

CHINESE LITERATURE

756

1979 5



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Kong Jiasheng

My Marriage

During the Spring Festival this year, I was married to Wu Guoliang, a returned overseas Chinese. According to the old saying, the course of true love never did run smooth, and how true that was for us!

From an Exchange of Blows, Friendship Grows

Two years before the downfall of the “gang of four” I was an assistant team leader of a workshop in the Xinghua Padlock Plant, as well as the secretary of the Youth League branch under the direct leadership of a deputy Party secretary. When I reflect on the past, I can see I was rather confused over some issues.

Wu Guoliang didn't have a good reputation then, and all I knew about him was that he was the standards inspector, a post not liable to endear him to others. That didn't bother me, because I never worried about giving offence. What really got me was

that he was an overseas Chinese. How shall I explain? Then, many people felt that those who'd been abroad were either rich or had complicated social backgrounds, and one was as bad as the other.

One day we went to get some steel wire from the storehouse. As the original supply had been used up, we were given a substitute. After trying it on the machines, we found it difficult to meet the requirements of the blueprint, even though we adjusted our machines and, dripping with perspiration, tried again and again. The result was no better than rejects. Some team members suggested we ask Wu Guoliang for help, and all agreed that I should go.

"Of course Zhen should go," declared Ou. "She's the assistant team leader."

"Well, you're the leader, so why not you?" I countered.

"Young men are always more susceptible to the charms of young girls!"

That Ou! I believed she would have choked if she couldn't have cracked her jokes. All right, so I would go then. What rotten luck! We'd never had to bother that Wu before because our work had always been first-rate.

As I entered his office with the blueprint and the rejects, I saw Wu reading some technical material about the world-famous Yale lock. I felt sick at the sight of him absorbed in the foreign material, so engrossed that he failed to notice me. I needed his help so I tried to be patient. In a restrained tone, I greeted him: "Hello, inspector."

Raising his head he saw me standing before his desk. Immediately he offered me a seat and poured out a cup of tea. "Have a seat and some tea, Liang . . . er . . . Liang . . ."

"Liang Xiaozhen," I introduced myself.

"Excuse me, I couldn't remember your name just now," he apologized and stretched out his hand to shake mine.

Forget it, I thought to myself. You never even knew my name. Why try to flatter me? What was the idea? As we worked in the same plant, even if we didn't know each other, we'd met on occasions. So why pretend? What a prig! However, I held out

my hand, which was rather dirty and grasped his. He just smiled. Placing the things on his desk, I said: "I've come to ask your advice about this blueprint."

"Some difficulty?" he asked.

"Yes, a bit. The standard is too high and we can't reach it."

"But it's always been this."

"Yes, but now the wire's used up."

"Then go to the storehouse and get some more."

"No need to offer that advice. There's none left."

"Then report to the supply section."

"What's the use of reporting?" I was fed up with his official tone. "The railways aren't functioning properly, and we just can't get the supplies we want."

"So what do you suggest?"

"Suggest? Lower



the standard and then we can meet it.”

“Out of the question!”

His tone enraged me. “Why not?” I shouted. “You think you’re the only technical expert here?”

“No, but I’m responsible for the quality of our products.”

“Really? We’ve been carrying on the Cultural Revolution now for some years, and you still dare to preach about specialists running the factories? Who’ll be responsible if we produce rejects?”

“According to our regulations, the team leader is responsible if you carry on production after I’ve queried the standards.”

“Whose regulations? They should have been smashed long ago!”

“Then we’d just have to put everything in order again.”

How reasonable he sounded! I was furious. Now I saw what Ou meant about young men and young girls.

“We’ll try to make some adjustments,” he said calmly. “What type of material are you using now?”

“Easier said than done. See for yourself!” So saying I turned on my heel and flounced out.

He followed me to the workshop. Working busily on the lathe, he was soon covered in grease. After some hours he had solved the problem. I poured out some tea and handed him a towel to wipe his face. Ou smiled with amusement. She was over-sensitive. Shouldn’t I even thank him?

From then on I greeted him whenever we met or when he came after work to help us with some adjustment. Sometimes I’d go to his office to ask questions. He was always willing to help, but always very formal and shy.

The Trick

One day after work, Ou handed me a theatre ticket and said: “Hi, Zhen! My sister wants to invite you to an opera at the People’s Theatre this evening. Wear your pretty skirt instead of your trousers.” Her third sister was my old classmate.

I didn’t mind about the theatre invitation, but why insist on

my wearing a skirt? However, I did as she asked. I arrived there early, so I kept glancing at the entrance from my seat. Presently I saw Wu Guoliang enter, smartly dressed and carrying a bunch of fresh orchids. So, he’d invited his girl friend here? He looked quite a sight with the flowers. Frowning I turned my head. After a moment, to my surprise, he walked over to me. As I looked up he recognized me. Amazed, I said: “Hello, inspector, so you’ve come to watch the opera too?” Embarrassed by the sidelong glances of those around us, I wished I could have escaped.

Meanwhile he checked his seat number and then puzzled looked around, declaring with a blush: “Well, here’s my seat. . . . I see you . . . you got here early!”

Obviously he was just searching around for something to say. How silly!

“Then sit down,” I said. “Don’t just stand there like that. Who’ll join you?”

“A friend.”

“A girl friend?” I asked as casually as I could.

“No, I don’t have any girl friends. Ou’s nephew invited me here and asked me to bring some flowers for him.”

We sat side by side in embarrassment, both keeping an eye out for our companions. I began to realize that there was something fishy going on. When all the seats beside us had been occupied, I saw the light. How Ou liked to tease! I decided to make my getaway as soon as the gongs and drums beat for the start of the opera. Then I changed my mind. So what if we watched it together? I remained in my seat. Still, I felt rather conspicuous in my pretty skirt beside this young man with his bunch of flowers. I was in no mood to relax and enjoy the performance.

Finally he gave up peering around and, though discomfited, he began to talk politely with me. Shy as he was, he was a witty talker.

“How many times have you seen this opera?” I asked.

“About six times in its various forms of local opera. The same thing over and over again. If there was more variety I might



appreciate it, but it's been glorified and shown ad nauseam. So I'm afraid. . . ."

In fact I was fed up with it too, and so I interrupted impulsively: "Shall we leave?"

He stood up immediately, and then I realized what I'd said. My heart beat fast, and I was glad it was dark so that no one could see my red face.

