive," he told me. "But. . . ." A sudden noise outside made him drop the wood and rush out.

Youngsters crowded the street. In their centre, proudly astride my horse, her chest thrown out, sat the girl. She'd taken it after all! Brandishing a whip, she yelled, "Gee-up!" The frightened horse wanted to bolt but couldn't because she had hobbled it. Its ears on end, it bucked wildly, then threw the girl. Chang darted over and helped her up. But she shoved him aside and without a second's hesitation vaulted into the saddle again.

In a fury, the horse snorted and buckled its legs, preparing to lie down. This was really dangerous, for if it lay down and rolled over the girl would be crushed. Chang sprang forward to tug at the reins, then pulled the girl down. To be frank, my heart skipped a beat. But even then, the girl didn't want to give up. Chang angrily snatched the whip from her.

"If you really had guts, you wouldn't have hobbled it."

"If I hadn't it would have bolted."

"Then you had no business fooling around with it."

"How else can I learn to ride?!"

Her rattling retorts silenced Chang. As for me, I hadn't been able to get in a word edgewise.

In the meantime the old Party secretary had arrived and taken in the explosive situation. A man who always kept his wits about him, he turned to me joking, "Like a gap-toothed man trying to eat a tough tendon of beef, this time you've bitten off more than you can chew. Let me introduce her to you." He pointed to the troublemaker. "Her name's Chiang Yu-hung. She came to settle down here three months ago..."

"Nicknamed Little Rebel," chorused the youngsters looking on.

The Party secretary seemed to have something on his mind, for he suddenly burst out, "Who gave you the idea of doing such a reckless thing?"

"Who?" She was already on the defensive, but her reply was as sharp as ever. "It was my own idea of course."

His lips curled in a cold smile, the old man's eyes, suddenly widened, ran swiftly over the crowd and came to rest at the corner of an earthen wall—a fat figure was ducking out of sight in a flurry.

The scene at the entrance of the village flashed through my mind. I seemed to remember that same figure near the girl blocking my way. Who was it? And why was he sneaking about like that?

The girl lowered her head as if some secret had been disclosed. "I'm the one to blame," she finally murmured. "He meant well..."

"Just remember the saying: 'A good hunter never fools around with someone else's gun; a skilled horseman never mounts a stranger's horse.' It's a good job you hobbled it, otherwise you'd have been crushed. In the future, be more *careful*."

At the word "careful", the old secretary shot another glance at the spot where he'd glimpsed that skulking figure. He raised his eyebrows. "You call that 'meaning well'?"

As the crowd dispersed, we returned to the office. The team leader, who had been fuming inwardly, now complained outright, "That's no way to handle her, Party secretary. It won't do to let her have free rein like that."

"It's not so simple, Chang. Do you really think giving her a dressing-down will solve this problem?" the old secretary responded patiently, puffing at his pipe. "No decent fellow would have encouraged her to ride a strange horse. If she'd got hurt, some people would have said, 'Just look, she's come all this way, only to give her life—and so young.' It would have been very bad. Why Fatty Chen..."

"Oh, that fellow. He's like melon-seed husks—not even good enough for fodder," the team leader cut him short.

The Party secretary turned to me. "He came here just after Liberation while our troops were wiping out some enemies holed up on the far-away grasslands. I only found out he'd settled in our village after I was demobilized. We've sent men to investigate his background, but so far they haven't turned up any reliable evidence. The important thing is to be on our guard. We'll wait and see. When the time comes we'll peel off his shell and see whether what's inside is red or white!"

After the team leader left, we began discussing Little Rebel's family. On his way back from another province, the old secretary had once

dropped in to see the girl's mother in Tientsin and had had a long talk with her.

Her parents, both underground members of the Party, were from the south. On the eve of Liberation when a large PLA force was advancing towards the remote town where they lived, her mother heavy with child was arrested during a strike and thrown into prison. But that tightly locked cell door couldn't keep out the sound of gunfire booming like spring thunder. The very morning the town was liberated, a baby girl was born behind bars. Her mother clasped the baby to her breast and gazed at the crimson clouds. Longing for the liberation of the whole world, she decided to name the child Yu-hung — Crimson World. Once rescued from prison, she began looking for her husband, only to learn he'd been killed by an enemy agent who was said to have fled with the Kuomintang troops and hadn't been seen since. Later on, her mother took the girl north and finally settled down in Tientsin where she began working in a textile mill. She was now Party secretary of her workshop.

2

I left Abaga Brigade shortly after that conversation, but at a meeting in the county town the old Party secretary and Team Leader Chang told me about another incident involving Little Rebel.

She and some of her former classmates had been assigned to the stock-raising team to learn to tend and train horses. The day before they left, the old secretary had a talk with them and asked each in turn what he thought of his new job. All were enthusiastic. Finally, he turned to urge Chang: "Mind you train them well!"

"Don't worry," was the answer. "I'll take more pains with them than I would with my own children."

Eager to train the youngsters well, Chang made strict demands on them. But learning to ride was not at all an easy job. After being thrown many times, Little Rebel lost patience and thought of another way of practising.

She went to Fatty Chen who was in charge of the equipment and asked to borrow a saddle, explaining her idea. He smirked ingratiatingly. "That's a good, practical method! You city people certainly have the courage to think and act. You're capable and well-educated. I took a great liking to you youngsters as soon as I set eyes on you." With that, he quickly handed her a saddle.

This time Fatty Chen's compliments grated on her ears, for Little Rebel remembered how he'd encouraged her to "borrow" my horse. "That's the spirit," he'd said. "You youngsters won't learn a thing if you don't fight for your rights. Just sitting around and waiting won't do any good. No cadre will give you a horse to practise on, even if you wait until your hair turns white." Then she'd got herself into a right mess!

After that incident the old secretary had spoken with her on several occasions, explaining how to analyse people and problems from the standpoint of the class struggle and struggle between two lines. "Don't rush into action because someone's fanned the fire," he'd warned. Ever since, she'd been on her guard. But now, saddle in hand, she wondered: "Why did he back me up as soon as I asked for a saddle? Does that mean he's got some dirty trick up his sleeve?"

She hesitated. One minute the Party secretary's warning rang in her ears, the next Fatty Chen's smiling face flashed before her eyes. But Little Rebel was true to her name. She was soon astride the saddle she'd placed on a low wall, completely absorbed in reviewing the riding skills Chang had taught them. She imagined herself a skilled herdsman, whipping her horse on as swiftly as the wind.

After a fortnight's practice, she'd made considerable progress. The other youngsters began saying that her method of "riding a mock horse", as they called it, wasn't bad. They were planning to borrow saddles too, when an accident occurred.

The herdsman unsaddling the horses after grazing them one day discovered that the most promising horse, Lion Head, had a badly scraped back. Blood was trickling down its flanks and it was twitching with pain.

Investigation revealed that the saddle was the one which Little Rebel often borrowed.

While the team leader paced frantically up and down, Fatty Chen poured oil on the fire.

"She turned a deaf ear to everyone. Now just look at the result: this fine horse hurt by the grit she left embedded in the saddle. What's to be done with such a careless girl?"

"I saw her brush the bottom of the saddle every day after using it." Someone stood up for her. "How could this have happened? It's very strange. Could someone have...?"

"She can't have brushed off all the grit. She shouldn't have started this nonsense in the first place."

Meanwhile Chang remembered also the incident of her borrowing my horse. "I'm anxious to temper this girl but, the way she's going on, she'll never amount to anything. I've got to crack down on her this time to protect collective property and make an example of her." Too angry to give the problem further thought he sent for Little Rebel and gave her a harsh dressing-down. This only hardened the girl's attitude. After turning the incident over and over in her mind, she decided she hadn't done anything wrong. Hadn't she concentrated all her energy on learning to ride? She felt most unjustly treated.

The news soon reached the Party secretary. He's already heard about her borrowing the saddle and had foreseen possible trouble but not expected it to come so quickly. He knew that although Little Rebel's use of the saddle and the injury to the horse appeared on the face of things to be the acts of the same person, they were, in fact, two quite different affairs.

"It'll take a lot of patience to undo this knot," he thought. "But now the most important thing is to use this incident to open the youngsters' eyes, turning this mishap into a useful lesson."

His mind made up, the old man called a meeting of the youngsters and asked Little Rebel to tell them, first of all, her view of what had happened.

"I..." The girl lowered her head. "I deserve to be criticized. After all... the horse has been hurt..."

"It's your reaction that should be criticized." Looking from one youngster to another, he spoke slowly, emphasizing each word. "'A stitch in time saves nine.' Let this be a lesson to you. You'll never be able to ride out storms if you can't overcome a small setback like this!"

The young people stared in astonishment, quite staggered. Although she kept her head lowered, Little Rebel could feel his piercing eyes probing her.

"I've read the applications for Party membership some of you have handed in," he went on, his voice resonant with emotion. "Some of you wrote: 'I'll resolutely carry on Chairman Mao's revolutionary line... I pledge to struggle for communism all my life.' If such is your resolve, your every word and deed must live up to that lofty ideal. You must analyse every situation from the standpoint of the struggle between two lines and always be ready to be put to the test."

These words threw the young people's minds into such a turmoil that none of them noticed when the Party secretary left.

Little Rebel's heart was very heavy. She remembered how she used to think: "I come from a family of workers, was brought up in the sunlight shed by Chairman Mao and weathered the storms of the Cultural Revolution. If I train hard and am not afraid of hardships, I'll be able to do my bit for the revolution." But things were not that simple. Once again she took up Chairman Mao's works and read until, little by little, a skylight seemed to be opening in her mind. She saw the sardonic smirk on Fatty's face and heard his raucous wheeze: "What a pity it is, a slip of a girl like you coming here to tend cattle or till the barren grasslands!" She shivered as if she'd been plunged into icy water. What poisonous talk! Why didn't I understand its sinister meaning sooner?

She pushed the window open. A refreshing autumn landscape met her eyes — flocks of snow-white sheep drifted across the velvety green grasslands like so many fleecy clouds; horses of different breeds seemed like a hundred flowers in bloom; propelled by their red webbed-feet, swans were paddling across the translucent blue water of the nearby pond. How beautiful it all was! And now she sensed

something vicious lurking somewhere in that peaceful countryside. Perhaps a fierce wolf was lying in wait in the dense bushes not far from the sheep. . . .

The old secretary's mind was still troubled too. Swindlers like Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao had viciously slandered Chairman Mao's directives concerning youngsters educated in town going to settle in the countryside. Hadn't they tried to win over these young people, to deflect them from the revolutionary line? It was certain that hidden and open enemies would continue to seize every chance to stir up trouble. Clear in his mind on this point, the veteran revolutionary decided to call a meeting of the Party committee that evening, to discuss Fatty Chen's behaviour and measures to deepen the youngsters' understanding of class struggle and the struggle between two lines.

The next day Little Rebel and her mates handed the old secretary a report they'd written, unmasking Fatty Chen.

3

That had all taken place a year and a half ago. What was Little Rebel like now? As I was wondering this I spotted her training the bay horse, Lion Head, in the distance. I whipped my horse on to catch up with her and as soon as she saw me she leapt to the ground and ran up to greet me warmly.

In silence, we crossed a small field of wheat, the heavy ears thudding as they brushed against our stirrups. Then I asked about Fatty Chen.

"He's got a complicated history," she told me. "We studied his case for a long time without being able to get to the bottom of it. Then the county security bureau took up the investigation, I've heard they've made some headway." She came nearer and whispered, "Our old secretary tells me they suspect him of killing my father. He may be an important enemy agent."

"You must be on the alert!"

"Yes," she responded solemnly, "I've always kept in mind our old secretary's warning."

I noticed she'd grown taller and stronger in the time since last I'd seen her. She'd cut off her pigtails and with her sunburnt face looked just like a local girl. In her wide eyes shone maturity and greater resolution.

She was delighted to hear I'd come to buy horses for the army and immediately cut in: "To make it easier for you, we've numbered our best horses. Lion Head is number one, that rascal who's just rolled in the mud is number two and that one with its head up, whinnying, is number three. . . ."

Lion Head may be the best, I thought, but he looks quite a terror. Guessing what was on my mind the girl continued:

"He's a good horse, Comrade Kung. Not completely broken in yet, but we'll soon have him well trained, and then you'll never want to part with him." I laughed with pleasure at her enthusiasm.

She was eager to tell her comrades the good news, so we parted. She galloped off and soon disappeared into the sea of waving grass. The drumming of horses' hoofs echoed over the steppe.

That night, I stayed in the stock-raising team's tamped-earth house. On one of its white-washed walls hung a portrait of Chairman Mao, below it, a water-colour. With the brigade leaders and other representatives of the poor and lower-middle peasants, I discussed how to select the horses needed by the army, according to the principle of supplying high quality horses without interfering with their production. We finally decided that the brigade would sell one or two really good horses to be chosen as soon as the PLA officer arrived the next day. When we'd agreed on this, the old secretary took advantage of the opportunity to discuss the matter of setting up night patrols to guard the ripening crops and precautionary measures against rain and floods. I looked out of the window, but saw no sign of rain.

However, the old secretary said: "Don't you remember the saying: 'Fine sky at night, rain in sight?'"

When the meeting came to an end the old secretary told me about the great changes that had taken place in these parts and spoke highly

of Little Rebel, adding, "She didn't come back for supper so she must have gone directly to the meeting."

"What meeting?"

"The meeting to work out a new schedule for training the horses. It's all your fault. We'd been planning to wait until after the autumn harvest, but when you told her your business here she came rushing to announce the news to me. 'The PLA officer will be here soon to buy horses, and as we've had all those requests from other organizations too for horses, we'll have to finish training them ahead of schedule.'

"'You've already started doing that on your own initiative,' I pointed out. 'You've speeded up Lion Head's training, haven't you?'"

Being old acquaintances, we had so much to talk about that we sat up till late, when rain began drumming on the roof.

Suddenly Team Leader Chang dashed in, drenched with rain. "Party secretary! Something's happened!" he burst out, anxiety written all over his face. "I was on duty in the office when the security bureau called — they've discovered evidence proving that Fatty Chen killed Little Rebel's father. They wanted us to arrest him immediately and hold an exposure-criticism meeting."

"Let's go right away!" I sprang to my feet.

"Let him finish." The old secretary hadn't moved.

Chang took a gulp of water, then went on: "As soon as I put the receiver down, I rushed to his house. But it was too late. He'd already escaped through a hole he'd dug under his back wall. He must have smelt danger."

"Escaped! That out-and-out counter-revolutionary won't leave without first carrying out some kind of sabotage."

"That's what I thought. We've already searched the granary, stables and the reservoir, but not a trace of the scoundrel."

"What about the young people's dormitory?"

"I didn't think of that!"

They soon realized what had happened. The youngsters had all been out rounding up the horses that evening, but had returned be-

fore the rain began — all except Little Rebel who, absorbed in training Lion Head, had stayed on at Green Dragon Mountain and been caught by the rain.

A clap of thunder split the sky. The rain pelted down. Ten of us sped towards Green Dragon Mountain battling our way through the storm. Anxiety weighed on our hearts like a block of iron. It was clear Fatty Chen intended to kill the girl and undermine the work of selecting horses for the PLA.

The old secretary led the way. The howling wind nearly deafened us, cold raindrops stung our numbed faces. We raced so fast that the horses seemed to skim the earth, their bellies brushing the tips of the grass. Water splashed in all directions. We seemed to be sailing in a tumbling sea. My horse, its mane streaming wildly, furrowed the tall grasses that swept into the distance like murky waves.

A ray of light appeared in the darkness. We headed for it and soon came to a large cave with a lantern hanging in its entrance. Pickets driven into the ground before it formed a fence, behind which whinnying horses reared their heads at the sound of our approach. The bright light of the lantern fell on a table made from a large slab of slate — it was badly smashed. Behind it gleamed a sharp knife impaled in a crevice of the cave wall. There had been a struggle here and the girl seemed to have escaped. But where were the protagonists?

"Blood!"

This startled cry from a man who had picked up a broken picket made our own blood run cold.

The old secretary looked for footprints, then waved his hand. "This way! Hurry!" We dashed out and began descending a trail, closely following the old secretary in the inky darkness. Our cavalcade rushed down the path like a powerful mountain torrent.

A bolt of lightning shattered the night sky. The horses shied and reared.

For a split second, the landscape was illuminated — two riders were racing in the distance. One crouching, head lowered, was

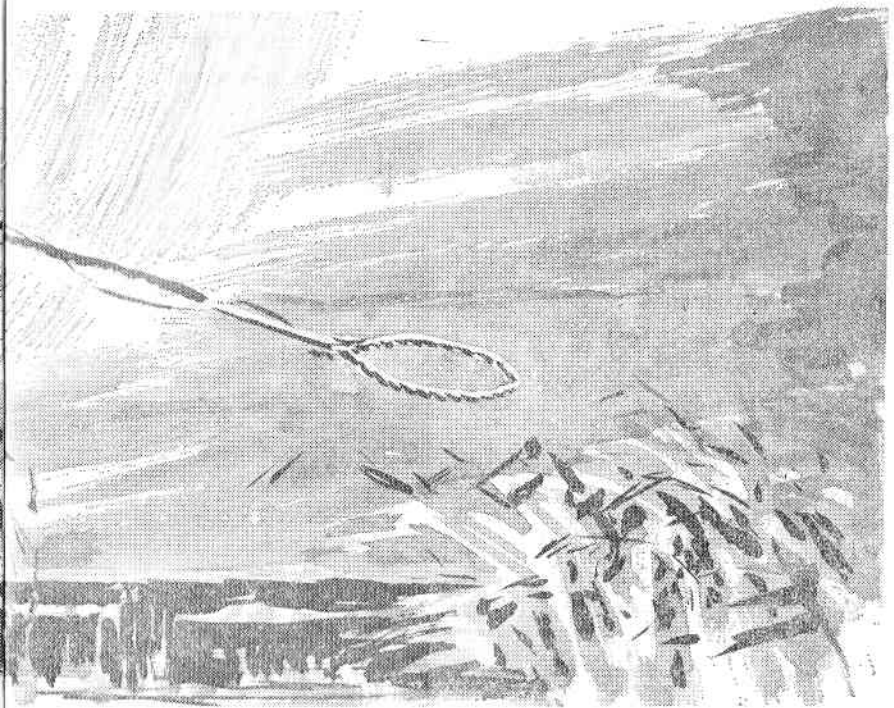


whipping his horse on with one hand while trying with the other to free his head from a noose. It was Fatty Chen with Little Rebel astride Lion Head close on his heels. Her wet clothes shining like silvery armour, she was holding on like grim death to her lasso pole, the noose of which had tightened like a vice round the neck of her quarry.

Then darkness enveloped the grasslands again.

When we arrived, the fighting was already over, Lion Head was snorting with rage and wildly pawing the ground, making deep hoof-prints which instantly filled with water.

Our flashlights converged on the girl — although her forehead was bleeding she was tugging hard at the heavy lasso pole, keeping the rope taut.



We quickly undid the lasso, seizing Fatty Chen who was covered with mud like a pig. He ground his teeth and darted us a baleful glance but couldn't stop shaking with fright.