Outside the theatre, we paused. Hesitantly he asked: "May I see you home?" I agreed.

We talked as we strolled along the river bank. He told me he'd come back from Indonesia for further study when he was fourteen and had later graduated from a light industry technical school. His father was a clerk in an overseas Chinese company and often travelled on business. As a boy, Guoliang had accompanied his father to various countries in southeast Asia, Europe and America. He described the beauties of the Philippines, the splendour of Versailles, even Shakespeare's birthplace in England. Shakespeare! I'd heard his name when I was at primary school, but I'd never got the chance to read one of his plays unfortunately. For years, since the Cultural Revolution began, we hadn't been able to lay our hands on any foreign books. So he told me the story of *The Merchant of Venice*. By the time he had finished his stories, hardly anyone was out and about.

"How much farther is it to your home?" he asked.

"Silly! We passed it ages ago."

The moonlight was soft and the scent of his orchids was sweet. Finally . . . he gave me the flowers.

"Red" and "White"

Shortly after that, news of our going around together spread throughout the plant. They said Ou had played a joke but the trick had become reality. Some girls praised Guoliang saying: "He's a good person, kind and handsome." Others commented: "Huh! Why does the secretary of the Youth League branch go out with such a man? I don't want to eat their wedding cake.

They'll bust up later." There was nothing I could do. Let them gossip!

Later I learned that Guoliang had been an excellent student both in his studies and behaviour at school. A youth magazine once published a short article about him. As for his attitude to his work, well, I'd seen that for myself. He was very strict in guaranteeing high quality. Whenever the units produced rejects, he'd talk to them about the lack of Chinese products in foreign shops. People said that Chinese goods weren't of a high enough quality to compete with those abroad. He argued that as representatives of the Chinese working class we should be able to catch up with and surpass the advanced levels in other countries. People's reactions differed. Unconvinced, some argued: "We're not capitalists. To hell with free competition!" Guoliang never got angry with them, but patiently continued trying to persuade them.

However, after some time, I didn't have quite the same impression of him as before. Gradually I spotted his faults. He was too "white". By that I don't mean he had a fair complexion, though in fact he was rather more of a pale scholar than a tanned labour hero as pictured in the books. No, what I meant was his political colour.

For example, during the Cultural Revolution, he buried himself in his room studying *The Construction of the Padlock*. No one knew to which faction he belonged. Even I didn't know. When I asked he replied: "I don't agree with factions."

"Then what do you agree with?" I queried.

"With those who sincerely try to build socialism!"

Moreover, when we were studying the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he shocked me by condemning some important articles in the press,* saying they were an extremely crooked theory.

I was enraged: "You dare to say that! You, a bourgeois specialist! Go and stick your head back in your books!"

Of course Ou soon knew about our tiff. One day after work

* Here the writer is referring to the anti-Marxist articles written by the "gang of four" and their followers in 1975.

I was washing my hands when Old Bao came over to me smiling. He was Ou's husband, one of the Party branch deputy secretaries. He was a very good man, upright and honest. Everyone nicknamed him "Bao, the just official".*

"You've a date this evening, haven't you? I saw Guoliang waiting at the gate for you," he said.

"Then let him wait!"

"Why so angry? Isn't he your boy friend?"

"He's politically muddled."

"Well, I wouldn't say that. He was so patriotic that he came back here to be educated under the leadership of the Party. Would you call that 'red' or 'white'?"

"Er . . . pink at most!"

Bao laughed and then continued: "Guoliang often comes to my home. Why don't you come too? We can have a good chat. You know, he's not as muddled as you think. He's got some good opinions. Of course, he's still young and lacks experience in struggle, so he has some shortcomings. But these can be sorted out with a bit of effort."

I was still angry with Guoliang over some points, but Bao's remarks pleased me. I said nothing more. To be frank, I was worried in case Guoliang got anxious waiting for me at the gate. That evening he was going to help me with my technical studies.

The Rotten Official

In the summer of 1976, my application for Party membership was finally approved. I was sponsored by the deputy secretary of the Party branch in charge of political work in the plant. He was nicknamed "Guo Yuzhi", who was a bad official in an old opera. I hadn't seen it, but this man was too much!

Once, when I submitted the list of names of those who wished to be admitted into the Youth League, he picked up a red pencil

* Bao Cheng (999-1062) was an honest official in the Song Dynasty. In defiance of powerful officials and others, he conscientiously applied the law and was renowned for his fair handling of cases and righting injustices.

and started crossing out or ticking off the names. By the end, not many were left on the list. "This one's grandfather was a Rightist," he murmured as he scored out the name. "You should be more careful!"

"But he died long ago," I interjected.

"His ghost still hovers around." Then he struck off some more names of those whose families were supposed to be "capitalist-roaders", and one with an aunt living abroad. How rotten can you get?

I felt rather ashamed that such a man was my sponsor. If only he had been Bao! Still it didn't matter. The main thing was whether or not I was suitable. My sponsor wasn't so important I thought.

When I broke the good news to Guoliang, I thought he'd be delighted and congratulate me. To my amazement after a long silence he said: "Don't you think you've joined the Party too early?"

"What do you mean? I'm already twenty-six. Liu Hulan..."*

"Liu Hulan was admitted to the Party not because she was fifteen, but because she met their..."

"Oh forget it! Other Party members said I have a strong fighting will and that I hate evil..."

"But first you must distinguish good from bad. You can't fight indiscriminately."

"That's enough! I can see you're not happy about it. Who wants to be like you? You're a bourgeois specialist, willing to be a democrat all your life."

"I was a Youth League member at middle school and then I was a section leader..."

"Oh, drop it! You're almost thirty and you've been out of the League for a long time. How you can have the nerve to mention it?"

"O.K. I'll shut up, but I just want to give you one piece of advice first. The present political situation is very complicated.

* A Chinese heroine who was executed by the Guomindang reactionaries in 1947 at the early age of sixteen. For her epitaph, Chairman Mao wrote: "A great life! A glorious death!"

You should always use your brains and consider everything very carefully. You should learn to judge right from wrong, and then stick by that."

Who did he think he was, giving me a lesson on politics? After that we didn't speak to each other for a while.

Yet who would have known that after joining the Party, my personal affairs would become more complicated. One day, as I began work, Guo Yuzhi sent for me.