Then we crowded round the girl, calling her name. Her bright eyes scanned the crowd, but she didn't answer. When she caught sight of the old secretary, like a child who's had a narrow escape and then suddenly sees its mother, she gave a faint smile.

At dawn, the steppe appeared in all its beauty, as if purified by the storm. Under the brilliant blue sky as translucent as clear lake water, dewdrops dotted the grass like pearls of green jade. The air was cool and fresh.

Staff Officer Wang arrived early. With Team Leader Chang we set to work and chose two horses, number two and number three as previously arranged.

But as soon as Staff Officer Wang set eyes on Lion Head he took a fancy to him. That big, sturdy stallion was taller than a man and his bay coat shone like satin. What a splendid horse! It was a pity we couldn't take him, but we had to return to the county town that same day to carry out an urgent task and Lion Head had not yet been fully trained.

The old secretary returned from the commune hospital before we'd finished. Although tired, his eyes sparkled when he told us that Little Rebel's wounds on her forehead and arm weren't serious, but that she was exhausted and would have to stay in hospital for treatment. He handed me a letter from the girl.

The gist of it was that this struggle had helped her to understand the importance of implementing and defending Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. The awareness of this doesn't fall from the sky nor are we born with it. It comes from the studying of Chairman Mao's works, from revolutionary struggle and the help and guidance of comrades. She said, "This lesson will remain for ever in my mind. I'll never cease the struggle to carry out and safeguard Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!"

In conclusion she wrote, "And as soon as I'm well enough, I'll finish training Lion Head as fast as I can, so as to send the PLA our best horse!"

During the next two months, we visited communes all over the county, buying the best horses for the PLA. Today, our task accomplished, we're transporting them to the army.

During these past two months we've kept asking for news of Little Rebel, but no one's been able to tell us anything.

That was the end of my story.

There was a long silence in the cab. The crunch of the wheels sinking into the snow was the only sound to be heard. Then the driver took a deep breath.

"It's a stirring story, all right!" he commented. "But it's unfinished — hasn't reached terminus, as we drivers would say."

"You've put your finger on the problem," Staff Officer Wang agreed. "We're all anxious to find out how the girl is now."

I had been thinking the same thing. But since her village was so far away, there was little chance of our seeing her again.

"Quiet!" the driver shouted, waving his hand. "Listen."

We looked round and listened, but in that snow-bound landscape not a soul was stirring.

But the driver pricked up his ears. "Someone's calling."

The rearview-mirror reflected a faint shadow advancing amidst the whirling snowflakes. The horses in the truck whinnied a greeting as if they'd recognized an old friend.

We slowed down and soon made out a rider racing so fast that the horse's body formed a straight line like an arrow. Presently the rider caught up and stopped before us.

"Little Rebel!" I leapt out of the cab and rushed over. I'd recognized her immediately.

Vaulting to the ground, she held the reins high and shouted jubilantly: "Look, Comrade Kung! It's Lion Head. Our old secretary told me to bring him to you."

Staff Officer Wang stepped forward and grasped her hands warmly, as if she were an old friend, but was at a loss for words.

I looked her over carefully — a small scar marked her forehead and icicles hung from her brown fur cap.

The driver had looked on in silence until then. Now he grinned at me: "Here's the terminus."

Little Rebel's eyes sparkled. "No," she retorted. "For me, it's only the start." We all laughed heartily. Then she took off Lion Head's saddle and ran her hand over his flanks. He sniffed at her hand as if reluctant to leave her as a child his mother.

"We've finished training the horses for the organizations on the plain. Since we're sending them to town tomorrow, I've got to head back at once." She helped us to lead Lion Head into the truck, then taking number three back in exchange quickly swung into the saddle.

The wind suddenly died down and the clouds seemed to melt away. Bright sunlight irradiated the boundless white grasslands. On either side of the road rose magnificent young pines, stretching their snow-laden branches towards the sky.

Illustrated by Sun Tzu-hsi



Lu Keh-chien

Manoeuvring on a Rainy Night

The night set for the practice manoeuvres had come. Unit A was to attack Unit B. Their scouts were to infiltrate the “enemy” camp, take the communications centre, and give the signal for the general offensive.

Since this vanguard action was vital to the success of the offensive, it had to be planned very carefully. If they succeeded they’d wreck the enemy’s defence, but if they failed they’d be caught in a trap themselves. Too many men would hinder the vanguard’s movements; too few would compromise its chances for success. The command decided to send one squad — the famous “old first squad” of the scouts company. Despite its name, it was in fact composed solely of new recruits, except for the squad leader Li Wu-ming, who’d just been assigned to a new, more important post. Though his transfer papers had already been issued, at his request he was granted permission to take part in this manoeuvre before leaving.

Why did Li make this request? Because he was worried about the new recruits. He often thought, “The first squad’s called ‘Tiger Squad’ because of our predecessors’ wartime feats. We must live up

to their reputation for courage and carry on their glorious tradition." It was to temper the new recruits that he'd asked for this difficult mission for his squad.

"Old Li's sticking his neck out!" someone commented. "Imagine taking raw recruits to tackle such a tough job. If they botch it, the squad will lose its fine reputation. Why run such a risk? After all, he's already received his transfer papers."

"And that deputy squad leader of theirs is so rash, he's quite likely to make some blunder," another put in. "Besides, we've other squads in our company — all more experienced than theirs!"

Despite various arguments against it, the company Party committee approved Li's demand, for they knew the new recruits would learn a great deal from the experience and would be better prepared to take over from the old squad leader. Old Li immediately called a meeting of the Youth League and Party members of the squad. When told about their assignment, they were enthusiastic.

It was the middle of July and the weather was hot and muggy. True to the saying, "Mid-July, now fine now wet, really makes you sweat," they were dripping wet as soon as they were accoutred. As the moon was hidden by clouds when they set out, at Li's suggestion they took a raft down the river to enter enemy territory unobserved. Old Li gave directions, the rest took turns to paddle.

The deputy squad leader Yang Kuo-hung, who'd just turned nineteen, was a likable fellow — cheery and quick in the uptake, but a bit too cocksure and brash. Knowing this, Li had entrusted him with this responsible task even at the risk of ruining their plan of action; for he wanted him to learn from experience and temper himself as fast as possible.

The oars dipped silently into the calm jet-black water. A light breeze made Yang's sweat-drenched jacket billow. In high spirits and bursting with energy, he was thinking: I must do my best to set Old Li's mind at rest before he leaves and our future squad leader's too — no matter who's chosen. I must lead the squad so well that we make a brilliant showing tonight. Then in future when I speak they'll really sit up and listen. Carried away by this thought, he began to row harder than ever.

Splash! Yang started with dismay. He'd slapped his oar flat on the surface of the water. He flushed and braced himself for a reprimand. But the squad leader simply grunted, deep in thought.

Young Yang seems to think the enemy's still far away, Li reflected. He doesn't yet realize, as every scout should, that each move he makes involves the whole army.

Just then their raft reached the bank. Li made his men land in groups, each covering the other, and left one fighter to hide the raft among the reeds. Having reconnoitred the area, as no enemy soldiers were in the vicinity he gathered the whole squad round him and quietly told them: "Our opponents are well-trained and highly experienced, so don't underestimate them. And although we've worked out our plan down to the last detail, in warfare the situation can change rapidly. No one can predict every enemy move, so we must be prepared for all eventualities. Be cautious and bold. Now let's go. We'll advance group by group."

They swiftly crossed two hundred metres of open ground and slipped silently into a clump of reeds. The highway, only about fifty metres ahead now, separated them from the enemy camp three hundred metres away which they knew was bristling with patrols, well-concealed sentinel posts and barbed-wire fences. They could make out a small litchi orchard within the barbed-wire enclosure and further on, a small hill, Height 505, where the enemy command was located. But how were they going to find out its exact location? So there were three hurdles before them — crossing the highway, getting into the enemy camp and locating the communications centre.

They lay hidden among the tall reeds as Li, drawing on his rich experience, scanned the enemy position and listened intently. The visibility deteriorated as a drizzle began to fall. Soon their backs were soaking wet. Li's eyelashes were heavy with raindrops, but he suppressed the urge to wipe them away. Slowly he craned his neck to look around, careful not to brush the reeds and set them rustling. As he was scrutinizing the silvery reeds to his right, he spotted something that looked like a greyish bundle propped up on two slender bamboo sticks. Looking closer, he realized it was an egret. Suddenly remembering how Yang had broken the silence with a splash, he

thought of the racket the bird would make if it woke up and flew off. It would be a signal to the enemy that the vanguard was hiding among the reeds near the pond. If they were to continue their reconnaissance undiscovered, they had to catch that bird.

Li inched forward, using his elbows and toes, keeping the rest of his body clear of the ground, a modified version of what the scouts call "worming forward". He advanced soundlessly but it was exhausting, and the pebbles round the pond didn't make it any easier. With each move forward, a sharp pain shot up his elbow. Thanks to the stamina acquired through gruelling daily training sessions, he was able to keep it up. But the other soldier on his left could not keep up the pace. Who was it? None other than Yang whose task was to help Old Li reconnoitre and decide where to cross the highway. Knowing they had no time to lose, Yang had hit on a plan after a few minutes' scouting. If his squad leader asked him for his opinion, he had it all worked out. He imagined that Old Li, on hearing his plan, would approvingly wave them forward with a sweep of his hand. They'd dash across the highway and... But his squad leader, usually so swift in his actions, now seemed to the youngster as slow as an old ox tugging at a broken-down cart. Ten minutes... fifteen... then sixteen minutes went by. His eyes on the luminous hands of his watch, he protested inwardly that far too much precious time had already been wasted.

Part of the problem was that Yang hadn't trained hard enough and lacked Li's stamina, the shooting pain in his elbows was almost unbearable and his arms were shaking. He began crawling on all fours, hoping to find a place free from those hateful pebbles.

The two were advancing each in his own way, when an enemy patrol appeared on the other side of the sluice-way embankment thirty metres ahead. The three enemy soldiers left the dried-up riverbed and headed straight for the place where the first squad lay hidden. Until then neither side had detected the other's presence, which proved that both units were equally good at manoeuvring under cover. But for the vanguard squad, being discovered would be much more serious than for the enemy patrol, it would be disastrous.

Meanwhile Li was edging closer to the sleeping egret. The night was so obscure that it was only when he was an arm's length away that he finally made out the bird's position: its head was tucked under one wing and it was sleeping fitfully because of the rain and wind. Li decided to reach out with his left hand and grab it. If he seized its wing and thrust its neck under his arm, while pulling it by the other wing, he could pin it down under him and keep it from screeching. He wormed his way closer and was about to reach out when the sudden clatter of pebbles made him freeze. Young Yang had made a false move.

With the enemy patrol in such close proximity, that sound rang out like a shot in the stillness of the night, electrifying the scouts in hiding. The egret started. It began unbending its neck and moving its claws in readiness to fly off. But Li's powerful hands closed round it. He sank back to the ground pinning the egret under his chest.

Horrified by his blunder, Yang had broken out in a cold sweat. He looked round in alarm and caught sight of three silhouettes emerging from behind the embankment ahead. The dim shapes of three heads soon became the full-sized figures of enemy soldiers.

They quickly closed in, deployed in a "T" formation, moving silently in such close co-ordination that they seemed linked by an invisible nerve. Yang noticed that the one in front had a signal-gun. Probably the patrol leader, he thought, as he watched them approach. The leader was thirty metres away from him, then twenty... ten... five, then only three metres away. Yang could now see that their jackets were tucked in their trousers and they had towels round their necks. At this critical moment, the youngster did not panic but actually grew calmer, steadied by his confidence in his squad leader. He would make no move until he received a signal from Old Li or the enemy trod on him. If that happened, he would leap up and overpower him before he could fire a shot.

Old Li had of course seen the predicament Yang was in. He'd been watching intently, hoping the patrol would not stumble on Yang, but it looked now as if their leader was about to tread on his head! He was pleased, however, by the fact that Yang had not

panicked. Although the youngster had got them into a tight spot, it was a good opportunity for him and the others to temper themselves and learn how to cope with dangerous situations. As Li was reflecting the patrol leader stopped just two metres away from Yang, to listen hard. Then with his white towel he signalled to the men behind him. They immediately advanced towards the pond, one searching the area to the right, the other that to the left. Li surmised that the patrol leader, not having discovered their presence, thought they must have sneaked off to the right or left. As the two men searched, their patrol leader watched and waited, ready to fire his signal-gun and alert the enemy command.

“Not bad!” thought Li approvingly.

Meanwhile the enemy soldier scouting on the left was heading straight for him. Although still ten metres away it wouldn't be long before he reached Old Li.

Yang as he watched analysed the situation. He realized the patrol had separated to make it difficult, if not impossible, for all three to be captured before they could send a signal. Every man in “Tiger Squad” kept his eyes glued on the enemy. They knew there was no one to be found on the right, but Old Li was hiding on the left with the northeast wind blowing rain into his eyes; whereas the enemy, their backs to the wind, could search unhandicapped.

Yang, who'd been abreast of his squad leader, boldly inched his way forward to a spot where he was able to observe the man approaching Old Li. There was little more than a metre now between them. The man took one step, then another . . . one more step and he was going to tread on Li! Yang silently raised himself to a crouching position, prepared to spring up and seize the patrol leader when Old Li nabbed the other man. After that, it would be easy to deal with the third man.

The man's foot was coming down on Li's head. In that split second, Li pushed the egret against it, letting the bird loose. As it flapped its wings wildly, then flew off, the startled soldier jumped back.

“What's happened?” called the patrol leader.

“I stepped on a bird.”



The enemy patrol figured that if a bird had been sleeping there undisturbed, no scouts could possibly be hiding in the vicinity. So they went off, disappearing into the darkness.

Yang felt a pang of remorse at the thought of all the trouble he'd caused and wanted to make a self-criticism to Old Li. Just then the squad leader came up. Yang opened his mouth, then didn't dare make a sound.

"The coast is clear. We can talk now," Old Li whispered.

"By making that noise I gave the game away. I..."

"Don't be in a hurry to criticize yourself," Old Li interrupted with a wave of the hand. "We often say, 'A bad thing can turn into something good.' This place has become safe now, hasn't it? I came to ask you how we should cross the highway."

Yang gripped Old Li's hand excitedly. That hand was not cold and wet from the rain, but moist with sweat which gave off the strange, distinctive odour of a bird. Only then did he realize that Old Li, by releasing the egret, had saved them from being discovered. But he makes no mention of that, thought Yang, and he still trusts me. He's giving me every opportunity to learn to lead the squad on my own. Old Li's deeds speak louder than words... Many questions flashed through Yang's mind: Why couldn't I keep up with Old Li? Because I haven't the staying power. And why not? I didn't train hard enough. Why?...

"Well, what's your plan?" Old Li repeated.

Yang had it all worked out — figure out the enemy patrol movements, make the most of the hilly terrain in choosing a spot for the crossing and then dash across the highway one group at a time — but before he could reply the roar of motorcycles sounded from the highway, then grew increasingly louder. Like a flash of lightning a beam of light slashed through the darkness.

The enemy motorcycles had started patrolling. Their defence was well planned, their co-ordination perfect.

The motorcycles swept impressively past, headlights cutting into the night. The rain was falling harder. Three minutes after the last motorcycle had whizzed by, the lead one reappeared. They had cut off the highway.

"Think we can still cross?" Old Li asked.

Yang nodded. "Yes, they must have weak points somewhere."

"For example?"

Yang raised his eyes as if a map were hanging before him. He had his answer ready.

"Although there's no motorcycle patrol along the eastern section of the highway, the terrain is to our opponents' advantage — it's level

and the vegetation too sparse to provide cover. In this central sector, their defence is the strongest and they've reinforced it. But to the west the terrain provides good cover with its hollows and the dry riverbed and embankment. Despite their motorcycle patrol, it's the weakest point in their defence. If we cross quickly, we can make it."

That sounded logical and realistic. Young Chang, standing by Yang, nodded approvingly. Old Li was pleased too, for the general analysis was correct. But as a veteran squad leader, he felt it his duty to make Yang delve deeper, especially since he himself would soon be leaving the squad.

"Your analysis is good as far as it goes," he began. "But you must go deeper. Aren't there any weaknesses in the central sector?"

"In the strongest part?" Yang was baffled by Old Li's question.

"Well then, tell me, what obstacles will we meet with in the western sector?" Li rephrased his question.

Yang had not considered the problem from that angle.

After a pause, the old squad leader continued, "No matter what a commanding officer's rank, he must analyse a situation scientifically in line with Chairman Mao's military theory. Chairman Mao himself has often said: Directing military operations is like playing chess. You can't just concentrate on your next move. You've got to keep the general strategy in mind. Now what's our overall objective?"

"Seize the enemy communications centre."

"That's our squad's immediate goal, not our overall objective."

"Begin the general offensive."

"And then?"

"Set up a barrage of gun-fire, charge, pierce the enemy line and thrust deep into their territory, splitting their forces. Then we'll consolidate our position and wipe them out, winning a complete victory." Yang had reeled this off without stopping to take a breath.

"Right," Old Li approved. "So you see, taking the centre is only one 'move'. If we fail to carry out our mission on time, the plans for the whole campaign will be upset."

"But we still have plenty of time."

"That's the question. Do we really? We do have time enough to take the roundabout way through the western sector, but none to

spare. And what if something unexpected crops up? How'll we make up for lost time?"

Yang and Chang thought that over and nodded, but Yang was still not quite convinced. He was thinking: We're not likely to be held up. Besides, how else can we get across?

"So we'll have to cross here." Li took up his unspoken question.

"But there's the motorcycle patrol!"

"There are weaknesses in their defence," Li continued. "The terrain may be fairly open and level but in several places the highway dips, then ascends. The embankments on either side of it will provide cover. Have you noticed how far apart the motorcycles are? As one is climbing the slope of a hill, its headlight slanting upwards, the one ahead of it is already going over the top of the next hill. Just at that instant we can dash across the dark hollow between the two hills. And the roar of the motors will cover the sound of our footsteps. Your plan to cross one group at a time is a good one. This way we'll get past the first hurdle in half the time it'd take if we went through the western sector."

"Of course you're right! Why didn't I think of that?" exclaimed Yang, knocking his fist against his forehead.

"Let's go into action now. You direct this move." Old Li was pleased that Yang had caught on so quickly.

With Yang leading the way and Old Li bringing up the rear, they crossed the highway without mishap and hid in the banana grove on the outskirts of the mine field. Ahead rows of barbed-wire fences of different shapes surrounded Height 505. The place bristled with mines and guards. They listened. Raindrops drummed rhythmically against the banana leaves. Despite the pelting rain that had drenched them to the skin, every man in the squad was pondering the problem of how to enter the enemy camp.

All eyes were on the old squad leader. He looked to Yang, who knew Old Li was waiting to hear his plan.

"Our only chance is to find out their password and enter disguised as their troops."

"Yes, but with the wind behind us, it won't be easy to overhear."

"Let me go and try," Yang said.

"All right, Chang and I will cover you."

The three advanced with Yang in the lead. He crawled along a dark hollow towards the barbed-wire fence, then inched his way nearer the entrance. Presently an officer accompanied by a messenger arrived at the gate.

"Password?" the sentinel challenged.