With a serious face he started: "Liang Xiaozhen, according to the report, you are in love with Wu Guoliang. Is that so?"

What a bureaucrat! We'd been in love for over a year.

When I nodded, he continued: "Now that you are a Party member, you should make a clean breast to the Party according to the Party spirit."

"What should I say?" I wondered.

"Something about Wu Guoliang's father being in the pay of a big capitalist, that he's a lackey of the bourgeoisie. If that isn't a mortal enemy of the working class, who is?"

So that was his ideology! As I didn't know much about Guoliang's father I said: "But he is very patriotic and progressive. He was chairman of the Overseas Chinese Society over there. During the war they donated money and shipped medicine to help the guerrillas in south China fight against the Japanese invaders."

"Capitalists only care about profit. Nothing else."

"His father used to be a committee member of the provincial People's Political Consultative Conference."

"That conference! It was condemned long ago. You'd better pay attention to what you're saying and consider your political stand before you speak."

I was speechless. He thumbed through a small blue-covered notebook, which as far as I could see was for noting some people's words and actions. Then he said: "Now let's talk about Wu Guoliang. He too has some problems. He refused to write articles criticizing Deng Xiaoping, saying since he was a target of criticism himself, how could he criticize others. What rubbish!"

Wasn't he very energetic in repudiating Lin Biao? If that isn't a trick, what is?"

I was silent, feeling very confused, while he continued: "Those who've returned from abroad have their minds stuffed with filth. It's infectious. Look at you! Once you used to dress simply, but now you go about in a skirt. How disgraceful! If that isn't corruption, what is?"

"But he's never said anything about my clothes!" I felt very wronged.

"According to the report, you told your team something about a foreign play. It was called the merchant of something. Is that true?"

"Yes. It's called *The Merchant of Venice*, written by Shakespeare. Guoliang said that Marx liked it very much."

"What rot! He sounds like a political swindler! I must note that." After scribbling something in the book, he added: "Mind you, with Guoliang's complicated family relations, he's bound to be a target in a political campaign. As a deputy Party secretary and sponsor of your application, I must maintain purity within our ranks. You must take a stand."

"... Let me think it over." I was practically in tears.

At that moment Bao entered. Wiping some grease from his hands with a cloth, he asked casually: "What were you two talking about? Youth League work?"

"No," Guo Yuzhi replied. "As she's a new member I'm telling her about our Party organization." Grimacing, he said to me: "You young people shouldn't be swept away by love. You could make a big mistake and affect your whole life. Love and marriage are political acts. Didn't Engels say that?" he asked Bao dubiously.

Frowning slightly, Bao said: "Well, preventing two young people from being in love and marrying is also a political act."

"I'm only implementing the rules from a higher authority," he countered.

I hadn't read these rules, as they were confidential. I only knew that some such rules had been issued in the days before the downfall of Lin Biao.

"But that document wasn't issued by the Party Central Com-

mittee," Bao argued. "It goes against the Party's policy concerning overseas Chinese."

Frowning Guo Yuzhi asked: "Do you think our Party has formulated two contradictory policies?"

"No, the policy is unchanging. However, there are always struggles between the two lines within the Party."

This was really a verbal clash! It was rumoured the two deputy secretaries had differences of opinion over certain people and policies. I thought I should leave, but as it happened, Guo Yuzhi said to me: "You can go now."

Relieved to be let off, I left the room. But my mind was far from easy. I felt as if a heavy weight was pressing down on me.

Before the Storm

That afternoon was political study for the cadres and administrative personnel. As the Youth League branch secretary, I had to attend also.

The weather was sultry, building up for a storm. Unfortunately, Guoliang sat beside me. What could I do? Drive him away? Under the grim looks of Guo Yuzhi, I felt more uneasy than when I'd been waiting in the theatre for my supposed classmate.

As always, Guo Yuzhi presided over the study. Bao suggested that first we should discuss why the quality of our products had gone downhill. Guoliang took the floor. He said: "There are many reasons, but the main one is that self-inspection and mutual-inspection have slackened. We can't label everything as a restriction and recklessly remove all reasonable rules and regulations. Some years ago the high quality of our products was renowned abroad. But now..."

"Just a moment," Guo Yuzhi cut in maliciously, "what do you mean about now?"

Having always detested Guo Yuzhi, Guoliang replied: "I mean that now the quality goes down and the masses complain that our goods aren't like before."

"So you're denouncing the present and praising the past." Guo Yuzhi liked to put labels on people. "You're denying the achievements of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution!" This remark sealed everyone's mouth.

Then political study began, with Guo Yuzhi reading a long article repudiating "bourgeois rights".

It was so muggy that everyone felt sleepy. I nearly dozed off and felt ashamed. How could a new Party member doze off during political study? In order to wake up a bit, I whispered to Guoliang: "Did you hear that? Money is also a remnant of the old society and must be replaced by labour coupons."

He answered that the labour coupon was something first thought of by a European utopian socialist. At best it was something only to be realized in the future. Today our society was still in its socialist development stage. Whoever wanted to jump a stage and have communist phenomena in our present society was open to doubt. He continued: "Let me give you an example. In a communist society we won't need padlocks, but if we stopped their production now, only thieves would be delighted."

His explanation sounded reasonable enough, but I wasn't totally convinced. I asked why if we felt some things to be correct they weren't implemented immediately. Instead we emphasized transition. With all these "transitions" how could we ever achieve communism? I was very concerned about that.

He whispered: "I'll tell you a joke. Once upon a time there was an old teacher, who recited a poem off the cuff with deep emotion when he saw snow falling outside his room. His poem went like this. 'It snows instead of rains. Melting snow becomes rain. Better to rain from the first!' Then a pupil rose and said: 'Teacher eats food instead of shit. Food in your stomach becomes shit. Better to eat shit from the first!'"

I laughed before I could stop myself. Guo Yuzhi was shocked. The dozers awoke with a start, staring at me puzzled.

Smiling, Bao asked: "What was so funny? Let's all hear the joke. It's so hot and sticky, and we're all feeling sleepy. A bit of laughter may wake us up."

Guoliang, like a fool, then told the joke to everyone. There

was an uproar of laughter. Some knocked over their mugs, while others held their sides.

Only Guo Yuzhi remained silent, his face stern. His look gave me the shivers. The moment the laughter had subsided, he began: "I don't think you finished your story. What happened to the boy?"