"Pass . . . word," was the only reply.

Although the officer had said nothing more, the sentinel waved them through.

Yang was puzzled: Had they signalled with their flashlights? But they hadn't turned them on. Had they gestured? No, they hadn't, for he'd watched them carefully. Perhaps the officer was the sentinel's commanding officer and he'd recognized his voice? That didn't seem probable for there had been no sign of recognition on their part. All Yang could do was wait patiently for other soldiers to arrive. Twenty minutes passed. He certainly appreciated the time saved by Old Li's plan.

A few more minutes went by and then another group of men approached. Yang pricked up his ears.

"Password?"

"Pass . . . word." The same reply.

Feeling baffled, Yang looked over his shoulder at Old Li. The latter beckoned to him, and the three of them stole back to their hiding-place.

"What the devil are they up to?" Yang exclaimed angrily.

"Cool down." Old Li smiled. "Let's think this over."

"What is there to think over?"

"Was there any difference between the question and the answer?"

After some thought Yang answered, "The question was spoken faster than the answer." Then he seemed to catch on. "And the reply was slurred . . . and even the voice seemed changed."

"Password? Pass . . . word," Old Li softly repeated what he'd heard. "The question's asked by one man, but the answer's given by two."

"You mean tonight's password is simply the word 'password'?"

"Exactly."

"Smart work!"

"Oh yes, our opponents are vigilant. They've done this to flummox our scouts."

"No, I meant it was smart of you to figure that out. Password! It's the first time I've heard that kind of password."

"There's always a way to figure things out. Well, let's get ready. Fix your uniforms like the enemy's."

Each soldier tucked his jacket into his trousers and draped a white towel round his neck. The rain had let up by the time they set out. And since the clouds had dispersed, visibility was better. Of course, this was not to their advantage, but they weren't worried in the least by that now. The whole squad strode openly towards the entrance.

When they approached the gate, the sentinel challenged them: "Password?"

"Pass," answered Yang, who was leading the way.

"Word," responded the sentinel.

But when Yang stepped forward he suddenly realized that the sentinel was a fellow-villager. What bad luck! He nudged Old Li, then stooped down pretending to tie his shoe-lace. Li caught on at once and shielded him from the sentinel while the other scouts marched swiftly in. The young sentinel surprised them by coming over and patting Yang on the back.

"How's it going outside?"

Young Yang was cornered, unable to utter a word, much less look at the sentinel, lest his fellow-villager recognize him. Old Li saved the situation by cutting in, "Hurry up, eighth squad leader!"

With his fountain-pen Yang quickly drew a mole on the back of his right hand, then got up slowly, retorting, "What's the hurry? You aren't worried, are you?"

He strode off scratching his face with his right hand, more impressed than ever by Li's quick-wittedness.

This sentinel had come to their squad a few days before to visit a friend and Old Li had remembered that he belonged to the first company. Everyone knew the eighth squad leader of the first company who was an outstanding fighter and had only recently given the scouts

company a talk. That's why Li had called Yang "eighth squad leader". Of course, Yang had been quick in the uptake too. Remembering that the eighth squad leader had a mole on his right hand, he'd immediately drawn a false one to fool the sentinel.

They put the second barrier and the orchard of small litchi trees behind them, and quickly arrived at the foot of Height 505. Li and his men reconnoitred the slope, covering about two hundred metres, but discovered nothing except scrub and rocks. They hid among the bushes. Then Li told Yang to reconnoitre the sector to the left and Chang that to the right. Both came back convinced they'd located the communications centre. Four hundred metres up the hill, Yang had discovered a two-roomed thatched hut with an aerial on the roof. As the hut overlooked the drill ground, it seemed an ideal location for the centre. Chang reported that four hundred metres up the slope on the other side was an old temple surrounded on three sides by houses and encircled by a strong wall and tall trees with dense foliage. It too was an ideal location and could be easily defended in case of attack.

As time was too short for a long discussion, one simply declared, "It's on the left." And the other, "On the right." To clinch his argument, Chang added that the hut must be a dummy with an aerial set up to lead them off the track. At first, Yang didn't think so, but after some thought he nodded in agreement.

"Chang's right," he whispered to Old Li.

"Why?" Li pressed.

"Because there's no light coming from any of the windows. How could they work in the dark?"

"No light?" Li grabbed Yang's arm.

"No." Once again Yang was bewildered.

"Our opponents are very clever. Your first reaction was that the centre must be housed in the hut, but on second thoughts you doubted it. Now they've given themselves away."

"You mean they've blacked out the doors and windows?"

"Yes, they've used both decoy and camouflage to fox us. They're really resourceful, this lot."



Both Yang and Chang were convinced. But having learned from Li's explanations and example to think problems over more carefully, Yang asked:

"But why didn't they use the high-walled temple? It'd be so much easier to defend."

"That's a good question. It shows you've given the matter more thought," Old Li approved. "If you delve deep enough, you'll get

to the root of it. Both sides, theirs and ours, are armed with Mao Tsetung Thought and have had strict training. That's why, instead of the temple, they chose this hut which must be sweltering with all the doors and windows closed in this humid heat."

Yang's admiration for his squad leader grew. It's like climbing a mountain, he thought, the higher you go, the farther you can see. Together they took the decision: the squad would attack the hut. Before setting out the old squad leader reminded Yang:

"Our opponents have chosen this hut, which is hard to defend, in order to temper themselves so they must be on their guard. While giving the impression of negligence, they're exercising the utmost vigilance. The closer you get, the more careful you must be. You'll have to be prepared for hand-to-hand combat."

Yang led half of the squad to make a frontal attack, with Old Li bringing up the rear. The rest of the scouts, with Chang at their head, left to surprise the enemy from the back.

Wispy clouds flitted across the sky and the crescent moon bathed the landscape in its silvery light. Weirdly-shaped rocks surrounded the hut, but soon Yang made out the dim outline of its double door. The occasional rustling of grass or the chirping of a cricket in the dead of the night accentuated the silence. Yang strained his ears, and at last, as expected, caught the faint sound of a transmitter. That proved the soundness of Old Li's judgement.

Yang was creeping rapidly round the rocks towards the door when he spotted a small clearing ahead. He was about to jump over to another pile of rocks in order to approach the door sideways when he felt a puff of air on his neck. He spun round. A dark figure was swooping down on him. He dodged just in time. It hadn't occurred to him that an enemy guard might be hiding among those rocks. Afraid the rocks might all turn out to be enemy soldiers in hiding, he leaped into the clearing. He had hardly steadied himself when another guard appeared as if from nowhere and tripped him up. Yang sprang to his feet, throwing a punch at him. But his opponent was a veteran soldier, skilled both in attack and defence and his footwork was excellent. While parrying Yang's blows he spotted his weakness: though bold and vigorous, Yang's footwork was poor and he could

easily be caught off balance. So he lured the youngster into attacking him. Eager to lick his opponent, Yang lunged at him fist first. Dodging, the soldier slipped behind him and delivered a carefully aimed kick at the back of Yang's knee, sending him staggering.

However, Old Li darted over in the nick of time and grabbed the enemy from behind. Before the man realized what had happened, he'd been throttled, then gagged with Li's towel. According to the rules of the manoeuvre, he'd been taken prisoner.

The other enemy guard, realizing they wouldn't be able to overcome the scouts without reinforcements, pulled out his signal-gun. Old Li spotted him. Whirling round he sent the gun flying with one kick. As the soldier was figuring out his next move Old Li kicked out again to topple him. The man sprang back. But Li pursued, rolling forward to spring at the enemy, striking at his temples with his fists — an attack he was noted for. Although his opponent, an experienced fighter, warded off the blows successfully, Li was too fierce for him to overpower bare-handed. Just then Yang closed in too, yanking the guard up by the seat of his pants. The man whipped out his fake dagger and thrust it at Yang's belly. Old Li bounded over, wrenched the dagger from him and hurtled the enemy soldier to the ground.

In less than two minutes of hand-to-hand combat, Li and Yang had captured two enemy soldiers. But the noise had alerted the others. An urgent order was given and in a flash a whole detachment was on the spot.

It was too late, however. While Old Li and half a dozen men played cat and mouse with the enemy among the rocks to divert their attention and gain time, Yang and Chang, acting on their squad leader's instructions, were climbing on to the roof. They plucked out the aerial and hoisted their own banner — the communications centre had been taken.

Then three red flares flamed in the sky. Unit A's mighty army converged from all sides like thousands of sharp swords. The general offensive had begun.

Illustrated by Huang Chia-yu

POEMS

Huang Ying-ku

Night Ploughing After Rain

By midnight it has cleared: the rain has ceased.
The old peasant tossing sleepless on the *kang*
Climbs off and, opening wide the window,
Sees the moon casting its silver sheen upon the ground.

The sweet odour of damp earth is carried on the breeze,
Like whirring alarm-clocks everywhere the frogs are croaking,
In such moonlight, the old man thinks, ploughing could begin,
We mustn't dally, for spring follows swiftly on the heels of rain.

He hopes the breeze will quieten, the frogs cease their din,
That commune members may stay sweetly dreaming,
But when he reaches the fields he stands amazed,
For with noise and bustle, others are already there.

There are all the young girls, fresh from school,
Bobbed hair or long plaits tied in gaudy kerchiefs,
Pausing to laugh and talk to one another;
While on flying feet the young men come running too.

How did they know that ploughing should start that night?
The breeze and moon are silent. There's no need to ask,
For this is early March, season of rain and thunder,
No need to wait for orders, all know it's time to start.

As the plough cleaves the moist soil, all scatter to work
One after another; they follow the example of Tachai,*
To the frogs' chorus and the night breeze;
Spring follows swiftly in the wake of the plough.

*The Tachai Brigade in Hsiyang County, Shansi Province, is a red banner on the agricultural front.

A Drink Along the Way

In spring, across the grasslands lush and green,
A soldier rides with a message for a distant hill-post.
For more than a hundred *li* his horse has galloped,
Now, stopping for a moment, he finds his water-bottle empty.

The young man looks around for a nearby stream, but finds none,
Vast green pastures stretch endlessly around him,
Only far away on the horizon he sees a rippling dark line,
And wonders if it's low-lying cloud or a flock of sheep.

Suddenly there comes a flash of red, another rider
Like a swift flame races across the green satin pasture,
As she comes towards him, slipping from her saddle,
A young girl holds out to him her sheep-skin water bag.

"Please take a drink, uncle. Taste our sweet water,
Which has brought such happiness to our grasslands."
How grateful he is as he watches the water flowing,
Even before his cup is full he feels refreshed.

Smiling, he asks, "Where does the water come from?"
"Our new canal was just opened yesterday," she says.
"Water, formerly as precious as gold, now flows freely.
My dad says it really comes from far-away Peking.
What do you think? Does it taste sweet, uncle?
The sound of running water is music to our ears,
This year we'll certainly have an extra good harvest."

So, the soldier thinks, it's not a cloud or flock of sheep
I see along the far-away horizon, but the new canal,
A new canal flowing across these level grasslands,
Its water is more refreshing than milk or wine.
Three full cups he drinks, then thanks the girl,
Mounts his rested horse and turns towards the distant hills.

The young girl mounts her fine roan horse,
Starts off too, like a bright flame,
Then she turns and shouts back at him,
"When you come this way again, uncle,
Drop in and see us, please do."
Then off she gallops like the wind,
Her voice still lingering on the air.
The soldier refreshed goes on to complete his mission.

Another Bumper Harvest (woodcut)
by Li Yi-ping and Liu Ying-bai



Before Going to Peking

Better go to sleep, the night breeze fills the yurt,
Better go to sleep, the moon rides high in the sky.
Better go to sleep, Apak has urged three times,
But Palitai still sits cross-legged upon the mat.

Why, she wonders, is the moon brighter than usual?
Why is the breeze so much fresher this night?
Ah, the grasslands must have heard the young girl's heart throb,
And seen the gleam of joy in her lustrous dark eyes.

How can Palitai sleep tonight
When such ripples of happiness flow around her heart?
For she's to be one of the first students from Kash valley,
To mature in the warm sunshine of the Party.

Tomorrow? Ah, tomorrow she will stretch her young wings,
She will fly to the east, to far-away Peking,
There with her own hands she'll touch the walls of Tien An Men
And with her own eyes she'll see the mighty Hall of the People.

How can Palitai sleep tonight?
She recalls the three years since school, spent in the commune,
She sees the rippling lake water, the wide grassland,
She can still hear the bleating sheep and neighing horses.

Tomorrow she must say goodbye to these beloved grasslands,
Tomorrow she must fly away from this unforgettable school,
But she will always remember the storms that swept these prairies,
Class struggle and productive labour have strengthened her wings.

How can Palitai sleep tonight?
For now she is turning a new page in her life.
The kindly instructions of the old Party secretary
Are deeply imprinted on her keen young mind.

“Young eagle, tomorrow you'll fly to our capital Peking,
We former poor and lower-middle herdsmen expect much of you.
After graduating from a college in the city where Chairman Mao lives,
We hope you'll return to carry on the revolution here.”

So how can Palitai sleep tonight?
Recollections and reminiscences still linger,
Clearly she sees and hears old uncle Surtan
As he talked to her when on his death-bed.

“Remember how I spent my life under the herd-owner's whip,
Remember it's the Party that has given us this warm yurt,
Now like a young bird in spring you're living under socialism
But never forget the past cruel winter and the raging storms.”

So how can Palitai sleep tonight?
Past struggles and plans for future study alternate
So, lighting the lamp she opens her diary and begins
To put her inmost thoughts and deepest feelings into words.

Goodbye for a time, dear people, beloved grasslands,
Palitai will never disappoint you.
I vow to be an eagle, soaring to the heights,
Flying always towards our communist goal!



The New-Year Sacrifice

The end of the year by the old calendar does really seem a more natural end to the year for, to say nothing of the villages and towns, the very sky seems to proclaim the New Year's approach. Intermittent flashes from pallid, lowering evening clouds are followed by the rumble of crackers bidding farewell to the Hearth God* and, before the deafening reports of the bigger bangs close at hand have died away, the air is filled with faint whiffs of gunpowder. On one such night I returned to Luchen, my home town. I call it my home town, but as I had not made my home there for some time I put up at the house of a certain Fourth Mr. Lu, whom I am obliged to address as Fourth Uncle since he belongs to the generation before mine in our clan. A former Imperial College licentiate who believes in Neo-Confucianism,**

*On the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month the Hearth God was supposed to go up to Heaven to make a report.

**The Confucian school in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) which claimed that all things in the universe and the feudal order were ordained by "Reason" and could never change.

he seemed very little changed, just slightly older, but without any beard as yet. Having exchanged some polite remarks upon meeting he observed that I was fatter, and having observed that I was fatter launched into a violent attack on the reformists.* I did not take this personally, however, as the object of his attack was Kang Yu-wei. Still, conversation proved so difficult that I shortly found myself alone in the study.

I rose late the next day and went out after lunch to see relatives and friends, spending the following day in the same way. They were all very little changed, just slightly older; but every family was busy preparing for the New-Year sacrifice. This is the great end-of-year ceremony in Luchen, during which a reverent and splendid welcome is given to the God of Fortune so that he will send good luck for the coming year. Chickens and geese are killed, pork is bought, and everything is scrubbed and scoured until all the women's arms — some still in twisted silver bracelets — turn red in the water. After the meat is cooked chopsticks are thrust into it at random, and when this "offering" is set out at dawn, incense and candles are lit and the God of Fortune is respectfully invited to come and partake of it. The worshippers are confined to men and, of course, after worshipping they go on letting off firecrackers as before. This is done every year, in every household — so long as it can afford the offering and crackers — and naturally this year was no exception.

The sky became overcast and in the afternoon it was filled with a flurry of snowflakes, some as large as plum-blossom petals, which merged with the smoke and the bustling atmosphere to make the small town a welter of confusion. By the time I had returned to my uncle's study, the roof of the house was already white with snow which made the room brighter than usual, highlighting the red stone rubbing that hung on the wall of the big character "Longevity" as written by the

*Referring to Kang Yu-wei, Liang Chi-chao and others who in 1898, supported by Emperor Kuang Hsu, started a bourgeois reform movement. After this was crushed by the die-hards, Kang Yu-wei and others fled abroad and organized a royalist group advocating constitutional monarchy, becoming a reactionary political clique.

Taoist saint Chen Tuan*. One of the pair of scrolls flanking it had fallen down and was lying loosely rolled up on the long table. The other, still in its place, bore the inscription "Understanding of principles brings peace of mind". Idly, I strolled over to the desk beneath the window to turn over the pile of books on it, but only found an apparently incomplete set of *The Kang Hsi Dictionary*, the *Selected Writings of Neo-Confucian Philosophers*, and *Commentaries on the Four Books*.** At all events I must leave the next day, I decided.

Besides, the thought of my meeting with Hsiang Lin's Wife the previous day was preying on my mind. It had happened in the afternoon. On my way back from calling on a friend in the eastern part of the town, I had met her by the river and knew from the fixed look in her eyes that she was going to accost me. Of all the people I had seen during this visit to Luchen, none had changed so much as she had. Her hair, streaked with grey five years before, was now completely white, making her appear much older than one around forty. Her sallow, dark-tinged face that looked as if it had been carved out of wood was fearfully wasted and had lost the grief-stricken expression it had borne before. The only sign of life about her was the occasional flicker of her eyes. In one hand she had a bamboo basket containing a chipped, empty bowl; in the other, a bamboo pole, taller than herself, that was split at the bottom. She had clearly become a beggar pure and simple.

I stopped, waiting for her to come and ask for money.

"So you're back?" were her first words.

"Yes."

"That's good. You are a scholar who's travelled and seen the world. There's something I want to ask you." A sudden gleam lit up her lacklustre eyes.

This was so unexpected that surprise rooted me to the spot.

"It's this." She drew two paces nearer and lowered her voice, as if letting me into a secret. "Do dead people turn into ghosts or not?"

*A tenth-century hermit.

**Compiled by Lo Pei in the Ching Dynasty for use in the imperial examinations.

My flesh crept. The way she had fixed me with her eyes made a shiver run down my spine, and I felt far more nervous than when a surprise test is sprung on you at school and the teacher insists on standing over you. Personally, I had never bothered myself in the least about whether spirits existed or not; but what was the best answer to give her now? I hesitated for a moment, reflecting that the people here still believed in spirits, but she seemed to have her doubts, or rather hopes — she hoped for life after death and dreaded it at the same time. Why increase the sufferings of someone with a wretched life? For her sake, I thought, I'd better say there was.

"Quite possibly, I'd say," I told her falteringly.

"That means there must be a hell too?"

"What, hell?" I faltered, very taken aback. "Hell? Logically speaking, there should be too — but not necessarily. Who cares anyway?"

"Then will all the members of a family meet again after death?"

"Well, as to whether they'll meet again or not..." I realized now what an utter fool I was. All my hesitation and manoeuvring had been no match for her three questions. Promptly taking fright, I decided to recant. "In that case... actually, I'm not sure... In fact, I'm not sure whether there are ghosts or not either."