Without hesitation, Guoliang replied: "I don't know what happened to him, but I know that old teacher made a bad reputation for himself and was sent packing!"

That provoked another fit of laughter. Guo Yuzhi's face grew darker. I was aware that the storm was imminent. As I thought, after the study, he called me and said he wanted to have a word with me in the political department's office.

The Storm

That evening it was stiflingly close. The air felt solid. A dim ring of light around the moon presaged the advent of a violent storm.

Guoliang and I were walking along the long embankment. I was feeling very disturbed, and tears filled my eyes. How could I tell him about Guo Yuzhi's words?

"Why don't you speak, Zhen?" he began. "Don't be sad. I'll tell you a joke."

What an occasion for joking! "No, no, please don't!" I stopped him hastily, fearing he'd start.

"What's the matter?"

I controlled my tears. Steeling myself, I asked: "Will you break with your family, Guoliang?"

"What do you mean?" He was taken aback.

"I'm a worker's daughter and a Party member. Your father's a capitalist lackey," I stammered. "It's a question of class stand."

"How can you say such things?" He stared at me with wide eyes. "Your father also worked for the capitalists in the old society. Do we call him a lackey? My father is also oppressed and exploited..."

"Let's leave it. Anyway he's not the same as the workers. What's more you said he was a public figure."

"Yes, he takes part in progressive and patriotic activities."

"That's difficult to clarify with such a complicated situation abroad."

"And if my father is an ordinary overseas Chinese working for a capitalist, what then? The majority of overseas Chinese capitalists are patriotic. We should follow the Party's policy concerning overseas Chinese. . . ."

"That's not the point. My situation is different from yours. I have to . . . make a clear distinction between. . . ."

After a painful silence, he asked uneasily: "Is this what Guo Yuzhi said to you?"

Nodding unhappily, I added: "He said there are rules about such things and all Party members must be obedient to the Party."

After another silence he said: "You joined the Party too soon."

Shocked, I retorted emotionally: "Why say that again? I can't change my mind because of. . . ."

"I don't mean that. Just that a young Party member like you can't be compared with Old Bao. You're a far cry from him."

This made me harden myself. "Please don't be angry, Guoliang," I began, still finding it difficult to speak out the words. "You're a good person, but it's a pity. . . . Don't be sad. According to the rules, our marriage is . . . forbidden."

At this he turned around slowly and slumped against the railings. I knew he was feeling very upset. As for me, tears poured down my cheeks.

I was about to find some words to comfort him, when suddenly he turned to me and said in a trembling voice: "I wish you all happiness." Then he walked heavily away.

Dark clouds covered the moon. The street lights caught his thin shadow. At that moment I felt his deep loneliness.

Battling with the Storm

That night the storm raged. The barometer on the wall on the balcony flapped in the wind. Heavy rain pelted against the tightly

closed windows. All these disturbances were reflected in my thoughts, as I lay in bed going over the situation again and again, tears welling in my eyes.

It often happens in life that when you have something, you don't know how to treasure it. It's only when you've lost it that you realize its true value. I had doubted our love at first. I hadn't thought it strong enough. But now that we had parted, I could hardly bear it. As I was thinking about Guoliang's fine character, the deputy Party secretary's stern face appeared in my mind again. I shivered and closed my eyes in pain.

Next morning my head ached badly. The wind still howled. On my way to work branches and leaves lay strewn across the streets. A huge banyan tree, uprooted by the wind, blocked the way. This scene of chaos seemed to be a symbol of my present situation.

That afternoon Ou told me: "Guoliang didn't come to work. He's sick. I don't know what's wrong with him."

My heart sank. I was silent for a while before I said: "Ou, wait for me after the shift."

"All right, I'll go and see him too."

As soon as the bell rang at the end of the shift I dashed out to buy some pears. Handing them to Ou, I said: "Please go and see him for me and give him these."

"Won't you go?"

"I . . . I've no time."

"O.K. then," Ou said puzzled.

As she turned to leave, I called her back: "Don't tell him who bought the pears."

"Why not?" She stared at me.

"He . . . he'll just feel worse. Please don't mention me at all."

"What's happened to you two?"

"I've . . . broken it off with him." I rushed away before she could see my tears.

The next day the storm blew even fiercer. Ou's face was as dark as the sky. I was about to ask her about Guoliang, but when we met she just said coldly: "Keep an eye on the work for me. I'm having my day off today."

I nodded and then asked: "How is he?"

"Who knows? Perhaps he won't recover." Her tone was harsh. "There's only him and his shadow in his home. So I'm going to look after him. He has a high fever. People are heartless!"

With that she went away, leaving me standing there alone with my pale face and red eyes. I wished I could have gone there myself and let Ou stay at work. But who was I?

That day with my machine at its fastest speed I put all my energies into my work, so that there was no time to think. Still pain gnawed at my heart. What about Guoliang? How was he? I felt very sorry when I thought of him.

I didn't make up my mind until after the end of the shift. Then I decided I simply had to see him that evening. People must have clear consciences. Some can brush their morals aside, but I couldn't.

Back at home, I cooked two bowls of thick porridge with some preserved eggs and meat and put it into a vacuum flask. Then braving the storm, I set off to visit Guoliang.

Ideals and Happiness

I hesitated in front of Guoliang's home for quite a long time. I had the key to the door, but how could I use it now? Neither did I dare to make him get up to open it. Then I heard someone talking inside. Who was it? I tapped at the door, and Old Bao opened it.

"I was sure you'd come, Zhen," he said.

Judging from his tone, I was also sure they'd just been discussing me. When I entered the room, I saw Guoliang lying in bed, his back to the door. He seemed asleep, so who had been talking? I looked around but there was no sign of Ou. Then I noticed the small water flask I had won as a prize, which I had left here for my personal use. Now it was filled with some traditional Chinese herbal medicine. I thought to myself that what he had

had to swallow was far more bitter than that medicine.

I sat down depressed, not knowing what to do. Bao came in and, glancing at Guoliang's back, beckoned to me to follow him to the sitting-room.

"I know all about what happened between you two," he said.

I lowered my head and said nothing.

"Guoliang's very low in spirits," Bao continued. "It's been a heavy blow." Then he told me that on the evening of the storm, after we had parted, Guoliang had wandered the streets. He'd been caught in the storm, got a chill and was now running a fever. He had been thinking about his life. For many years he had been discriminated against, and his dream of helping to build his motherland could not be realized. There was no happiness or comfort in his personal life.