To avoid being pressed by any further questions I walked off, then beat a hasty retreat to my uncle's house, feeling thoroughly disconcerted. I may have given her a dangerous answer, I was thinking. Of course, she may just be feeling lonely because everybody else is celebrating now, but could she have had something else in mind? Some premonition? If she had had some other idea, and something happens as a result, then my answer should indeed be partly responsible... Then I laughed at myself for brooding so much over a chance meeting when it could have no serious significance. No wonder certain educationists called me neurotic. Besides, I had distinctly declared, "I'm not sure," contradicting the whole of my answer. This meant that even if something did happen, it would have nothing at all to do with me.

"I'm not sure" is a most useful phrase.

Bold inexperienced youngsters often take it upon themselves to solve problems or choose doctors for other people, and if by any chance things turn out badly they may well be held to blame; but by concluding their advice with this evasive expression they achieve blissful immunity from reproach. The necessity for such a phrase was brought home to me still more forcibly now, since it was indispensable even in speaking with a beggar woman.

However, I remained uneasy, and even after a night's rest my mind dwelt on it with a certain sense of foreboding. The oppressive snowy weather and the gloomy study increased my uneasiness. I had better leave the next day and go back to the city. A large dish of plain shark's fin stew at the Fu Hsing Restaurant used to cost only a dollar. I wondered if this cheap delicacy had risen in price or not. Though my good companions of the old days had scattered, that shark's fin must still be sampled even if I were on my own. Whatever happened I would leave the next day, I decided.

Since, in my experience, things I hoped would not happen and felt should not happen invariably did occur all the same, I was much afraid this would prove another such case. And, sure enough, the situation soon took a strange turn. Towards evening I heard what sounded like a discussion in the inner room, but the conversation ended before long and my uncle walked away observing loudly: "What a moment to choose! Now of all times! Isn't that proof enough she was a bad lot?"

My initial astonishment gave way to a deep uneasiness; I felt that this had something to do with me. I looked out of the door, but no one was there. I waited impatiently till their servant came in before dinner to brew tea. Then at last I had a chance to make some inquiries.

"Who was Mr. Lu so angry with just now?" I asked.

"Why, Hsiang Lin's Wife, of course," was the curt reply.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife? Why?" I pressed.

"She's gone."

"Dead?" My heart missed a beat. I started and must have changed colour. But since the servant kept his head lowered, all this escaped him. I pulled myself together enough to ask:

"When did she die?"

"When? Last night or today — I'm not sure."

"How did she die?"

"How? Of poverty of course." After this stolid answer he withdrew, still without having raised his head to look at me.

My agitation was only short-lived, however. For now that my premonition had come to pass, I no longer had to seek comfort in my own "I'm not sure", or his "dying of poverty", and my heart was growing lighter. Only from time to time did I still feel a little guilty. Dinner was served, and my uncle impressively kept me company. Tempted as I was to ask about Hsiang Lin's Wife, I knew that, although he had read that "ghosts and spirits are manifestations of the dual forces of Nature",* he was still so superstitious that on the eve of the New-Year sacrifice it would be unthinkable to mention anything like death or illness. In case of necessity one should use veiled allusions, but since this was unfortunately beyond me I had to bite back the questions which kept rising to the tip of my tongue. And my uncle's solemn expression suddenly made me suspect that he looked on me too as a bad lot who had chosen this moment, now of all times, to come and trouble him. To set his mind at rest as quickly as I could, I told him at once of my plan to leave Luchen the next day and go back to the city. He did not press me to stay, and at last the uncomfortably quiet meal came to an end.

Winter days are short, and because it was snowing darkness had already enveloped the whole town. All was stir and commotion in the lighted houses, but outside was remarkably quiet. And the snowflakes hissing down on the thick snowdrifts intensified one's sense of loneliness. Seated alone in the amber light of the vegetable-oil lamp I reflected that this wretched and forlorn woman, abandoned in the dust like a worn-out toy of which its owners have tired, had once left her own imprint in the dust, and those who enjoyed life must have wondered at her for wishing to live on; but now at last she had been swept away by death. Whether spirits existed or not I did not know; but in this world of ours the end of a futile existence, the removal of

*This was said by the Sung-dynasty Neo-Confucian Chang Tsai.



someone whom others are tired of seeing, was just as well both for them and for the individual concerned. Occupied with these reflections, I listened quietly to the hissing of the snow outside; until little by little I felt more relaxed.

But the fragments of her life that I had seen or heard about before combined now to form a whole.

She was not from Luchen. Early one winter, when my uncle's family wanted a new maid, Old Mrs. Wei the go-between brought her along. She had a white mourning band round her hair and was wearing a black skirt, blue jacket, and pale green bodice. Her age was about twenty-six, and though her face was sallow her cheeks were red. Old Mrs. Wei introduced her as Hsiang Lin's Wife, a neighbour of her mother's family, who wanted to go out to work now that her husband had died. My uncle frowned at this, and my aunt knew that he disapproved of taking on a widow. She looked just the person for them, though, with her big strong hands and feet; and, judging by her downcast eyes and silence, she was a good worker who would know her place. So my aunt ignored my uncle's frown and kept her. During her trial period she worked from morning till night as if she found resting irksome, and proved strong enough to do the work of a man; so on the third day she was taken on for five hundred cash a month.

Everybody called her Hsiang Lin's Wife and no one asked her own name, but since she had been introduced by someone from Wei Village as a neighbour, her surname was presumably also Wei. She said little, only answering briefly when asked a question. Thus it took them a dozen days or so to find out bit by bit that she had a strict mother-in-law at home and a brother-in-law of ten or so, old enough to cut wood. Her husband, who had died that spring, had been a woodcutter too, and had been ten years younger than she was. This little was all they could learn.

Time passed quickly. She went on working as hard as ever, not caring what she ate, never sparing herself. It was generally agreed that the Lu family's maid actually got through more work than a hard-working man. At the end of the year, she swept and mopped the

floors, killed the chickens and geese, and sat up to boil the sacrificial meat, all single-handed, so that they did not need to hire extra help. And she for her part was quite contented. Little by little the trace of a smile appeared at the corners of her mouth, while her face became whiter and plumper.

Just after the New Year she came back from washing rice by the river most upset because in the distance she had seen a man, pacing up and down on the opposite bank, who looked like her husband's elder cousin — very likely he had come in search of her. When my aunt in alarm pressed her for more information, she said nothing. As soon as my uncle knew of this he frowned.

"That's bad," he observed. "She must have run away."

Before very long this inference was confirmed.

About a fortnight later, just as this incident was beginning to be forgotten, Old Mrs. Wei suddenly brought along a woman in her thirties whom she introduced as Hsiang Lin's mother. Although this woman looked like the hill-dweller she was, she behaved with great self-possession and had a ready tongue in her head. After the usual civilities she apologized for coming to take her daughter-in-law back, explaining that early spring was a busy time and they were short-handed at home with only old people and children around.

"If her mother-in-law wants her back, there's nothing more to be said," was my uncle's comment.

Thereupon her wages were reckoned up. They came to 1,750 cash, all of which she had left in the keeping of her mistress without spending any of it. My aunt gave the entire sum to Hsiang Lin's mother, who took her daughter-in-law's clothes as well, expressed her thanks, and left. By this time it was noon.

"Oh, the rice! Didn't Hsiang Lin's Wife go to wash the rice?" exclaimed my aunt some time later. It was probably hunger that reminded her of lunch.

A general search started then for the rice-washing basket. My aunt searched the kitchen, then the hall, then the bedroom; but not a sign of the basket was to be seen. My uncle could not find it outside either, until he went right down to the riverside. Then he saw it set down fair and square on the bank, some vegetables beside it.

Some people on the bank told him that a boat with a white awning had moored there that morning but, since the awning covered the boat completely, they had no idea who was inside and had paid no special attention to begin with. But when Hsiang Lin's Wife had arrived and was kneeling down to wash rice, two men who looked as if they came from the hills had jumped off the boat and seized her. Between them they dragged her on board. She wept and shouted at first but soon fell silent, probably because she was gagged. Then along came two women, a stranger and Old Mrs. Wei. It was difficult to see clearly into the boat, but the victim seemed to be lying, tied up, on the planking.

"Disgraceful! Still..." said my uncle.

That day my aunt cooked the midday meal herself, and their son Ah Niu lit the fire.

After lunch Old Mrs. Wei came back.

"Disgraceful!" said my uncle.

"What's the meaning of this? How dare you show your face here again?" My aunt, who was washing up, started fuming as soon as she saw her. "First you recommend her, then help them carry her off, causing such a shocking commotion. What will people think? Are you trying to make fools of our family?"

"*Aiya*, I was completely taken in! I've come specially to clear this up. How was I to know she'd left home without permission from her mother-in-law when she asked me to find her work? I'm sorry, Mr. Lu, I'm sorry, Mrs. Lu. I'm growing so stupid and careless in my old age, I've let my patrons down. It's lucky for me you're such kind, generous people, never hard on those below you. I promise to make it up to you by finding someone good this time."

"Still..." said my uncle.

That concluded the affair of Hsiang Lin's Wife, and before long it was forgotten.

My aunt was the only one who still spoke of Hsiang Lin's Wife. This was because most of the maids taken on afterwards turned out to be lazy or greedy, or both, none of them giving satisfaction. At such times she would invariably say to herself, I wonder what's be-

come of her now? — implying that she would like to have her back. But by the next New Year she too had given up hope.

The first month was nearing its end when Old Mrs. Wei called on my aunt to wish her a happy New Year. Already tipsy, she explained that the reason for her coming so late was that she had been visiting her family in Wei Village in the hills for a few days. The conversation, naturally, soon touched on Hsiang Lin's Wife.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife?" cried Old Mrs. Wei cheerfully. "She's in luck now. When her mother-in-law dragged her home, she'd promised her to the sixth son of the Ho family in Ho Glen. So a few days after her return they put her in the bridal chair and sent her off."

"Gracious! What a mother-in-law!" exclaimed my aunt.

"Ah, madam, you really talk like a great lady! This is nothing to poor folk like us who live up in the hills. That young brother-in-law of hers still had no wife. If they didn't marry her off, where would the money have come from to get him one? Her mother-in-law is a clever, capable woman, a fine manager; so she married her off into the mountains. If she'd betrothed her to a family in the same village, she wouldn't have made so much; but as very few girls are willing to take a husband deep in the mountains at the back of beyond, she got eighty thousand cash. Now the second son has a wife, who cost only fifty thousand; and after paying the wedding expenses she's still over ten thousand in hand. Wouldn't you call her a fine manager?"

"But was Hsiang Lin's Wife willing?"

"It wasn't a question of willing or not. Of course any woman would make a row about it. All they had to do was tie her up, shove her into the chair, carry her to the man's house, force on her the bridal head-dress, make her bow in the ceremonial hall, lock the two of them into their room — and that was that. But Hsiang Lin's Wife is quite a character. I heard that she made a terrible scene. It was working for a scholar's family, everyone said, that made her different from other people. We go-betweens see life, madam. Some widows sob and shout when they remarry; some threaten to kill themselves; some refuse to go through the ceremony of bowing to heaven and earth after they've been carried to the man's house; some even smash the wedding candlesticks. But Hsiang Lin's Wife was really extraor-

dinary. They said she screamed and cursed all the way to Ho Glen, so that she was completely hoarse by the time they got there. When they dragged her out of the chair, no matter how the two chair-bearers and her brother-in-law held her, they couldn't make her go through the ceremony. The moment they were off guard and had loosened their grip — gracious Buddha! — she bashed her head on a corner of the altar, gashing it so badly that the blood spurted out. Even though they smeared on two handfuls of incense ashes and tied it up with two pieces of red cloth, they couldn't stop the bleeding. It took quite a few of them to shut her up finally with the man in the bridal chamber, but even then she went on cursing. Oh, it was really. . . ." Shaking her head, she lowered her eyes and fell silent.

"And what then?" asked my aunt.

"They said that the next day she didn't get up." Old Mrs. Wei raised her eyes.

"And after?"

"After? She got up. At the end of the year she had a baby, a boy, who was reckoned as two this New Year. These few days when I was at home, some people back from a visit to Ho Glen said they'd seen her and her son, and both mother and child are plump. There's no mother-in-law over her, her man is a strong fellow who can earn a living, and the house belongs to them. Oh, yes, she's in luck all right."

After this event my aunt gave up talking of Hsiang Lin's Wife.

But one autumn, after two New Years had passed since this good news of Hsiang Lin's Wife, she once more crossed the threshold of my uncle's house, placing her round bulb-shaped basket on the table and her small bedding-roll under the eaves. As before, she had a white mourning band round her hair and was wearing a black skirt, blue jacket, and pale green bodice. Her face was sallow, her cheeks no longer red; and her downcast eyes, stained with tears, had lost their brightness. Just as before, it was Old Mrs. Wei who brought her to my aunt.

"It was really a bolt from the blue," she explained compassionately. "Her husband was a strong young fellow; who'd have thought that typhoid fever would carry him off? He'd taken a turn for the better,

but then he ate some cold rice and got worse again. Luckily she had the boy and she can work — she's able to gather firewood, pick tea, or raise silkworms — so she could have managed on her own. But who'd have thought that the child, too, would be carried off by a wolf? It was nearly the end of spring, yet a wolf came to the glen — who could have guessed that? Now she's all on her own. Her husband's elder brother has taken over the house and turned her out. So she's no way to turn for help except to her former mistress. Luckily this time there's nobody to stop her and you happen to be needing someone, madam. That's why I've brought her here. I think someone used to your ways is much better than a new hand. . . .”

“I was really too stupid, really. . . .” put in Hsiang Lin's Wife, raising her lacklustre eyes. “All I knew was that when it snowed and the wild beasts up in the hills had nothing to eat, they might come to the villages. I didn't know that in spring they might come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and told our Ah Mao to sit on the doorstep and shell them. He was such a good boy; he always did as he was told, and out he went. Then I went to the back to chop wood and wash the rice, and when the rice was in the pan I wanted to steam the beans. I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer. When I went out to look there were beans all over the ground but no Ah Mao. He never went to the neighbours' houses to play; and, sure enough, though I asked everywhere he wasn't there. I got so worried, I begged people to help me find him. Not until that afternoon, after searching high and low, did they try the gully. There they saw one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. ‘That's bad,’ they said. ‘A wolf must have got him.’ And sure enough, further on, there he was lying in the wolf's den, all his innards eaten away, still clutching that little basket tight in his hand. . . .” At this point she broke down and could not go on.

My aunt had been undecided at first, but the rims of her eyes were rather red by the time Hsiang Lin's Wife broke off. After a moment's thought she told her to take her things to the servants' quarters. Old Mrs. Wei heaved a sigh, as if a great weight had been lifted from her mind; and Hsiang Lin's Wife, looking more relaxed than when first she came, went off quietly to put away her bedding



without having to be told the way. So she started work again as a maid in Luchen.

She was still known as Hsiang Lin's Wife.

But now she was a very different woman. She had not worked there more than two or three days before her mistress realized that she was not as quick as before. Her memory was much worse too, while her face, like a death-mask, never showed the least trace of a smile. Already my aunt was expressing herself as not too satisfied. Though my uncle had frowned as before when she first arrived, they always had such trouble finding servants that he raised no serious objections, simply warning his wife on the quiet that while such people might seem very pathetic they exerted a bad moral influence. She could work for them but must have nothing to do with ancestral sacrifices. They would have to prepare all the dishes themselves. Otherwise they would be unclean and the ancestors would not accept them.

The most important events in my uncle's household were ancestral sacrifices, and formerly these had kept Hsiang Lin's Wife especially busy, but now she had virtually nothing to do. As soon as the table had been placed in the centre of the hall and a front curtain fastened round its legs, she started setting out the winecups and chopsticks in the way she still remembered.

"Put those down, Hsiang Lin's Wife," cried my aunt hastily. "Leave that to me."

She drew back sheepishly then and went for the candlesticks.

"Put those down, Hsiang Lin's Wife," cried my aunt again in haste. "I'll fetch them."

After walking round in the hall several times without finding anything to do, she moved doubtfully away. All she could do that day was to sit by the stove and feed the fire.

The townspeople still called her Hsiang Lin's Wife, but in quite a different tone from before; and although they still talked to her, their manner was colder. Quite impervious to this, staring straight in front of her, she would tell everybody the story which night or day was never out of her mind.

"I was really too stupid, really," she would say. "All I knew was that when it snowed and the wild beasts up in the hills had nothing to

eat, they might come to the villages. I didn't know that in spring they might come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and told our Ah Mao to sit on the doorstep and shell them. He was such a good boy; he always did as he was told, and out he went. Then I went to the back to chop wood and wash the rice, and when the rice was in the pan I wanted to steam the beans. I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer. When I went out to look, there were beans all over the ground but no Ah Mao. He never went to the neighbours' houses to play; and, sure enough, though I asked everywhere he wasn't there. I got so worried, I begged people to help me find him. Not until that afternoon, after searching high and low, did they try the gully. There they saw one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. 'That's bad,' they said. 'A wolf must have got him.' And sure enough, further on, there he was lying in the wolf's den, all his innards eaten away, still clutching that little basket tight in his hand. . . ." At this point her voice would be choked with tears.

This story was so effective that men hearing it often stopped smiling and walked blankly away, while the women not only seemed to forgive her but wiped the contemptuous expression off their faces and added their tears to hers. Indeed, some old women who had not heard her in the street sought her out specially to hear her sad tale. And when she broke down, they too shed the tears which had gathered in their eyes, after which they sighed and went away satisfied, exchanging eager comments.

As for her, she asked nothing better than to tell her sad story over and over again, often gathering three or four hearers around her. But before long everybody knew it so well that no trace of a tear could be seen even in the eyes of the most kindly, Buddha-invoking old ladies. In the end, practically the whole town could recite it by heart and were bored and exasperated to hear it repeated.

"I was really too stupid, really," she would begin.

"Yes. All you knew was that in snowy weather, when the wild beasts in the mountains had nothing to eat, they might come down to the villages." Cutting short her recital abruptly, they walked away.

She would stand there open-mouthed, staring after them stupidly, and then wander off as if she too were bored by the story. But she still tried hopefully to lead up from other topics such as small baskets, and other people's children to the story of her Ah Mao. At the sight of a child of two or three she would say, "Ah, if my Ah Mao were alive he'd be just that size. . . ."

Children would take fright at the look in her eyes and clutch the hem of their mother's clothes to tug them away. Left by herself again, she would eventually walk blankly away. In the end everybody knew what she was like. If a child were present they would ask with a spurious smile: "If your Ah Mao were alive, Hsiang Lin's Wife, wouldn't he be just that size?"

She may not have realized that her tragedy, after being generally savoured for so many days, had long since grown so stale that it now aroused only revulsion and disgust. But she seemed to sense the cold mockery in their smiles, and the fact that there was no need for her to say any more. So she would simply look at them in silence.

New-Year preparations always start in Luchen on the twentieth day of the twelfth lunar month. That year my uncle's household had to take on a temporary manservant. And since there was more than he could do they asked Amah Liu to help by killing the chickens and geese; but being a devout vegetarian who would not kill living creatures, she would only wash the sacrificial vessels. Hsiang Lin's Wife, with nothing to do but feed the fire, sat there at a loose end watching Amah Liu as she worked. A light snow began to fall.