"Do you think he's right to think like this?" Bao asked me.

After some thought I heaved a sigh and shook my head.

"Why don't you think so?"

"Because his ideal can be realized in our new society."

"Yes, but you always oversimplify things. The past few years have shown something quite unusual in our society. Many doors have been closed to young people like Guoliang. We need to help him more so that he doesn't feel without family or friends after his return to China. Only then will he be able to make greater efforts in building socialism."

As I thought over what he said, he added: "Tell me, Zhen, what do you think happiness means?"

I answered automatically, "Struggle means happiness."

"Quite right," Bao grinned, "but that's a bit too simple. Why do you struggle and against whom? No need to answer me in a hurry. Think it over carefully. Now let's come back to happiness. 'In life there is not only struggle, but also joy from love.' Do you know who said that?"

"Ostrovsky," I replied after a moment's thought.

"Correct. We're Communists, not Confucian moralists. We're materialists. Love is also a kind of happiness. Don't you think Marx and Jenny were happy together?"

Love was also a kind of happiness. I felt as if I was waking from a nightmare.

"Of course," Bao continued, "love isn't all happiness. Love must be based on shared ideals and a common goal. For example, Guoliang and you cherish the same ideals. There are many paths before us in life. Some are tortuous. Some lead to a dead end. There's only one correct path. Some people are not certain which to take and remain at the crossroads hesitating. Some charge about madly until they get stuck in a rut. Some take the correct path at first and then waver before difficulties. As the secretary of our Youth League branch, do you think there are young people like that in our plant?"

As the Youth League secretary, I often talked to other young people about ideals and happiness and the paths of life. Yet it seems I'd only a very superficial understanding of these.

At that moment a fit of coughing was heard from Guoliang's room. I wanted to go in and see him, but Bao prevented me saying: "Don't disturb him now. He too should think over the matter carefully."

So he was awake!

"Have you young League members ever been to Honghuagang?"* Bao asked suddenly.

"Of course. We often go there."

"And Huanghuagang?"

"Huanghuagang?"

"You should go there once. The seventy-two martyrs** buried there were people with high ideals. They sacrificed their lives to overthrow the corrupt Qing Dynasty. You should go and pay your respects there."

"Is it all right to go there?" I asked dubiously.

"Talk it over first with your committee. By the way, there were twenty-nine overseas Chinese among the martyrs."

"Overseas Chinese?"

*In this scenic spot is located the graves of the martyrs killed during the 1927 Uprising led by the Communist Party in Guangzhou.

**In the 1911 Guangzhou Uprising led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, seventy-two martyrs were killed.

"Yes. The overseas Chinese also have a glorious tradition. They were forced to leave their native places and go far away in order to make a living. Some were sold as slaves by the imperialists. They have a history of suffering. Their class character embodies the revolutionary character too. Many took part in the revolutionary wars in the past and today even more are participating in the socialist construction of their motherland."

With my head bowed I was silent in thought. I'd learnt a lot that day.

Bao finished by saying: "You've got many fine qualities, Zhen, but you are still politically naive. You've joined the Party organization, but you must pay attention to ideological problems. In many aspects you need to learn from Guoliang. In others, of course, he should learn from you."

The mention of Guoliang made me ashamed. I felt like crying.

Bao saw this and added: "Don't feel too bad. Just think it over. It's a very important event in your life."

Yes, I needed to think it over carefully.

Bao said goodbye and left me to give Guoliang his food and medicine. I took Guoliang's hand gently. It was as hot as my throbbing heart.

True Love Will Find a Way

Not long after the downfall of the "gang of four", I began to see what I could learn from Guoliang. I wasn't my old self. I'd become a girl who loved to think. Guoliang was different too. He became happier. Very concerned about politics, he often took part in various activities, working with even more energy than before. Together with some old workers, he modernized some outdated processes and greatly improved the quality of the locks. Now we were able to export our products once more.

One day after a meeting, Guoliang came and asked: "Will you be free tonight?"

"That depends on what you're planning to do," I replied.

"My father's just arrived from Indonesia. He came today. Would you like to meet him?"

"Like to meet him? Of course!"

"Aren't you afraid about losing your Party membership? It's a complicated problem."

"Oh, stop teasing!"

He smiled and then whispered in my ear: "I want to warn you first that perhaps father will encourage us to get married while he is here, if he likes you when you meet."

Blushing, I paused and said: "Do as you like, I don't mind."

That evening, at Guoliang's, his father praised me saying that we Chinese girls were warm-hearted and mature. Later, we took a family walk along the river bank. The night was very beautiful. Touching the white railings of the embankment, Guoliang's father with some emotion recalled the past. Many years ago he had gone to the United States with Guoliang, who was just a child. They had been standing by the great Mississippi River when they heard some workers singing a melancholy song.

Guoliang had asked: "What song is that, daddy?"

"*Old Man River!*"

"Who are singing it?"

"Some Black American workers."

"And who are we?"

"We're Chinese."

Sighing, he continued: "We Chinese, who live abroad, never forget the miseries and humiliations of the past. But today standing by this river in our motherland, I can say with pride, 'We are Chinese!'"

Yes, we are Chinese and we love our socialist country with immense pride and joy!

The way to happiness was for us full of difficulties, yet now Guoliang and I are married. Both of us believe we share the same ideals and that we can help each other in our path through life. Our love is a happy one.

Illustrated by Lin Yong

Xie Yi

Short Stories from the Liberated Areas

One of the most popular books recently published in Beijing is *A Selection of Short Stories from the Liberated Areas*, containing fifty short stories written between May 1942 and September 1949 by forty-six writers in the liberated areas.

In 1942, Comrade Mao Zedong published his article *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*, in which he pointed out that literature and art must serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. After that many groups of literary and art workers went to factories, to the countryside and to army units to integrate themselves with the people. From these experiences, they created a number of short stories reflecting the lives of the people. These played a significant role in the struggles for liberation. Under the cultural despotism of Lin Biao and the "gang of four", these stories were banned and their authors persecuted. It is only with the downfall of the gang that these stories have been republished.

From 1942 to 1949, the Chinese people victoriously fought the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) and the War of Liberation (1946-1949), until the establishment of the People's Republic of

China in October 1949. The liberated areas controlled by the Chinese Communist Party were mainly vast rural regions where the army and people as well as fighting also developed production. They carried out reforms to transform the system of feudal land ownership which restricted the development of productive labour. These short stories truly reflect the struggles against the aggressors and for emancipation and liberation.

Many stories depict the changes in the liberated areas, where the new was in conflict with the old, the good with the bad. The moral and ideological outlook of the people developed in accord with the political and economic structure. Feudalism, which had existed for thousands of years, was swept aside with such attendant phenomena as forced marriages and inequality of the sexes.

Zhao Shuli (1906-1970) was the first writer to successfully portray country life. He wrote many fine and diverse stories in a lively way. An example of this is *Little Erhei's Marriage* published in this issue. The love story of Little Erhei and Little Qin reflected the struggles being waged in the countryside in the liberated areas. It praised the new ideas of the peasants and mocked their old backward ones. A criticism of the feudal forces then existing in the countryside, the story is based on fact. While living among the peasants, Zhao Shuli heard about a young couple who had sought a free marriage and who, as a result, were persecuted, the young man being beaten to death. Indignantly, Zhao Shuli investigated the circumstances of the persecuted man's family. In order to encourage young people to fight these wrong feudal ideas, Zhao Shuli changed the ending to a happy one. His story was greatly enjoyed by its readers and was adapted into an opera and staged everywhere.

Kang Zhuo's story, *My Two Hosts*, also published here, successfully characterizes Jinfeng, a young girl who loves labour and works hard to learn about culture. She embodies both the traditional morality and spirit of resistance of Chinese women and the modern ideas of the women in the liberated areas. The story also demonstrates the close relationship of intellectuals and peasants. The animated style of the author brings to life the cheerful work-chants and smiling faces of the peasants.

Finally we have selected Pan Zhiding's story *The Young Couple's Dilemma*. People have always enjoyed reading this. The background of the story is the winter literacy campaign. The young couple, Wang Yulian and her husband Zhou Manzi, have such different characters that they barely talk to each other, but they are young and want to study at the winter school. Helped by the chairman of the local women's association and the teacher, they read the newspaper and study political affairs together. In this way they learn to help and show concern for each other. Eventually their contradictions are solved. This story depicts the kinds of changes wrought in family relations by the revolution. Written in simple language, it is a lively and careful portrayal of daily family life.

These stories reflect the new themes and new artistic techniques the writers used in depicting the changes. Their main characters are the peasants, who awaken and develop their minds. This shows the truth of the statement that once working people are liberated from exploitation and oppression, they indeed become an irresistible force. The authors both continued and developed the traditions of Chinese classical and folk literature, in accordance with the new conditions and needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Their work is both strongly national and typical of the people. The characters are simple, natural and unobtrusive. Mostly written in colloquial dialogue, the language is easy to read and understand, so that these stories are very popular. Their structure is strict, and they make a strong artistic impact. All their characteristics have been applied by the later generation of writers in their works.

Zhao Shuli

Little Erhei's Marriage

The Soothsayers' Taboos

In the Liu Valley, there lived two soothsayers whose names had become household words in all the surrounding country. One went by the nickname Kong Ming* the Second; the other Third Fairy-maid. Kong Ming the Second's original name was Liu Xiude and he had once been a merchant. He was addicted to divination and would never do anything without consulting some deity or other. Third Fairy-maid, usually swaggering about with a red cloth over her head, claimed to be a goddess on the first and fifteenth of every month. Kong Ming the Second shunned the phrase "unsuited for sowing," and Third Fairy-maid "the rice is over-cooked". There were two little stories about these taboos.

One year rain did not fall for a whole spring season. It was not until the third day of the fifth moon in the lunar calendar that there was a slight drizzle. On the fourth day, when everybody hurried to the fields to sow, Kong Ming the Second, having checked the almanac and counted on his fingers, announced, "Today is

* Kong Ming is the name of Zhuge Liang, (P-234) a strategist and statesman, who, it was believed, could forecast the future with assured accuracy.

unsuited for sowing." The fifth day was the Dragon Boat Festival and for years he had never done a single stroke of work on such a day. So he didn't sow on the fifth. The sixth day was a lucky one according to his calculations, but his fields had, unfortunately, become dry by then. Although he finally sowed his four *mu* of land, not half of his seeds came up. When rain did come again on the fifteenth day, the others were out weeding among the new sprouts, while Kong Ming the Second and his two sons had to re-sow the places where nothing had come up. A young neighbour who met Kong Ming at lunch time asked him jokingly, "Grandpa, is today unsuited for sowing?" Kong Ming the Second could only glower at him, and walked away, the laughing-stock of the whole village, after his incorrect forecast.

Third Fairy-maid had a daughter Little Qin. One day, Jin Wang's father, one of the villagers, came to consult Third Fairy-maid on account of an illness. He knelt in front of the incense-table and waited for the oracle from the babbling lips of the "goddess." Little Qin, then aged nine, was cooking the noon meal in the kitchen and, upon hearing her mother's murmured incantations, she paused to listen and forgot all about the pot of rice boiling on the stove. After a while, when the old man went out to make water, Third Fairy-maid, who was supposed not to speak to any human being while acting as a medium for the gods, suddenly got worried and said to Little Qin, "Go and see to the cooking! The rice will be over-cooked!" Her words were unexpectedly overheard by the old fellow returning and, sure enough, he brought them to the ears of everyone in the village. Since then, mischievous tongues often jested in Third Fairy-maid's presence, "Has the rice been over-cooked?"

The Origin of Third Fairy-maid

Third Fairy-maid had been invoking the gods for thirty solid years. She had started in this avocation at the age of fifteen when she married Yu Fu. She was then the most attractive girl in the village

while Yu Fu was honest, young, a man of few words, who worked hard in the fields.

Yu Fu's mother had died early. So, when Yu Fu went with his father to work in the fields, the new bride was left alone at home. Young villagers sympathized with her in her loneliness and were glad to keep her company. In a few days, she had collected many admirers. The big crowd surrounded her with gaiety and laughter. Yu Fu's father thought such behaviour improper, and one day lost his temper. He gave the young people a good scolding. This certainly prevented them from coming again, but irritated his daughter-in-law so much that she cried for a whole day and night, refusing to comb her hair, wash her face, or take any food. She lay on the *kang*, and no one could persuade her to get up. Her husband and father-in-law were at their wits' end as to what to do. A granny in the neighbourhood found them an old witch of a woman who communed with the gods and declared that the young woman was possessed by "Third Fairy-maid." The possessed one, indeed, chanted and muttered, "Yes, my Goddess, no, my Goddess," as if she were a real medium. Since then the name of Third Fairy-maid stuck to her, and she began to communicate with this deity regularly on the first and fifteenth of each month. Thus it became the practice of the villagers to send her offerings on these days while she posed as a holy person and answered questions regarding fortune or health.