"Ah, I was really too stupid," said Hsiang Lin's Wife as if to herself, looking at the sky and sighing.

"There you go again, Hsiang Lin's Wife." Amah Liu glanced with irritation at her face. "Tell me, wasn't that when you got that scar on your forehead?"

All the reply she received was a vague murmur.

"Tell me this: what made you willing after all?"

"Willing?"

"Yes. Seems to me you must have been willing. Otherwise. . . ."

"Oh, you don't know how strong he was."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe he was so strong that you with your strength couldn't have kept him off. You must have ended up willing. That talk of his being so strong is just an excuse."

"Why . . . just try for yourself and see." She smiled.

Amah Liu's lined face broke into a smile too, wrinkling up like a walnut-shell. Her small beady eyes swept the other woman's forehead, then fastened on her eyes. At once Hsiang Lin's Wife stopped smiling, as if embarrassed, and turned her eyes away to watch the snow.

"That was really a bad bargain you struck, Hsiang Lin's Wife," said Amah Liu mysteriously. "If you'd held out longer or knocked yourself to death outright, that would have been better. As it is, you're guilty of a great sin though you lived less than two years with your second husband. Just think: when you go down to the lower world, the ghosts of both men will start fighting over you. Which ought to have you? The King of Hell will have to saw you into two and divide you between them. I feel it really is. . . ."

Hsiang Lin's Wife's face registered terror then. This was something no one had told her up in the mountains.

"Better guard against that in good time, I say. Go to the Temple of the Tutelary God and buy a threshold to be trampled on instead of you by thousands of people. If you atone for your sins in this life you'll escape torment after death."

Hsiang Lin's Wife said nothing at the time, but she must have taken this advice to heart for when she got up the next morning there were dark rims round her eyes. After breakfast she went to the Temple of the Tutelary God at the west end of the town and asked to buy a threshold as an offering. At first the priest refused, only giving a grudging consent after she was reduced to tears of desperation. The price charged was twelve thousand cash.

She had long since given up talking to people after their contemptuous reception of Ah Mao's story; but as word of her conversation with Amah Liu spread, many of the townsfolk took a fresh interest in her and came once more to provoke her into talking. The topic, of course, had changed to the scar on her forehead.

"Tell me, Hsiang Lin's Wife, what made you willing in the end?" one would ask.

"What a waste, to have bashed yourself like that for nothing," another would chime in, looking at her scar.

She must have known from their smiles and tone of voice that they were mocking her, for she simply stared at them without a word and finally did not even turn her head. All day long she kept her lips tightly closed, bearing on her head the scar considered by everyone as a badge of shame, while she shopped, swept the floor, washed the vegetables and prepared the rice in silence. Nearly a year went by before she took her accumulated wages from my aunt, changed them for twelve silver dollars, and asked for leave to go to the west end of town. In less time than it takes for a meal she was back again, looking much comforted. With an unaccustomed light in her eyes, she told my aunt contentedly that she had now offered up a threshold in the Temple of the Tutelary God.

When the time came for the ancestral sacrifice at the winter solstice she worked harder than ever, and as soon as my aunt took out the sacrificial vessels and helped Ah Niu to carry the table into the middle of the hall, she went confidently to fetch the winecups and chopsticks.

"Put those down, Hsiang Lin's Wife!" my aunt called hastily.

She withdrew her hand as if scorched, her face turned ashen grey, and instead of fetching the candlesticks she just stood there in a daze until my uncle came in to burn some incense and told her to go away. This time the change in her was phenomenal: the next day her eyes were sunken, her spirit seemed broken. She took fright very easily too, afraid not only of the dark and of shadows, but of meeting anyone. Even the sight of her own master or mistress set her trembling like a mouse that had strayed out of its hole in broad daylight. The rest of the time she would sit stupidly as if carved out of wood. In less than half a year her hair had turned grey, and her memory had deteriorated so much that she often forgot to go and wash the rice.

"What's come over Hsiang Lin's Wife? We should never have taken her on again," my aunt would sometimes say in front of her, as if to warn her.

But there was no change in her, no sign that she would ever recover her wits. So they decided to get rid of her and tell her to go back to Old Mrs. Wei. That was what they were saying, at least, while I was there; and, judging by subsequent developments, this is evidently what they must have done. But whether she started begging as soon as she left my uncle's house, or whether she went first to Old Mrs. Wei and later became a beggar, I do not know.

I was woken up by the noisy explosion of crackers close at hand and, from the faint glow shed by the yellow oil lamp and the bangs of fireworks as my uncle's household celebrated the sacrifice, I knew that it must be nearly dawn. Listening drowsily I heard vaguely the ceaseless explosion of crackers in the distance. It seemed to me that the whole town was enveloped by the dense cloud of noise in the sky, mingling with the whirling snowflakes. Enveloped in this medley of sound I relaxed; the doubt which had preyed on my mind from dawn till night was swept clean away by the festive atmosphere, and I felt only that the saints of heaven and earth had accepted the sacrifice and incense and were reeling with intoxication in the sky, preparing to give Luchen's people boundless good fortune.

7 February 1924

Woodcut by Ku Yuan

Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien

On Lu Hsun's Story "The New-Year Sacrifice"

In old China which was semi-feudal and semi-colonial, all labouring women were subject to four types of authority: the state, the clan, religion and, in addition, masculine domination. As Chairman Mao has pointed out: **"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."** Hsiang Lin's Wife, the chief character in this story by Lu Hsun which we publish in this issue, is a typical example of the working women in old China who were oppressed and crushed to death under these four systems of authority.

The New-Year Sacrifice was written in 1924. China then was under the dark rule of a warlord government which, to consolidate its power, cruelly suppressed the revolutionary masses and fostered the cult of Confucius and the study of the reactionary Confucian classics, using these doctrines to deaden the people's spirit. This story is one of

many essays and stories which Lu Hsun wrote at that time to attack this reactionary trend and expose the deceit and iniquity of Confucianism.

This story hits out at the heinous nature of the feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, laying stress on the oppression and ruin of labouring women by the Confucian doctrines which were the ideological basis of the reactionary authorities. The main theme hinges on the relationship of two opposite types of character: Hsiang Lin's Wife who is the victim of the feudal system and Fourth Mr. Lu who upholds Confucian ethics.

Hsiang Lin's Wife is an ordinary good-hearted peasant woman, industrious, honest and able to endure great hardships. She wants nothing more than to earn a meagre living by hard work, yet her hopes are dashed time and again. From the day that she starts working to the time of her tragic death, her whole life is one of calamities and misfortunes. Lu Hsun depicts the sad lot of this woman, trenchantly showing how the four thick ropes of feudal authority formed a net to ensnare her and finally cause her death.

At the start she is forced by her clan to marry a boy ten years younger than herself. After he dies, she runs away from her mother-in-law to work as a maid for the landlord Fourth Mr. Lu. She finds satisfaction in her hard work there and never complains. "Little by little the trace of a smile appeared at the corners of her mouth, while her face became whiter and plumper." However, though so easily contented and good-natured, she cannot escape from the trammels of those four systems of authority. The Confucian code of morality stipulated that a woman before marriage must obey her father, after marriage her husband, and after his death his clan. So after a short time she is caught, gagged and bound, and taken back by her in-laws to be sold like cattle to another man in the mountains.

But unluckily her second husband too falls ill and dies, and she becomes a widow again. Then the feudal clan authorizes her brother-in-law to take her house and drive her away, so that she is forced to return to the house of Fourth Mr. Lu. The Lu family is willing to have her back in order to exploit her, but all the calamities the poor woman has suffered have made her dull-witted and slow, unable to

work as efficiently as before, and so she is treated coldly and with contempt.

Furthermore, in the eyes of the landlord who upholds Confucian ethics, for a widow to remarry is immoral and disgraceful. According to the Confucian moral code, she should remain a widow all her life or, better still, kill herself after her husband's death. Only then can she be considered "chaste". Applying these Confucian standards, Fourth Mr. Lu declares her unfit to help prepare the New-Year sacrifice. "Chastity" was one of the virtues most lauded by the Confucians, who claimed that it was better to starve to death rather than to be unchaste. This story is an attack on such inhuman ideas.

Hsiang Lin's Wife after being treated so cruelly by the clan authority and masculine authority is caused still greater mental agony by the religious authority based on Confucian doctrines. Because she has had two husbands, Amah Liu also working for the Lu family uses feudal superstitions to frighten her, saying that after her death she will be sawn into two by the King of Hell to divide between her two husbands. The thought of this torments her, and on Amah Liu's advice she spends all her savings to buy a threshold in the Temple of the Tutelary God which will be trampled on in her place by thousands of people. She believes that in this way she will atone for her sins and win the right to live as a human being again. However, when she goes confidently to fetch the winecups and chopsticks for the New-Year sacrifice, she is stopped peremptorily by her mistress. Clearly she is still not pardoned by the four authorities. Though she has done her best and bought a threshold in the temple, she is still considered "guilty" by the Confucians and even after death she may receive a fearful punishment. These repeated blows from the feudal forces quickly demoralize her. She loses all hope. And at this point she is thrown out by Fourth Mr. Lu and has to beg in the streets. She dies wretchedly during the New-Year sacrifice.

As early as May 1918, Lu Hsun in his well-known story *The Madman's Diary* had used the madman's words to lash out fiercely at Confucianism, pointing out the man-eating nature of its so-called morality. *The New-Year Sacrifice*, relating the sad life of a peasant

woman, reveals how millions of labouring women in old China were devoured alive, like Hsiang Lin's Wife, by Confucian mortality.

The depiction of the negative character Fourth Mr. Lu shows clearly the cruelty and hypocrisy of Confucianism. This landlord who typifies the feudal forces is an out-and-out hypocrite. He poses as a dignified gentleman but at heart is thoroughly vicious. When he meets the narrator of this story, he immediately launches into a violent attack on the reformists, who by then had actually become royalists. An ardent believer in Confucian doctrines, he clutters his desk with Neo-Confucian books while on his wall hangs a scroll with the inscription "Understanding of principles brings peace of mind" — a Confucian maxim. He is so obsessed by Confucian morality that when he sees Hsiang Lin's Wife he frowns in disgust, because she is a widow. However, as she is also a good worker he keeps her on to exploit her as their servant. When her husband's family carries her off by force he considers the commotion this causes disgraceful and wonders what people will think, because this is a blow to his own interest and pride and counter to Confucian propriety. Nonetheless he acquiesces. "If her mother-in-law wants her back, there's nothing more to be said." This comment shows that he condones the barbarous behaviour of the mother-in-law.

When Hsiang Lin's Wife goes the second time to work for the Lu family, Fourth Mr. Lu still frowns but still wants to exploit her; however, he secretly warns his wife that while such people may seem very pathetic they exert a bad moral influence. Thus although she can work for them she must have nothing to do with ancestral sacrifices. They will have to prepare all the dishes themselves, otherwise they will be unclean and the ancestors will not accept them. In fact, such Confucian ethics were finally responsible for her death. When news of it reached Fourth Mr. Lu, the one chiefly responsible, he commented: "What a moment to choose! Now of all times! Isn't that proof enough she was a bad lot?"

With these few words Lu Hsun lays bare the viciousness and callousness of this member of the landed gentry, also making it clear that Confucianism is just a philosophy to deceive the masses and oppress the young and weak. More than two thousand years ago,

Confucius maintained that man's fate was predestined, preaching fatalism to help preserve the tottering order of the slave-owners. Later Confucians also advocated these idealist notions in the hope of making the labouring people obey the will of Heaven and submit to enslavement and oppression by the feudal ruling class. In this story Fourth Mr. Lu talks the same hypocritical rubbish. Having hounded Hsiang Lin's Wife to death, he complains that she has chosen the wrong time to die. "Isn't that proof enough she was a bad lot?" In this way he justifies his murder of this woman as her own "fate".

By exposing this follower of Confucius, Lu Hsun tears off the mask of all the hypocritical Confucians who posed as benevolent gentlemen.

Lu Hsun's depiction of such other characters as the mother-in-law and Amah Liu also serves to bring out the main anti-Confucian theme. The mother-in-law of Hsiang Lin's Wife belongs to a family of woodcutters in the mountains too poor to afford to get a wife for her younger son. This poverty, caused by the feudal system, could only be ended by overthrowing this iniquitous social system. But because her mind has been poisoned by Confucianism, she decides to sell her elder son's widow to cover the expenses of her younger son's marriage. Wrinkled old Amah Liu too, so poor that she has to work for a rich family during the New-Year festival, believes the superstition that a woman who marries twice will be sawn into two in Hell after her death. Through these character sketches Lu Hsun points out how under the feudal-patriarchal system the minds of the labouring people were poisoned by ideas based on Confucian doctrines.

In 1925, in his essay *Idle Thoughts at the End of Spring*, Lu Hsun compared Confucianism to a wasp injecting its venom into a caterpillar — a means used by the ruling class to numb and paralyse the people in the hope of consolidating their class rule. But Lu Hsun was convinced that they would never succeed no matter how hard they tried, for the oppressed, hoodwinked masses would wake up to the truth in the end. In this story, although Hsiang Lin's Wife does not wake up completely, she is not simply a slave who submits to her "fate"; she resists the feudal forces which try to destroy her and struggles repeatedly against oppression and persecution. Indeed, before her death she asks whether spirits exist or not and whether

there is really a hell. These doubts in her mind show that the lies propagated by the Confucians about predestination and the supernatural cannot deceive the masses indefinitely. The hard facts of class oppression must ultimately arouse the oppressed to revolt.

Artistically, this story is well constructed. Lu Hsun tells the story retrospectively, starting with the final New-Year sacrifice and the main character's death, so that from the beginning she has our sympathy. And then her life is unfolded step by step. This imbues the whole work with a strong sense of tragedy, making it most poignant and moving.



SONGS OF FRIENDSHIP

The three poems below are selected from *The Rainbow of Friendship*, published this year by the People's Literature Publishing House. This is a collection of poems written by Chinese construction workers and engineers helping to build the Tanzania-Zambia Railway.

— The Editors

Chang Chih-min

Friendship Lies Deep

When the sun was setting
And faint stars pierced the blue above,
Jioni and I took the same way home.

Back at our base we sat side by side,
So that gently probing with a needle
He extracted a *nyigu** sting for me,

Chang Chih-min is a locomotive driver.

*Big hornets in the African wilds.

While I, with stitches neat and strong,
Mended his much torn shirt.
Our hearts were close entwined
Though I spoke not his language,
Nor did he speak mine.

Not until we felt the evening breeze
That set the palm leaves swaying
And the moon slid slanting to the west,
Did we go indoors together,
Hand in hand like brothers tied by blood.

Chang Hsin

One Aim, One Wish

Who says we three can't converse?
Although we come from three different lands,
From Tanzania, Zambia and far-away China,
And speak three very different tongues,
When we strode into our workshop side by side,
Our hearts were linked by such close ties,
That although mute, we exchanged ideas
In a language understood by all.

Who says we three can't converse?
Forming a close circle we began
To stoke the glowing furnace,
Ladled out the molten iron
And poured it into casts,

Chang Hsin is an engineer.

Shaping and re-shaping the moulds.
Amid the fiery sparks our friendship grew.

Who says we three can't converse?
Together we breasted the waves of heat,
Emptying the molten metal
Into the same intricate moulds.
With such labour shared, it created
Not just stanzas but whole poems of friendship.

Who says we three can't converse?
When each day, arm in arm, we left the workshop
It was with satisfaction shared;
Looking back it was no heap of castings that we saw,
But a mountain of the fruits of friendship.

Different tongues shall never separate us,
If we have one aim, one wish.
We'll do even more till we see a profusion
Of flowers blooming along the road of friendship.
Peoples of the third world
Keep in step and march forward.

A Girl Meteorologist (oil painting)
by Liang Ling



A Battle Shared

For centuries the great Ruaha River* slumbered,
Cloaked in primeval forest, hooded in cloud;
Along its banks untamed lions roamed,
In its waters sportive hippos wallowed.

Now from Tanzania, Zambia and China,
A contingent of workers has come
Fearing no hardship.
They've made their camps along the river banks,
Set up their cooking stoves in the wilds;
Their songs greet the morning mists.

There's a roar of motors, much coming and going,
Work-chants shatter the age-long silence.

Liu Chen-yuan is the leader of a road-building team.

*A river in Tanzania, over which a railway bridge is built.

When the worker's iron arms swing,
Earth and cliffs begin to tremble.

Bold workers, defying the swift currents below,
Soar above the fierce growling river,
Till cables and cages are suspended over it;
Through mist and cloud cars and men shuttle.
Such a scene, never seen before,
Is mirrored on the waters of the mighty river.
There is drama and living poetry in this bridge-site.

There is no night, but a flood of light,
For in building the bridge every second counts.
Then at dawn on the ninetieth day
A rainbow bridge spans the Ruaha River,
A blossom of friendship watered by labour's sweat.

Single-heartedness has conquered the mighty river,
Workers from three lands beam with pride,
For this rainbow of friendship knits them together
Into one big family, opposing
Imperialism and colonialism, their common foes.

SKETCHES

Hu Chang-ching

Water-Borne Store

It was early morning. The sun had flecked rippling Tungting Lake with gold. White sails dotted the blue water stretching far off to meet the azure sky. I was on a sampan bound for one of the fishing hamlets which dotted this lake district lovely as a painting. When the young boatman learned that I'd come specially to report on their water-borne store, he was very interested.

"That's been a wonderful thing for us fisherfolk," he said. "You'll hear all kinds of gripping stories there."

Pointing to the islets dotting the skyline, he went on to tell me about the store. Those islets were inhabited by a good number of fishing brigades. Formerly, when the fishermen needed anything, they had to sail all the way across vast Tungting to reach a department store in a lakeside town. But now they had this water-borne store which delivered the things they needed to their boats. As he seemed to know so much about it, I asked:

"How big is that store anyway?"

He gave my question some thought, then returned the cryptic answer, "It's so big that the whole of Tungting Lake can hardly hold it. Yet so small, it's like a spring swallow flying low."

Our little boat ploughed vigorously through the waves. As the islets drew nearer, I could see emerald tinted reeds under gracefully swaying willows. Snow-white gulls chased each other on the beach. When our sampan rounded a bend, we saw gathered together dozens of fishing-boats in the midst of a tense battle. Some fishermen were tending their nets, others drawing in their lines. Here and there the water burst into silvery blossoms or broke into pearly foam. Frisky fish were tossed by hand into the holds. I was quite captivated by the lively scene.

"Oh, look, there they come!" cried my young boatman.

I whirled round. "What's come?"

Without a word, the young man pointed. Following the direction of his finger, I saw a white sail fly out of the green reeds, a bright red flag flapping at its mast. On the flag were the words, "Water-Borne Store". As I eyed that fiery banner I felt that the touch of spring had brightened the rippling green lake.

As the water-borne store approached, I could make out a sturdy young fellow in the bow. He deftly loosened the riggings and like a white cloud the sail fluttered down to the top of the cabin. With a skilful turn of the tiller, the old helmsman brought the boat alongside.

The fishermen all around called out warm greetings: "Hello, Uncle Yang!" "Hey there, Young Chiang."

My boatman quickly rowed our sampan forward. Soon I could see the two men on that vessel clearly. The robust man at the tiller was round about fifty, with keen eyes sparkling in a swarthy face deeply lined round the eyes and over the brows. He was Uncle Yang then and the youngster who had furled the sail would be Young Chiang.

Uncle Yang removed the door board of his cabin. Having answered the warm greetings of the fishermen he invited them over to take their choice of his wares.

"Here you are, Old Wang," he called, producing a snow-white bundle and tossing it across to another boat. "Here's the nylon line you wanted."

Turning to a young man, he said, "Here, look what I've brought you. Didn't you want some lead sinkers for your silk net?" The young fellow was full of thanks.



Up in front, Young Chiang also had his hands full, weighing out salt and filling oil bottles, selling soap, toothpaste, matches and cigarettes. The smiling faces of the customers here reminded me of the busy shoppers in our bigger cities, but somehow the scene before me had its own special charm.

"Why, isn't Little Sister Yuan here today?" asked Uncle Yang all of a sudden.

"Here I am!" The laughing voice of a girl came from the further side of the gathered boats. Having, apparently, just drawn in her lines she was bringing her boat alongside.

Uncle Yang bent down to take a bottle of lubricant oil out of the cabin. "I've brought you this," he said, holding it up.

"Just in the nick of time!" cried the girl joyfully. "I was just worrying how I was to clean my hooks since I've run out of oil."

"You bought your last bottle on the seventeenth of last month. I reckoned you must have nearly finished it."

The girl took the bottle gratefully. "I can see you've got everything figured out in your head."

"Don't try to flatter me," chuckled Uncle Yang. "Just broadcast what you need beforehand, next time."

After a little thought the girl said, "Please, will you bring me a book about the habits of fresh-water fish next time you come?"

Uncle Yang nodded approvingly and picking up a notebook quickly jotted down the request.

As there was now a slight let-up in the sales, my boatman took this chance to introduce me to the two men on the water-borne store. He then went off in his sampan. I had a good look round this mobile store. There were several iron pails and bamboo crates in the cabin holding all sorts of daily necessities and fishing tackle. By the door was a radio on top of which lay Uncle Yang's notebook. With the owner's permission, I leafed through it and was very much impressed. The book was filled with notes of the basic facts concerning different fishing brigades and the various commodities they needed. There were also details about the types of net and hook used at different fishing grounds and the names of islets frequented by the boats. There was even a special column in which Uncle Yang had

marked down the amount of eggs and brown sugar required by expectant mothers living on the islets.

Uncle Yang had now finished tidying up the goods cabin. "Our work falls far short of what it should be, so please help us by giving us your advice," he said with a smile when he noticed that I was still going over his notebook.

"I've come specially to learn from you," I told him. "You must have been working here on the lake for many years."

"Yes, exactly fifteen years," Uncle Yang said this with love and pride.

"He's one of the first batch of fighters on the lake's trading front," said Chiang with respect in his voice. "Last year the leadership wanted to transfer him to the city, he's getting on in years, you know. But, do you think he would go?"

Uncle Yang rolled up his sleeves to show me his bulging muscles. "See how strong I am still? Why, I can manage all right in wind and waves for another ten years at least. Besides, I couldn't bear to leave Lake Tungting."

As we were chatting they had hoisted sail again. Bathed in sunlight Uncle Yang fixed his gaze far ahead, his hands firmly on the tiller. A few miles further on he suddenly changed course.

Chiang paused in his rowing to ask, "Aren't we going to take the wires to Lotus Brigade's Team One? Why have you veered to head for Rushing Water Shoal?"

"Have you forgotten the medicinal wine for Uncle Liu?" Uncle Yang pointed to some bottles in the cabin.

The young man smiled sheepishly and plied his oars with even more vigour, dimpling the smooth gilded water of the big lake.

Uncle Yang turned to me. "They're magnificent, aren't they, these islets and the lake? But what's even more magnificent is the outlook of our fisherfolk nowadays. Take Uncle Liu for instance. He's in his seventies but he still insists on going out with the others to catch fish. He's a man who's been through a real sea of bitterness. Three years before these parts were liberated, Old Liu couldn't stand being swindled by the local despot and profiteering merchants so he sent his son to town to exchange a few loads of fish for some

rice and salt. But before the young fellow got there he was stopped and murdered by bandits. Then his father was accused of sending his son out to contact bandits and for three whole months he was kept in a water dungeon. He's been crippled with rheumatism ever since. In the old society, so many of us had our homes broken up and our dear ones murdered by despots and bandits. In those days, Tungting Lake overflowed with the blood and tears of the poor. Now the fisherfolk are really keen to give their all to the revolution and we've had good catches year after year. The lake is very dear to all of us now." Uncle Yang's eyes shone with affection.

We came near an islet, so tiny that it seemed like a gourd ladle afloat in the water. A corner of a thatched roof jutted out of the willow branches. I was told that this was Fangchow Islet. We slowed down and moored under a big willow tree.

Uncle Yang took the wine bottles. "I'll deliver these to Uncle Liu. You two can have a little rest now," he announced as he jumped ashore. Striding on firm legs, he headed for the thatched hut in the willows.

"Uncle Yang sure has our fisherfolk's welfare at heart," said Chiang, his eyes on Yang's retreating back. "He's now on the Party committee of the state purchasing-and-supply station. You see, in the beginning there were only a few stores on the bigger islands in Tungting Lake. Of course for the fisherfolk this was already much simpler than going all the way to town to buy what they needed, but it was still inconvenient for those on the move all the time. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution Uncle Yang suggested setting up a mobile store on the lake. Some people protested: 'We've already moved the stores from the cities to the islands. We've done our duty, haven't we? There's no need to go on the lake. Besides, in that case you'd have to sail a boat. Whenever a storm sprang up you'd be in trouble.' Uncle Yang didn't feel that way though. He said that to set up a store on the water would be carrying out Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. He quoted Chairman Mao's instructions on developing the economy and ensuring supplies. He said we shouldn't be afraid of trouble but should dedicate ourselves whole-heartedly to serving the fisherfolk. The

Party committee supported his proposal and the masses were delighted with the idea. The water-borne store was quickly set up. Since then, both on hot summer days and in the bitter winter when snowflakes whirl, you can always hear Uncle Yang's hearty laughter reverberating over the lake and our store's red flag has become a welcome sight to the fisherfolk."

"Have you been working with Uncle Yang on the water-borne store all this time?" I asked.

"No. I came later on. I've been with him a couple of years and during that time I've learned a lot," Chiang continued. "The winter after I came to the lake we had really frightful weather. It was freezingly cold and snow-squalls raged hundreds of miles across Tungting. All the ports and inlets were blocked by ice, the only water visible being out in the middle of the lake. A fishing team from Star Brigade was marooned — ice-bound — by an islet several dozen miles away from their hamlet.

"When news of this reached us, the Party branch of our purchasing-and-supply station got us all together to study the problem. We calculated the time they'd been away and came to the conclusion that their supplies must be running low. We must find some way to send them fresh provisions. Outside the window a blizzard had turned everything a murky white. 'But what can we do?' I asked, wavering. 'You can hardly row a boat on the ice nor get there on foot in this snowstorm.'

"Uncle Yang's brows were tightly knit. 'Our class brothers brave all difficulties to go out fishing for the revolution. Now that they're marooned we must do all we can to help them.' He stood up and walked outside where snow wrapped everything up in white. In place of the wide expanse of rippling water, the lake was a big smooth mirror. Uncle Yang meditated, his eyes taking in the world of crystal around him. Then he went down to the lake. Stepping on to the ice, he advanced gingerly at first but soon he was striding along. After covering quite a distance, he returned. Flapping the snow from his shoulders, he declared, 'I've thought of a way. The ice is thick enough for us to transport the supplies out.

I've just tried it.' He then proposed packing the provisions in baskets which could be hauled over the ice on improvised sleds.

"Together we mapped out the best route to follow and thought of possible difficulties on the way. 'I'm a Communist,' he announced at the end of our discussion. 'I ask the Party branch to assign the task to me.'

"We all volunteered to go with Uncle Yang. While we were clamouring, who should enter the room but Chou Hsing from Star Brigade. 'I've heard you all,' he said. 'I can see you people are really close to us fishermen. You really have our welfare at heart.' Chou Hsing was a member of his brigade's Party committee and had been sent to see about getting supplies to the ice-bound boats. It was decided that he and Uncle Yang should go out together to the fishing-boats.

"I was told it took them a whole day of struggling with the elements before they got the supplies to the fisherfolk, who were moved to tears at sight of Yang's clothes frozen solid and his hands red and swollen from the cold. It was after this incident that, at my own request, I left the store on an island to work on the water-borne store with Uncle Yang."

Chiang was quite carried away by his narrative but just at this point Yang himself returned.

"Let's get going now. A thunderstorm's in the offing."

"Thunderstorm?" I was incredulous. There before me was the tiny islet, bathed in sunshine, and round it the tranquil lake, undisturbed by a ripple.

"Yes. See that grey eagle swooping low over the lake? And the mist rising in the west? These are signs of an approaching storm." Uncle Yang was busy weighing anchor as he spoke.

"It'll be rough going at Rushing Water Shoal in a storm," said Chiang. "Are we still going to deliver the wires?"

"Of course. Team One of Lotus Brigade needs them urgently. We'll put on speed and cross the shoal before the storm breaks. Once we're in the lagoon, the storm won't be much of a menace."

Chiang was reassured. As he plied his oars, he whispered, "Trust Uncle Yang to be right. Everyone calls him a local meteorologist.

He often tells us: We must set our hearts on serving the people. But that's not enough. We must also have real skill so as to be able to serve the people well. He's put in so much time visiting veteran fishermen and summarizing their experience that now he knows every single nook and cranny round these parts as well as all the temperamental changes of the weather here."

We had by now approached Rushing Water Shoal which proved to be aptly named. A series of islets formed a narrow strait through which the current thundered. Yang and Chiang substituted bamboo poles for oars and punted the boat along against the current. I noticed that a dark cloud in the west was rapidly pressing down on us, but by the time thunder started rumbling, our boat had left the strait and entered a lagoon. Flashes of lightning streaked across the heavy black clouds overhead. Evidently the storm was imminent. I was filled with admiration for Uncle Yang's accuracy in forecasting the weather. Suddenly a loud clap of thunder brought on pouring rain and a gale whipped up giant waves in the peaceful lake. Our boat rocked as it rose first to a crest and then quickly dropped again into a deep trough of water. Uncle Yang, his hands firm on the tiller, remained unperturbed. His eyes intent on the waves, he seemed wholly unaware of the wind tearing at his clothes and the rain pelting down on his face.

Soon the storm subsided and the lake gradually returned to normal.

"Well, you weren't scared, were you?" Yang turned to ask me.

"I was just a little tense."

Uncle Yang smiled. "Storms and waves are paper tigers too. They look frightening, but once you know all about them you can easily conquer them."

"The storm's over now, Uncle Yang. You ought to stop and have a rest before we go on," I suggested.

Uncle Yang scanned the sky. "Better not. After we deliver those wires we've still got to go to several fishing grounds. We've got to snatch back the time lost in the storm."

As we went on, a fishing-boat darted towards us.

"That's Team Leader Liu from Lotus Brigade," said Chiang.

When I looked up I saw a man standing in the bow. "Here you are at last, Uncle Yang," he yelled, still some distance away. "We were quite frantic."

"Why worry? When I say I'll bring something today, I won't keep you waiting till tomorrow," Yang replied.

"I know you well enough to be worried. I was worried about you in this storm, that's why I came out to meet you."

"Pooh, what's there to worry about? As long as a man's determined and keeps a firm hold on the helm, he can withstand any storm however strong."

By then our boats were close enough for Liu to leap over. He came to grip Yang's hands with deep feeling in his eyes.

After giving Liu the wires, we hoisted sail, heading for the next point on our route. From afar came the lilting strains of a fisherman's song. A rainbow arched over the rain-washed lake. Our red flag fluttered gaily against the blue sky and green waters, making a picture too beautiful for words. I recalled my young boatman's description of the water-borne store earlier that morning. Indeed, as the craft sped through waves and storm, stopping by countless fishing-boats and islets to sell supplies, the store covered an area as wide as the lake itself. But keeping so close to the people, like a low-flying swallow in spring, the little boat touched the hearts of all the fisherfolk, bringing to them the concern of the Party and the keen support of devoted workers on the commercial front.

Illustrated by Chen Yen-ning

First Lesson in the Countryside

The sun had risen from the east; it was terribly hot. A blue bus on its way from Hsiaoshan to Lungkou stopped at Wuchiao and a girl jumped off it, a bundle in her arms. The conductor then handed down the rest of her luggage. This girl was about eighteen, with two short plaits which her swift movements kept bobbing up and down.

The Wuchiao bus-station was a small one where very few passengers got on or off the bus. A bulging string-bag in one hand, the girl paced up and down in front of it, looking eagerly around. Just then a middle-aged woman hurried towards her from the stone bridge over Dragon River. She was wearing a blue tunic and black trousers, while on her shoulder was a carrying-pole with a hempen rope coiled round it. As she approached, the girl walked up to her.

"Will you please tell me the way to Spring Breeze Valley, comrade?" she asked.

The woman halted and sized up the girl.

"You want to go there?"

"Yes."



"To visit relatives?"

"No. I'm a school-graduate going to settle down there," the girl answered clearly and crisply.

The woman, her face lighting up, dropped the carrying-pole to throw her arms round the girl. "So you're Comrade Hsiao Tung-mei! Sorry to have kept you waiting. On my way here I delivered some of our mountain products to the depot. That's why I'm late."

Tung-mei was puzzled. "You're..."

"I'm your future neighbour. Just call me Sister Hui-ching. All the poor and lower-middle peasants of Spring Breeze Brigade are looking forward to your coming just as if you were their own daughter. When we heard you'd be coming today, the old Party secretary

and all the rest sent me to meet you here."

Sister Hui-ching took the girl's luggage, divided it into two lots and tied one on each end of the carrying-pole. This she did so quickly and so competently that Tung-mei had no chance to lend a hand.

When the load was firmly secured, she draped her striped towel round her neck then grasped Tung-mei by the shoulders and shook her playfully.

"What a beautiful girl!" she exclaimed. "Pretty as a picture. The only thing is that you look a bit delicate."

Tung-mei's shoulders felt as if pinched by two pairs of pincers. "Don't shake me so hard, sister," she cried. "I'm not a street-vendor's rattle. You'll soon shake me to pieces!" Then she burst out laughing.

"What a sharp tongue you've got, lass," retorted Sister Hui-ching. "When we heard you'd be coming back to your native place to settle here, all of us, men and women, young and old, started counting the days on our fingers. The girls have hardly talked of anything else. They want to learn more general knowledge from you and carry out scientific experiments so as to transform these mountain regions of ours."

These words warmed Tung-mei's heart. She put in quickly: "You people expect too much of me, sister. There's nothing I can teach you. In fact I've come to learn from you in the big school of the countryside."

While she was still speaking, Sister Hui-ching snatched the string-bag from her and hung it on one end of the carrying-pole, saying: "We can talk to our heart's content when we get home, lass. Let's go now. The whole village is waiting for you."

Tung-mei stepped forward to pick up the carrying-pole, but the older woman beat her to it. Shouldering the carrying-pole she strode swiftly off.

2

After leaving Wuchiaio and crossing Dragon River, they took the road leading to Spring Breeze Valley.

Tung-mei was in high spirits. Spring Breeze Valley was her ancestral home, but she had never once been there. Born in the city, she had been living with her parents, two cadres working in the provincial capital. When she graduated from senior middle school she responded to Chairman Mao's great call: "**It is highly necessary for young people with education to go to the countryside to be re-educated by the poor and lower-middle peasants.**" She made up her mind to go and settle in her ancestral home. Her parents fully approved. Her reason for choosing Spring Breeze Valley was not

because her folk had come from there, but because the conditions in this mountain village were fairly hard and she knew the best way to be steeled was in arduous struggle. She wanted to do her bit to help build a new socialist countryside together with the poor and lower-middle peasants there. Now her wish had come true.

She had just set foot on the soil of the mountain area when Sister Hui-ching came to welcome her on behalf of the Spring Breeze Valley poor and lower-middle peasants. And already this peasant woman had made a deep impression on her. She had all the frankness, warmth and friendliness for which people living in the mountains were known.

Terraced fields rose on both sides of the road, the crops in them a lush green. Irrigation ditches interlaced the fields and through them clear water flowed, gurgling, to the sturdily growing crops. Tung-mei enjoyed the scenery as she walked. Putting on a spurt to catch up with Sister Hui-ching she cried:

“What good crops we’ve got this year up here in the mountains!”

Sister Hui-ching slowed down.

“Why, lass, that shows the advantages of the people’s commune,” she told her. “We haven’t had a drop of rain since March. If the commune hadn’t built a reservoir and irrigation canals, the crops would long ago have died of drought. You wouldn’t know by looking at them, would you, that we’ve had no rain for four months.”

Hearing this, Tung-mei looked round in amazement at the fields of green kaoliang on both sides of the road, which were growing so well that no one could believe they had lacked rain for four months.

As they climbed up a slope, they heard hammering in the distance. Tung-mei raised her head and saw some girls quarrying stones.

“What are they doing there, Sister Hui-ching?” she asked.

“Painting a picture,” Sister Hui-ching answered with a twinkle.

“Painting a picture?” Tung-mei echoed blankly.

Sister Hui-ching nodded, then added: “They’re painting the landscape of our socialist countryside.”

Then Tung-mei understood.

“Look at that big stone wall winding up the hill and down the gully, lass,” Sister Hui-ching continued. “It’s the March-the-Eighth Canal

which took our women masons three years to build. It’s led the water up to the hills and brought several hundred *mu* of our brigade’s land under irrigation. Building this canal was a tough job all right! In winter, their hands were all chapped and swollen; in spring, we had such bad sand-storms they could hardly open their eyes. But these girls of ours have grit. They put their shoulders to the wheel and worked wherever the conditions were hardest. It’s due to Chairman Mao’s wise leadership, lass, that our mountains have changed out of all recognition. And you’ve come at the right time. We are going to dam the Tzuho River and build a hydro-electric power station on it. A few more years and in these mountains of ours:

We won’t use oil for lamps,

Nor oxen to plough the land,

Won’t need to trudge to town,

And will have running water close at hand.

Ours will be a new socialist-style countryside.”

The more Tung-mei heard the more encouraged she felt. She seemed to see that beautiful scene before her eyes.

After crossing Peach-blossom Valley, they began to climb a winding mountain path. Tung-mei cast a glance at Sister Hui-ching and saw she was advancing as swiftly as ever. The load weighing about sixty catties on her shoulder seemed nothing to her. As for the girl herself, her legs were aching, her feet as heavy as lead. For this was the first time she had covered such a long distance through hilly country. But when she recalled the deeds of the women masons and looked at the people working hard on the hills, her spirits revived.

They walked on until they came to a place where the road was crossed by a stream of water. Sister Hui-ching halted with a cry of dismay which startled Tung-mei too. Sister Hui-ching put down her load and looked up to see where the water was coming from higher up the slope. Then she turned to Tung-mei.