The young men who visited Third Fairy-maid, however, were more interested in gazing at the holy body than in listening to holy words. Third Fairy-maid knew only too well what was on their mind. So, on every occasion, she put on nicer clothes and kept her hair smoothed, her trinkets polished and her face powdered, in order to attract these impious flies.

Well, that was thirty years ago. Most of her admirers now wore beards, and had grown-up children and had even themselves become fathers-in-law. Except for a few old bachelors, almost none had the time to call on Third Fairy-maid any more. But she was not like other women. Although forty-five, she still tried to make herself attractive to men. She wore embroidered shoes and trousers with embroidered borders. Her head, now going bald,

she covered with a black kerchief. The only pity was that powder failed to hide all the wrinkles on her face, which looked like a donkey's egg-shaped droppings, covered with a layer of frost.

As most of her former admirers refused to come and the few old bachelors brought her little satisfaction, she started rallying round her a crowd of young men who were even more numerous and more gallant than those of her former days. The secret of this popularity? It had a lot to do with her young daughter Little Qin.

Little Qin

Third Fairy-maid had borne altogether six children, five of whom had died in their infancy. The only surviving child was named Little Qin.

Little Qin had now turned eighteen. People regarded her as far more beautiful than her mother at that age. The young men always looked for an opportunity to exchange a few words with her. When Little Qin went to the river to wash clothes, they followed her; when she went to gather wild herbs, they all did the same. At mealtime, the villagers would often come with their bowls of rice, and quite a journey it was for a few of them, to sit and talk a while at Third Fairy-maid's. This had been an old custom of over thirty years' standing; but it had not been until two or three years ago that young villagers had also begun to show such enthusiasm. At first, Third Fairy-maid thought she still had charm enough to allure the young folk. But gradually she realized that they did not come for her sake.

Little Qin, however, did not take after her mother. Though she was jolly in the company of others, she never allowed anyone to take liberties. For the past two or three years, she had been getting along well with Little Erhei. One summer morning, when her father had gone to the fields and her mother was out gossiping with the neighbours, young Jin Wang came around and said with a grin, "At last we have a chance to be together!" Little Qin, however, looked quite serious. "Jin Wang, you'd better behave,

you are not a child!" Jin Wang pursed up his lips and insisted, "Stop acting! You would soften soon enough if you were with Little Erhei. Come, let me have a go too. The pot shouldn't call the kettle black if it's got soot itself, you know!" With that, he took hold of Little Qin's arm and whispered into her ear, "Come on, don't pretend!" He was taken aback when Little Qin screamed "Jin Wang!" He let go of her and slipped out of the house, muttering, "I'm patient and you'll see."

The Wang Cousins

Everybody in the village hated Jin Wang. Only his cousin Xing Wang was on good terms with him. Jin Wang's father was a farmer, but behaved more like a tiger. For a good number of years the old man had been the village head, and was a past master in maltreating people. When Jin Wang had grown into his late teens, he became his father's accomplice, and his cousin Xing Wang also helped the tiger to pounce on its victims. If the old man wanted to lay hands on anybody, he no longer need do it himself; he had just to give the word and both Jin Wang and Xing Wang would spring to action.

In the early years of the thirties, traitors, enemy spies, disbanded soldiers and bandits roamed everywhere, causing much trouble in the countryside. Jin Wang's father had died by then; so the two cousins did some dirty work for a band of marauders, helping them to kidnap the countryfolk and hold them to ransom. Then they came out as mediator between the bandits and the peasants, pretending that they were serving the interests of both parties. Finally, the people's army came and made short shrift of all these marauders and bandits. The cousins thereupon returned to the Liu Valley.

The people in the valley were timid by nature. And, after months of disorder in which many were killed, few dared come out and speak for other folk. Other large villages had set up village governments, national salvation leagues, military committees and the like. But not so the Liu Valley. Here nobody wanted

to be a village cadre, save the village head who had been appointed by the county government. Some time later, the county government sent someone to the Liu Valley to sponsor the election of village cadres. The Wang cousins, however, looked upon this as an opportunity to seize power. Since the people were only too glad to have someone interested enough to take on the posts, they elected Xing Wang as head of the village military committee and Jin Wang a member of the village government. Even Jin Wang's wife was elected head of the Women's National Salvation League. The rest of the posts were filled by some old men who happened to be there, to make up the number. But they had to have a young man as captain of the Youth Vanguard, after all. Little Erhei's appealing, handsome face made Xing Wang nominate him for the post on the spur of the moment. Although the boy's father, Kong Ming the Second, did not like it, he did not dare object for fear of offending a person like Jin Wang, so the candidate was easily elected.