“You wait here, lass. I’ll go up to have a look.”

With that she clambered as fast as she could up the slope.

From her anxiety, Tung-mei knew that there must be something wrong. So she took off and threw aside her finely woven straw hat,

and after dragging her luggage off the road chased after Sister Hui-ching.

The higher they climbed, the more water they found on the slope.

"What's happened!" Sister Hui-ching exclaimed anxiously. "The water is flooding everywhere. That's a waste not only of water but of electricity too."

Just then the wind, veering, carried to them the sound of a waterfall. Tung-mei looked up. From a leak in the canal clear water was cascading like a silver dragon down to the grey rock below, spray flying in all directions in the sunshine. At the foot of the rock were pools of eddying water, the foam on them like white clouds in a blue sky. Mushroom-like bubbles were spreading in all directions.

The sight of the flooded slopes fired Sister Hui-ching with anxiety. Snatching up a big stone, she dashed towards the leak, ignoring the jagged rocks under her feet.

Faced for the first time by a crisis like this, Tung-mei followed Sister Hui-ching's example. She hastened to help stop the leak with stones.

Time ticked by second by second. Sweat began to pour down from the faces of the woman and girl. But the stones they heaped in the breach were washed away like balls down the slope, and the earth Tung-mei shovelled on top with her hands disappeared instantly.

Sister Hui-ching was getting worked up. In a bad drought like this when the parched fields needed water, each drop was as precious as gold. Losing water from the canal meant reaping less grain!

Tung-mei was worrying too. All of a sudden, she saw Sister Hui-ching plunge into the canal to stop the breach with her body. She stood gaping, not knowing what to do.

"Plug the gap with stones, lass, quick!" shouted Sister Hui-ching.

Then, understanding, Tung-mei ran forward gasping:

"Come up, sister. I'll stop the breach!"

"Stones, quick!" Sister Hui-ching clung, motionless, over the hole.

Working like a house on fire, Tung-mei piled stones in the gap. Each stone she placed sounded to her like a battle drum; each wave pounding Sister Hui-ching seemed to pierce her own heart.

Just at this moment several commune members who were passing by came up to help. Soon the leak was stopped. Tung-mei quickly hauled Sister Hui-ching up.

But before Tung-mei could say a word, a man of about fifty walked up to them. His bronzed face was perspiring, his two big eyes were shining under bushy brows. Beads of sweat hung on his stubbly chin. As he clasped Sister Hui-ching's hands she looked up and recognized Uncle Wu, head of Laokuantun Production Brigade and a model forestry worker in their commune.

"Sister Hui-ching," he said, "in that year of serious drought you helped us build the canal, working hard day and night for over a month without coming to drink a drop of our village's water. Now you've risked your life to stop this breach in the canal. We don't know how to thank you for all your help. This time you must come to our village and have a rest there."

"Don't talk like that, uncle," Sister Hui-ching laughed. "You people have helped us too. When our Spring Breeze Brigade dammed the river to open up new fields on the river bed, your brigade members sweated away at it too."

"That was only right."

"So was the little thing Tung-mei and I did."

Suddenly, thunder rumbled in the distance. Sister Hui-ching raised her head and saw dark clouds rolling towards them like galloping horses from the northwest. It had grown so close, she could tell that a big storm was brewing. So she said:

"Uncle Wu, I came out today to meet Tung-mei who's to settle down in our village. After her long trip by bus and trekking over the hills she's quite tired out, so we must hurry back now."

When Uncle Wu and the others heard that the girl who had helped plug the leak was a school-graduate coming from the city to live in the countryside, such admiration shone in their eyes that she felt quite embarrassed. A smile on her face, she took Sister Hui-ching's arm and they hurried down the slope. When they reached the road, Sister Hui-ching stooped to pick up the carrying-pole, but Tung-mei had already snatched it up and put it on her own shoulder. Together then they headed for Spring Breeze Valley.

Soon they reached Lion Ridge. Tung-mei's heart was still in a turmoil. Looking at Sister Hui-ching's rolled-up trouser-legs, sopping wet, and thinking back to the stirring scene by the canal, she was more impressed than ever by this selfless, public-spirited peasant woman. Her own fatigue seemed to have flown and her footsteps were lighter as she sped down the slope.

Just then lightning flashed, followed by a crash of thunder from the other side of the mountain. The sky became as dark as an iron cauldron. It began to pour with rain.

The people who had come out to welcome Tung-mei stood in the rain at the entrance to Spring Breeze Village. Not one of them ran for shelter. When Tung-mei and Sister Hui-ching arrived they crowded round them. A plump girl took the carrying-pole from Tung-mei and draped a coir cape over her shoulders.

It was raining so heavily now that Sister Hui-ching urged the villagers to go home, then she and the plump girl took Tung-mei to her own house.

Once inside, Sister Hui-ching made haste to fetch a basin of water for her to wash her face.

"I'm not a guest, sister." Tung-mei smiled. "Don't treat me like an outsider. You wash first."

"Not a guest? You're a distinguished guest sent to us by Chairman Mao. I must treat you well."

As they talked and laughed, lightning flashed and thunder crashed outside the window. Sister Hui-ching turned to the plump girl and said: "You stay here to see to our guest, Swallow. I'm going out to have a look round." Putting a raincoat over her shoulders, she left.

Now that the two girls were alone in the room, Tung-mei had a chance to take a more careful look at her new home. Though not very big, the room was spick and span, its walls newly whitewashed. By the back wall facing the door was a varnished desk with two new thermos flasks and some other utensils on it. On the *kang* in the inner room was a thick layer of straw covered by a mat. A hoe, sickle,

shovel, pick and other small tools rested neatly against the wall. The sight of all these things warmed Tung-mei's heart. She was very touched by the great concern shown for her by the poor and lower-middle peasants.

Seeing the radiant look on her face, Swallow told her gaily: "When we learned you'd be coming to settle down in our village, everyone was so pleased, they all prepared rooms for you! I begged several times to have you live with me, but Sister Hui-ching outwitted all of us. She said her husband's in the army and she's all on her own just now, so she wanted you here to keep her company. That's how she 'bagged' you. Together with the other brigade cadres, she got this place ready for you long ago. When she heard you'd be coming today, she got up before dawn this morning to sweep the courtyard and tidy the whole place up as if she were preparing for a wedding! By the time I arrived here to help, she'd got everything ready."

A flash of lightning brightened the room. Looking at the dripping coir cape hanging behind the door, Tung-mei began to worry about Sister Hui-ching. Outside, the wind was blowing harder, the rain was pelting down. The water cascading off the eaves set the puddles on the ground swirling and bubbling.

"Where can she have gone in this downpour?" she asked Swallow anxiously.

"Who knows," Swallow answered. "When it rains, other folk run home but she runs outside to make sure no harm comes to the property of the collective."

"Let's go and look for her!" Tung-mei suggested.

"No need. Who knows where she's gone? Today, the Party secretary and the brigade leader have gone to a meeting at the commune. Sister Hui-ching's a member of our Party committee as well as head of our women's team. You can't keep her at home in a heavy rain like this."

But Tung-mei just couldn't sit there quietly. She couldn't take her mind off Sister Hui-ching. The meeting at the bus-stop, the plugging of the breach in the canal were fresh, vivid memories. And now in her mind's eye she seemed to see Sister Hui-ching fighting

bravely against the storm to protect the collective's property. She felt it was wrong for her to wait idly indoors. She ought to join Sister Hui-ching and battle together with her. This decision reached, she dashed out into the rain.

"Sister Tung-mei! . . ." Swallow cried. Having failed to stop her, she ran after her.

The wind and rain continued, interspersed by lightning and thunder. The two girls slogged their way through the pouring rain out of the village, but no Sister Hui-ching could they find. Where had she gone? They had no idea. Then, guessing that she must be where the danger was greatest, they headed for the reservoir east of the village.

After running some distance they saw people coming their way. No mistake, it was Sister Hui-ching with some men behind her. Her trouser-legs rolled up above her knees, she was covered by mud and water. When she saw the two girls she exclaimed:

"What are you doing here in this heavy rain?"

"Looking for you!" Tung-mei replied bluntly.

Sister Hui-ching laughed. "Looking for me? I'm big enough not to get lost." Then she turned to scold Swallow for not having kept her guest at home.

"I tried to stop her several times," Swallow retorted. "But she insisted on coming out. What could I do?"

"Well, no more arguing now." Sister Hui-ching smiled. "The reservoir's safe. Let's go back."

The rain subsided as they strode towards the village. When they reached the entrance to it they heard the clamour of voices from the creek.

"The piglets have been swept away. Go to the rescue, quick!" a loud voice shouted.

At once Sister Hui-ching turned to run towards the creek, followed by Tung-mei and Swallow. They found that the walls of a pigsty on the bank of the stream had collapsed in the pouring rain. Several piglets had fallen into the stream and were being swept away down to the Tzuho River. Some commune members struggling in the water were trying to fish them out. But two piglets had been carried out

of their reach. Tung-mei without any hesitation jumped into the water. The stream was deep. She soon found herself out of her depth. She swam as hard as she could after the piglets till the swirling current engulfed her. . . .

When Tung-mei came to, she was lying on the *kang* in her new home. She opened her eyes to see Sister Hui-ching, Swallow and a few elderly women sitting around her. She struggled to sit up.

"Sister Tung-mei's come to!" Swallow cried in delight.

"Don't sit up!" Sister Hui-ching made Tung-mei lie down again then asked: "How are you feeling?" She put one hand on her forehead. "Still a bit feverish. Just lie down and rest."

Swallow brought a bowl of ginger soup for her, and the women crowded around. When Tung-mei finished the soup Sister Hui-ching put a thin quilt over her.

"What a risk you ran, child!" she said fondly. "Not knowing how deep the water was, why did you jump in so rashly? If they hadn't rescued you in time, you'd have been swept away into the Tzuho River!"

Only then did Tung-mei remember what had happened. "What about the piglets?" she asked eagerly.

"They're all saved," Swallow told her.

A woman brought Tung-mei a bowl of poached eggs. "Eat it while it's hot, child," she urged. "You've only just arrived, yet you put the collective first. What a good lass you are!"

"Yes indeed," chimed in the others. "Her schooling hasn't been wasted."

Tung-mei's heart warmed to them. She sat up and said: "I only did what was right. But compared with you poor and lower-middle peasants, I've a long, long way to go. I must learn from you all."

Other women now brought in bowls of egg noodles they had prepared for her. Looking at the steaming, appetizing food, Tung-mei was too moved to speak.

It was late now and Sister Hui-ching made the others leave. After giving Tung-mei a pill to bring down her fever, Sister Hui-ching tucked the quilt round her and told her to have a good sleep, then left.

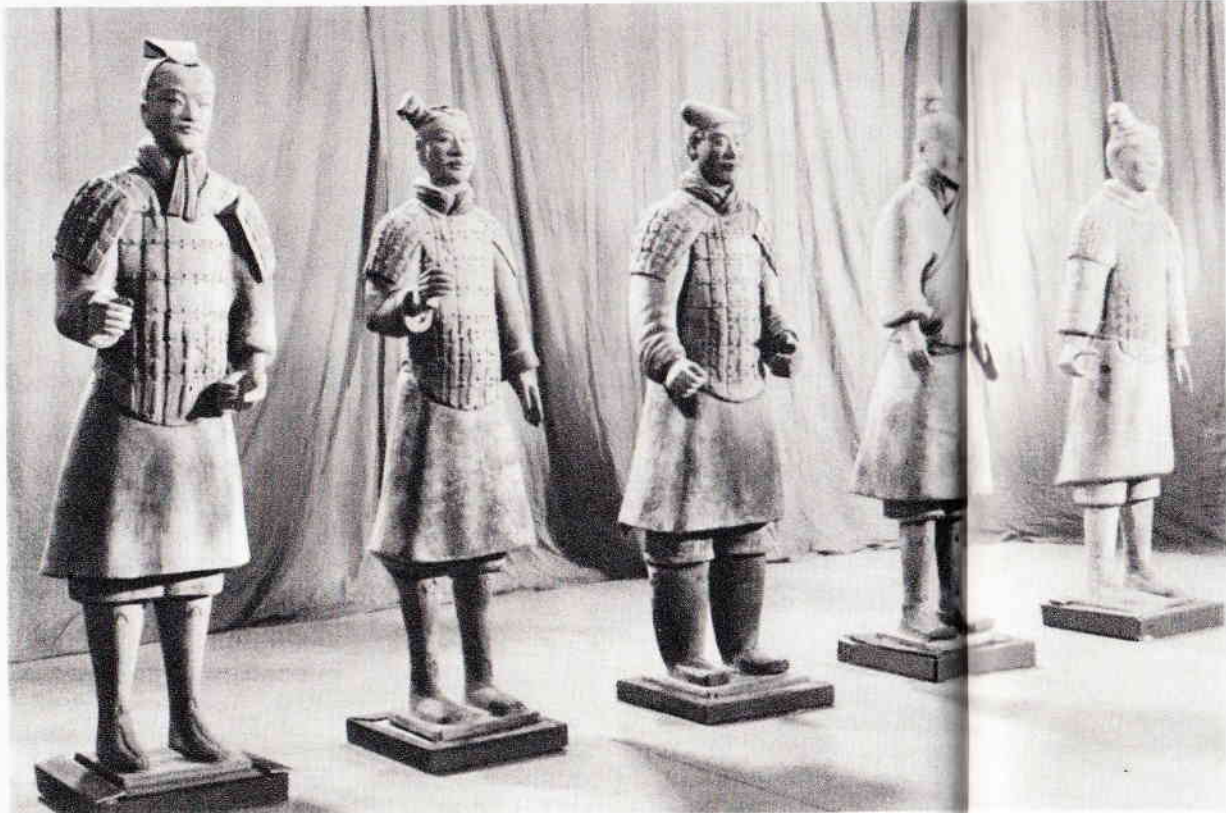
But Tung-mei couldn't sleep. The night wind, blowing softly through the window, filled the room with the fragrance of the hibiscus flowers in the courtyard. Today's my first day in the countryside, she thought, the start of my new life. But what a deep impression it's made on me! What a splendid start! In her excitement she quietly sat up and fished out her diary. She was going to record this first unforgettable day — her first lesson in the countryside.

Illustrated by Chao Chun-sheng

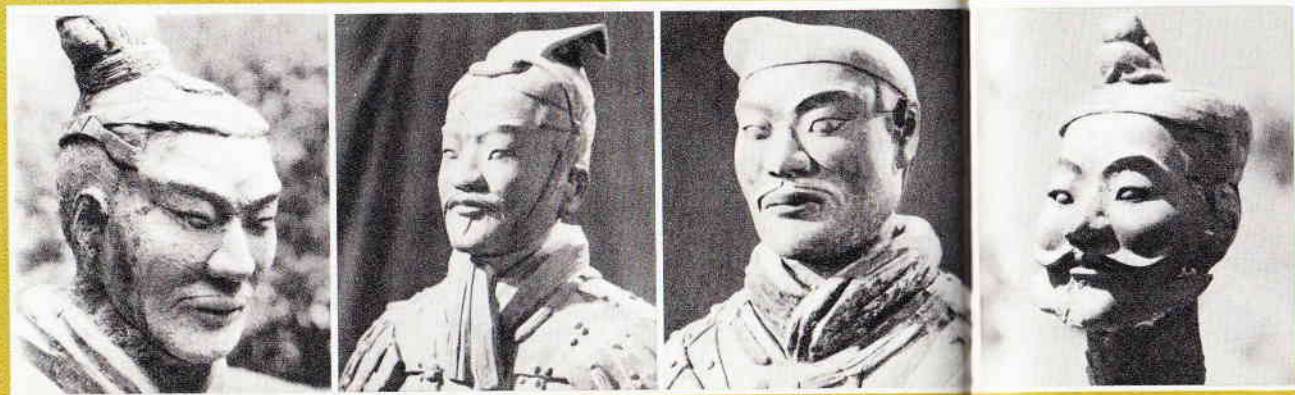


A warrior

Chin Dynasty Terracotta Figures



Warriors (restored)



Heads of warriors

1

2

4

Full-length figure of a warrior



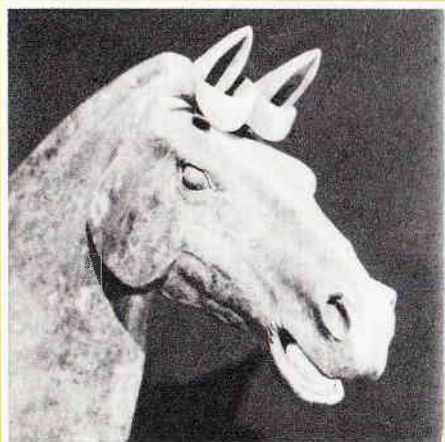
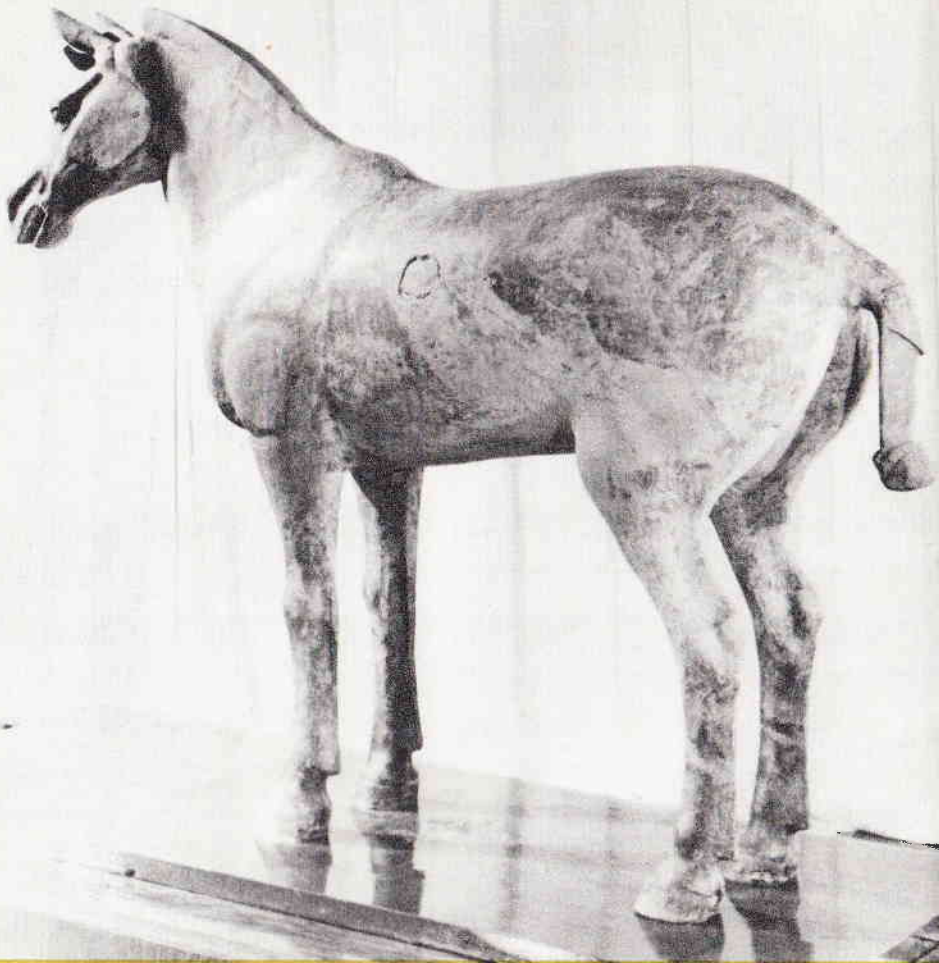
NOTES ON LITERATURE AND ART

Hsin Hua

Song-Writer of the Korean Nationality

Thirty-seven-year-old Kim Bong Hao of the Korean national minority used to play in the orchestra of Hualiong County's art troupe in the Yenpien Korean Autonomous *Chou* in Kirin. During the last sixteen years he has composed more than one hundred revolutionary songs many of which have become popular favourites, songs such as *The People of Yenpien Love Chairman Mao*, *A Red Sun Is Shining on the Border Region* and *I Ship Timber Downstream for the Revolution*.

Kim began to write songs in 1959 while living with the peasants of Songshen People's Commune on the banks of the River Tumen in Kirin. He was very impressed there by the heroism with which the commune members were transforming nature and battling with the elements, and by the many new folk-songs they made up in their spare time. He decided to set some of these songs to music. He tried his hand at this in the evenings after working with the peasants during the day, and this was how he composed his first song *The Poor and Lower-middle Peasants Have High Aspirations*, which was quickly taken up by commune members of the Korean nationality who are fond of singing and dancing.



Terracotta horse and
a detail of the head

Since then the life of the masses, so rich in content, has supplied him with inexhaustible raw materials for songs.

Shanghai Brigade in Hualiong County is situated in a mountain gully where formerly the ground was so stony that no crops could be grown there. During the movement to learn from Tachai, the local peasants of the Han and Korean nationalities worked together with crates on their backs or baskets suspended from shoulder-poles to carry away the stones and open up this wasteland. On the day when they dug up the last big rock and carried it to the brigade office, Kim Bong Hao heard an old Korean peasant propose:

"Let's cut these words on the stone: 'Self-reliance and Arduous Struggle' and set it up on the mountain to remind everyone here in future to advance along the road pointed out by Chairman Mao."

This proposal won general approval, and soon this rock was erected on the mountain. The incident made a deep impression on Kim.

On another occasion his art troupe performed the opera *Blood and Tears* for a different brigade in this county. Because it depicted the sorrows of the labouring people in the old society, the opera made a strong impact on the audience, many of whom broke down and wept as they recalled their own past sufferings. Even before the performance ended, peasants surged towards the stage crying, "Never forget class sufferings! Remember the past with all its blood and tears!"

The Party secretary shouted with deep feeling, "We must never forget Chairman Mao in our happiness. Never forget the Communist Party now that we've won liberation!"

That same night all the brigade members went into action. Men and women, old and young alike, they worked through the night on the threshing-floor to choose the best crops for the state, and by the next morning loaded carts set out to deliver the grain. With tears in his eyes, Kim joined the crowd beating drums and gongs to send off the grain to the state granary. This was such a stirring experience for him that when he lay in bed the next night the peasants' shouts still resounded in his ears, and the golden words inscribed on the rock appeared in his mind's eye.

While living with the peasants, Kim got to know the Yenpien district well and developed a deep affection for the people of various nationalities there. He witnessed many inspiring scenes and often heard the villagers express their love for Chairman Mao in simple, ingenuous terms. One Spring Festival his troupe went to another brigade where he and several of his colleagues gave a special performance in the house of a revolutionary martyr for an old man over sixty who was seated by a brazier, a relative of the martyr. Their singing made the old man exclaim with feeling:

"It was Chairman Mao who rescued me from a sea of grief. Now you come to perform for me. All my happiness comes from Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts!"

As the old man said this, he fetched some wine which he had been keeping for years and asked them to drink a toast to Chairman Mao's good health. This moving scene and these simple words spoken from the heart set Kim's own heart in a tumult. He thought then of his own childhood. Before Liberation while he was still a baby, his parents had been so oppressed by the local landlord that they had fled with him to Hualiong County, begging for food all the way; but as soon as they settled down in Hualiong, his father was conscripted by the Japanese aggressors to do hard labour, leaving mother and child to make shift by themselves. In 1945, Hualiong County was liberated and they began to know happiness. Kim, then eight years old, slung a satchel over his shoulder and went joyfully to school. In both primary and middle school he took an active part in the school choir, warmly singing the praises of the Party and Chairman Mao. In 1957 the Party sent him to work in an art troupe and he became a member of the orchestra. Recalling all these scenes from the past, Kim could not hold back his tears. Together with the other former poor and lower-middle peasants, he shouted the words which came from all their hearts, the most powerful voice of our age:

"Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts!"

Then in Kim's mind this phrase "the red sun in our hearts" began to take form as a theme for music; and after working on it for several months he produced the score for the song *The People of Yenpien Love*

Chairman Mao. This passionate melody expresses the local people's fervent feeling for our great leader:

The red sun in our hearts
Shines on our border region, turns all things red.

The song goes on to describe a splendid scene of jubilation:

The Changpai Mountains, range after range,
Re-echo with our songs;
On the banks of the River Hailan
Red flags flutter in the breeze.

Then the lilting, cheerful rhythm grows even more evocative with the lines:

A thousand rivers flow into the great ocean,
Ten thousand red blooms face the sun.

Many of Kim Bong Hao's songs were based like this on accumulated first-hand material from real life.

However, the way forward is never smooth or devoid of obstacles. After some of Kim's songs had become widely popular, some people encouraged him to seek personal position and fame. Influenced by such ideas, for a time he became less keen to go to the countryside and mountain districts to perform for and to learn from the labouring masses. He concentrated on studying music at home. And because he cut himself off from the fiery struggles of the masses, his compositions began to lose their revolutionary fervour.

1966 saw the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Together with the revolutionary masses Kim repudiated the revisionist line in literature and art and resolutely took the road of revolutionary writers and artists — that of integration with the workers, peasants and soldiers. The new socialist Yenchien became the school in which he studied by going whole-heartedly to live among the revolutionary masses and persisting in performing and composing music for them. In this way his political consciousness was heightened, and his musical compositions again had a firm ideological basis.

Kim's mother and his two younger brothers are forestry workers who tell him stirring stories about the lumbermen who ship timber downstream on rafts. He often goes to the forests himself and has

become deeply involved in the life and struggles of the workers there. First thing in the morning, when the sun dispels the mist over the River Tumen, the raftsmen's shanties can be heard in the distance and Kim has often watched them standing on their rafts and punting with poles through rapids and hidden reefs, braving the wind and the waves, to ship loads of timber to docks hundreds of miles away. He has sometimes worked on these rafts with the lumbermen, chanting:

Stand firm — hei-ho!
We'll win through — hei-ho!
The mountains advance in welcome,
We work for the revolution. . . .

He chose this as the theme for his song *I Ship Timber Downstream for the Revolution*, which expresses the lumbermen's heroic spirit as they propel their rafts onward guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line.

Kim in his music strives to voice the feelings of the revolutionary masses. He makes discriminating use of the best elements in traditional Korean tunes, choosing those which are exuberant, lively and healthy while rejecting pessimistic and sentimental melodies. Thus his songs breathe the spirit of our age and have strong national minority features. He has done good work in adapting a national minority art form to serve the socialist political content and in introducing innovations into the traditional Korean music.

Kim Bong Hao now holds a leading position in the Cultural Bureau of Kirin Province, but he still persists in taking part in the fiery struggles of the masses and is indefatigably composing new songs.

Terracotta Figures Found Near Chin Shih Huang's Tomb

Chin Shih Huang (259-210 B.C.), the founder of the Chin Dynasty, was an outstanding statesman representing the landlord class during the early feudal period in China. His huge burial mound more than forty metres high on the north side of Mount Li in present-day Ling-tung County, Shensi, has come down to us intact. During the summer of 1974, a vast underground vault filled with terracotta figures was discovered about two kilometres east of Chin Shih Huang's tomb, and many life-size figures of warriors and horses were excavated.

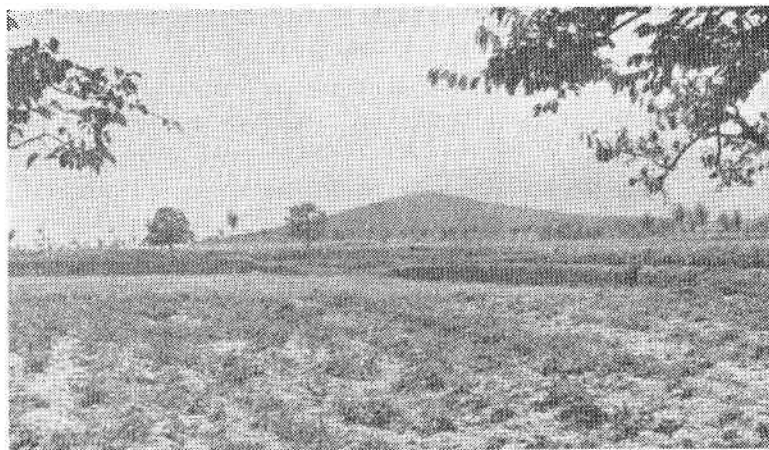
According to historical accounts, the construction of this tomb began soon after Chin Shih Huang ascended the throne and by the time of his death was more or less completed together with the funeral accessories. It follows from this that the figures of men and horses in this vault were probably made during the emperor's lifetime.

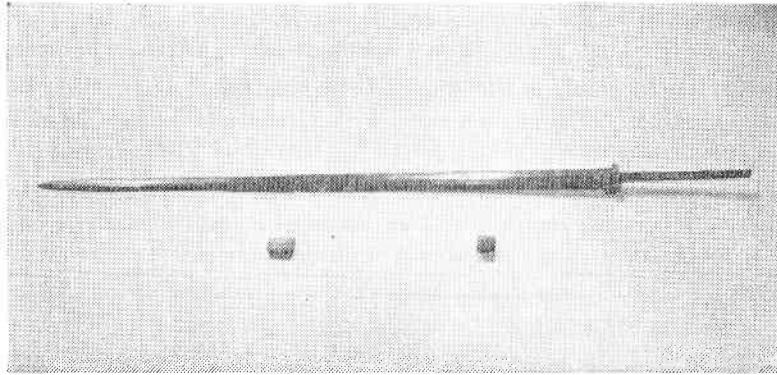
Preliminary investigations show that this underground vault built with earth and timber measures 210 metres from east to west, 60 metres from north to south, and 4.6 to 6.5 metres in height. Its total area is 12,600 square metres.

Starting from the east end archaeologists have so far excavated and cleared about 1,000 square metres and discovered five entrance ramps leading down to the vault. There they found 216 figures, all facing east, drawn up in three rows with 72 warriors in each. Behind these, deployed in smart order from east to west, were 40 lines of men and horses. Since only a section 16 metres long was excavated, no more than 314 warriors and 24 horses — a small fraction of the whole — have been unearthed; but from them we can see that these warriors and chariots drawn by horses were arranged in a regular, orderly battle formation.

These terracotta warriors, 1.78 to 1.82 metres in height, wear battle-dress, armour and helmets, and carry real bows and arrows or swords, lances, javelins and cross-bows. There are many swords, arrow-heads and cross-bow stocks made of bronze. The swords, made of some special alloy, are sharp and stainless. The terracotta horses are also life-size. Each chariot is drawn by a team of four. Judging by the excavation already completed, the total number of warriors in this vault must come to about six thousand. This orderly proud array of men and horses evokes the magnificent battles in which Chin Shih Huang routed the forces of the moribund slave-owning princes throughout the country and brought about the unification of China.

Chin Shih Huang's tomb





A Chin-dynasty sword

It gives us a true picture of the First Emperor's Legalist line, in accordance with which he abolished the old ducal states of slave society and established the new provincial system with centralized authority and with the emperor himself in supreme command of the army.

These terracotta figures of men and horses also show the new height attained by sculptural art during the reign of the First Emperor.

Previously, in the Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States Periods (770-221 B.C.), the disintegration of slave society and gradual emergence of the new feudal system caused a significant change in burial customs: figurines were used in place of the human victims who had been buried with the dead. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) tried stubbornly to preserve the old slave system. He cursed, "May he who first invented funeral figurines have no descendants!" However, the substitution of terracotta or wooden figurines for the human beings interred with dead slave-owners was an irresistible historical trend. And this trend helped the development of sculptural art in ancient China. Towards the end of the Warring States Period it was recorded that as many as hundreds and thousands of figurines were used during burials. Obviously, the production of such figurines was carried out on a large scale. But judging by archaeological finds, the figurines made of terracotta, wood, lead or bronze during the Warring States Period were all small ones, and their features were roughly delineated in a simple style.

Chin Shih Huang supported the Legalist school and put its line into practice. Like the early Legalists, he believed that art should serve a useful purpose and opposed all that was bizarre and meaningless. Thus sculpture too had to serve his political line with its emphasis on the present and encouragement of new developments; and this gave a great impetus to the improvement of the art during the Chin Dynasty. We can see that these lifelike Chin figures so full of vitality are quite different from the decadent art of the moribund slave-owning class. Grim, monstrous and fearsome features such as the *tao-tieh* (monster-mask) designs on ancient bronze vessels were all done away with, and sculpture was brought back from the realm of the supernatural and grotesque to real society. A significant feature of Chin Dynasty sculpture is that it usually reflected struggles in real life, and most of the large statues showed the distinctive features of different types of men. This was a new departure in the art. According to ancient records, after Chin Shih Huang unified China he had twelve huge bronze statues made, each fifty feet high with feet six feet long, weighing over a hundred tons. These giant statues were erected before the palace at Hsienyang to commemorate his historical achievement in uniting all China under feudal rule, and they testified to the high level of skill attained in the sculptural art and bronze casting techniques.

These terracotta figures of warriors and horses, simply executed but highly realistic and full of vitality, are material evidence of the admirable quality of Chin sculptural art. The warriors are well modelled with accurate proportions, their heads being approximately one-seventh of the length of the whole bodies. The heads and hands were modelled separately and then joined to the bodies. The successful delineation of the features shows craftsmanship of a high order. The several hundred figures excavated reveal a remarkable range of different features and expressions. All alike look powerful and resolute, but they vary in age, social status and individual traits. Some, for instance, have knitted brows and lips firmly compressed like veteran fighters with rich experience and wisdom; others with arched eyebrows and a fiery gaze seem bold, impetuous youths; some have sternly set jaws conveying their determination; others have the curled



Unearthed figures

moustaches and cheerful air of high-spirited optimists. The sculptors by portraying their diverse features have shown us the militant spirit of the Chin warriors who were guided by Chin Shih Huang's Legalist line for reform and national unity. These warriors have different hair styles too, and their armour, belts, leggings and boots are modelled so carefully that they seem real. The terracotta horses have pointed ears slanting forward and curly manes; they are looking intently ahead, their tails knotted to enable them to gallop freely. They convey the concentration and alertness characteristic of chargers trained for battle. All these features, both in conception and execution, are consis-

tent with the intrepid confidence of the newly emerging feudal ruling class during a revolutionary period.

These outstanding works of art are the crystallization of the ancient Chinese craftsmen's wisdom and hard work. Some of the warrior figures are stamped with the names of the craftsmen, and certain of these names also appear on tiles, bricks and other building material previously excavated near Chin Shih Huang's tomb. This shows that the sculptors of these figures were also builders, producers of material wealth as well as artists. The creative talent and sculptural skill with which they produced such fine figures has added a glorious page to the history of ancient China's sculptural art and contributed more art treasures to the world.

CHRONICLE

Korean Pyongyang Acrobatic Troupe in Peking

The Korean Pyongyang Acrobatic Troupe recently put on performances in Peking, many of their items showing the Korean people's courage, resourcefulness and talent.

In *Spring-board*, an act based on the seesaw, seven men and women



Tight-rope act

acrobats in brightly coloured national costumes displayed outstanding agility and grace as they performed, switching partners, skipping with hoops and turning back-somersaults in the air.

In *Tight-rope Walking*, the acrobat turned back-somersaults and performed other highly difficult feats on a rope suspended more than four metres above ground.

Double-deck Trapeze, in which two acrobats tumbled and twisted in the air, drew bursts of warm applause and favourable comments from the audience.

Australian Landscape Painting Exhibition in Peking

An Australian landscape painting exhibition opened in Peking in September.

On display were 85 oil and water-colour paintings by Australian painters of the 19th and 20th centuries. These paintings of magnificent scenery also presented scenes from the life of the hard-working Australian people, and showed the development over the years of Australian landscape painting.

Exhibition of Clay Sculpture "The Wrath of the Serfs" in Lhasa

In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, a group of clay sculptures *The Wrath of the Serfs* has been displayed in Lhasa, capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

It consists of 106 life-size human figures, 6 animal figures and 4 backgrounds in relief. The exhibition is divided into 4 parts — the Feudal Manor, the Lamasery, the "Kasha" (former local government office) and the Serfs' Struggle for Liberation. Together they expose and denounce the iniquities of the old feudal serf system in Tibet, and praise the serfs' fighting spirit. The whole exhibition exemplifies the truth that history is created by slaves. Through the delineation

of a wide range of characters the artists portray the heroic serfs struggling against their reactionary rulers. The sculptures made a strong emotional impact on all who saw them.

The Wrath of the Serfs was jointly produced after more than a year's hard work by a sculpture group of the Fine Arts Institute of the Central "May Seventh" Art University and teachers from the Shenyang Fine Arts Institute who visited Tibet, as well as art workers from the Tibet Revolutionary Museum.

Mass Cultural Activities in Huimin Prefecture, Shantung

In recent years, the broad masses in Huimin Prefecture, Shantung Province have done a great deal of literary and art work which reflects our socialist revolution and socialist construction, thus effectively occupying the ideological and cultural front in urban and rural areas.

Huimin Prefecture, situated by the lower reaches of the Yellow River near Pohai Bay, consists of twelve counties. Before Liberation, the labouring people there lived too hard a life to give any time to art and literature. Before the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, owing to the revisionist line in the cultural field, mass literary and art activities were discouraged and their development was hampered. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution the people and cadres in this district criticized the counter-revolutionary revisionist line. They organized and trained a contingent of literary and art workers, so that socialist literature and art began to flourish. Now many communes, production brigades, factories and schools have set up spare-time groups of writers and artists, most of whom are workers and peasants. Since 1973, the whole district has already produced 55 plays, more than 180 short stories, more than 300 revolutionary tales, more than 2,000 poems, over 180 new songs, more than 200 ballads, 12 serial-picture books and more than 300 art works.

Innovations in Handicrafts in Liaoning

Recently an exhibition of the arts and crafts of Liaoning Province displayed over three thousand exhibits including shell paintings, feather paintings, carvings, sculptures and handicrafts for daily use. These colourfully reflected the new spirit since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and presented heroic images of workers, peasants and soldiers. The exhibits were rich in variety, original in conception and fully imbued with the spirit of our age.

Innovations had been introduced in the traditional handicrafts on display according to the policy of weeding through the old to bring forth the new.

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