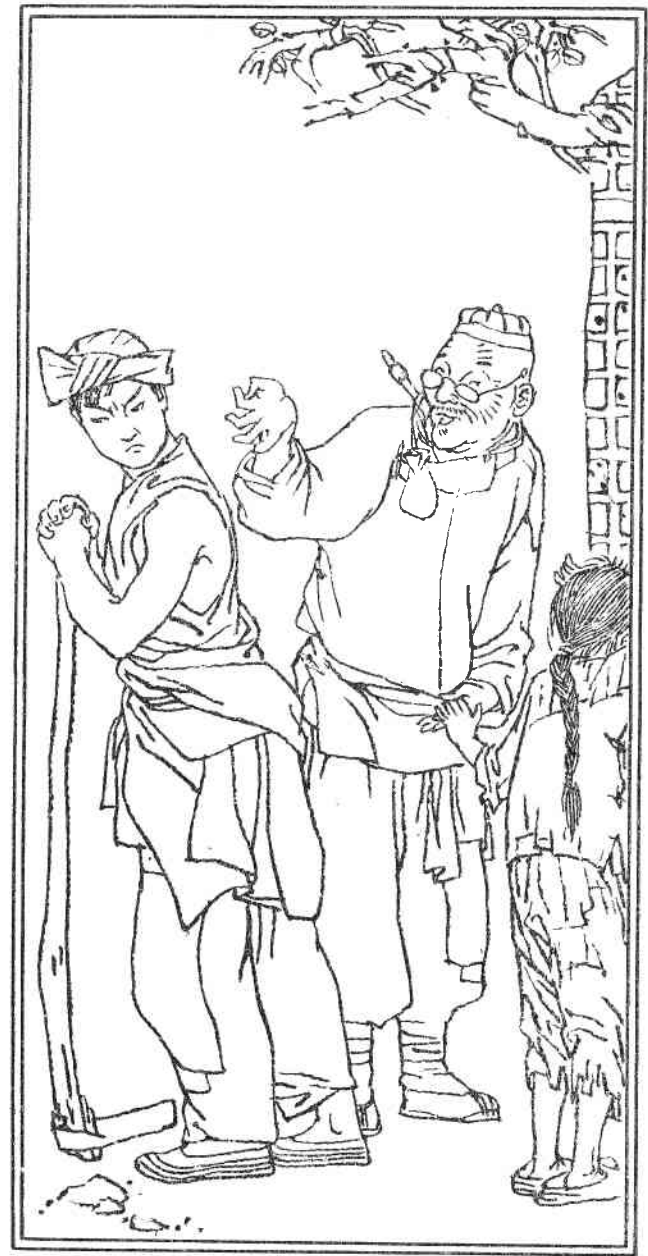
Since the village head was not from the valley, he did not know much about local conditions. As time went on, Jin Wang and Xing Wang became more domineering than ever; for so long as they could deceive the village head, they could have everyone in the village do their bidding. Although some village cadres had been replaced over the years, the Wang cousins remained firmly in the saddle. The countryfolk hated them like poison, but nobody dared breathe a word, for fear of the risk in getting involved with such formidable enemies.

Little Erhei

Little Erhei was the younger son of Kong Ming the Second. Once in a battle, he had killed two enemy soldiers and had been commended for his excellent marksmanship. His good looks were known far and wide, and he turned the heads of the womenfolk in all the villages where he appeared in stage plays during the Spring Festival.

Little Erhei had never been to school. When he was six, his father started teaching him some characters from books on the art of fortune-telling, rather than the Chinese classics. As he was such a lovely child, all grown-ups enjoyed joking with him. But since the incident of "unsuited for sowing", Kong Ming the Second had been grumbled at by his wife and elder son, and laughed at by every villager. Little Erhei was thirteen then, but grown-ups still liked to tease and treat him like a child. When they visited the family, those who were fond of having a dig at Kong Ming the Second would, in his presence, greet Little Erhei with "Young man, is today 'unsuited for sowing'?" Even children of his own age knew how best to hurt his feelings when worsted in an encounter. They had merely to shout, "Unsuited for sowing, unsuited for sowing..." The joke piqued Little Erhei, and he did not show his face for several months. Finally, mother and son decided not to have anything to do with his father's soothsaying in future.

Little Erhei and Little Qin had been steady friends for the past two or three years. At about seventeen, he used to spend some of the long winter evenings in Third Fairy-maid's house, together with other visitors. But when he grew so very much attached to Little Qin, he could not let a single day pass without seeing her. Some villagers were willing to be the matchmakers for the two young people. But Kong Ming the Second objected for three reasons: first, Erhei's horoscope was characterized by "Metal" while Little Qin's was by "Fire," so fire would melt metal; second, Little Qin had been born in the tenth moon, a generally unlucky month; and, third, Third Fairy-maid had such a bad reputation. A group of refugees happened to come about that time from some other places, and among them was one called Lao Li, who brought his daughter of about eight or nine years with him. To avoid starvation, he was willing to give the girl to anybody who wanted her. Kong Ming the Second thought it a good bargain; he cast her horoscope and declared, after much calculation, "Two beings destined to marry each other, though born a thousand miles apart, can be tied together by a single string." And he took her into his house as Little Erhei's future wife.



Although Kong Ming the Second called the little girl an ideal wife for his younger son, Little Erhei refused to acknowledge it. Father and son quarrelled over this matter for days, but Kong Ming the Second remained adamant. Finally, Little Erhei said, "If you want to keep her, all right. But I'll have nothing to do with her!" In the end, the girl stayed, but her exact status in the family was never made quite clear.

A Struggle Meeting

Ever since Little Qin rejected his advances, Jin Wang had nursed a deep resentment against her, thinking of revenge. Once Little Erhei could not attend a meeting of village cadres called by the military committee because he was down with malaria. Jin Wang then told his cousin who was head of the military committee, "Little Erhei was faking. The rascal must be fooling around with Little Qin. This gives us a good reason for settling accounts with him." Since Xing Wang bore Little Qin the same sort of grudge as Jin Wang, he readily agreed to the scheme. He also advised Jin Wang to get his wife, as head of the Women's National Salvation League, to call a struggle meeting against Little Qin. Because Jin Wang had taken a fancy to the girl, his wife also hated Little Qin like poison. She was, therefore, only too pleased with the idea. She laid aside her needlework and at once set about making the necessary preparations.

On the following day, therefore, two meetings were held in the village: one sponsored by the military committee was directed against Little Erhei; the other sponsored by the Women's National Salvation League was against Little Qin.

Blameless himself, Little Erhei of course refused to admit that he had been malingering and insisted that it was all a false charge. Xing Wang ordered his men to tie Little Erhei up and turn him over to the village government. Fortunately, the village head knew his job and reproved Xing Wang.

"Little Erhei really was ill with malaria, it was not just an excuse. As to his being in love, there is nothing wrong with that; you have no reason to have him tied up like this!"

But Xing Wang insisted, "But he's already engaged!"

"Everybody in the village knows that Little Erhei has never agreed to the engagement to the little girl his father's chosen for him," the village head retorted. "He has the right to refuse. And this little girl is only a little over ten years old. She's too young to consider such a matter. She will probably also not agree when she grows up. Therefore, Little Erhei is free to make love to any girl he chooses. Nobody can intervene."

Xing Wang had nothing more to say, so Little Erhei counter-charged him: "Isn't it against the law to tie people up without a proper reason?" The village head had quite a difficult time to mediate between the two and then he let Little Erhei go.

Before Xing Wang could make his exit from the village government, Little Qin also arrived, with the head of the Women's National Salvation League in tow. She was barely over the threshold when she blurted out loudly:

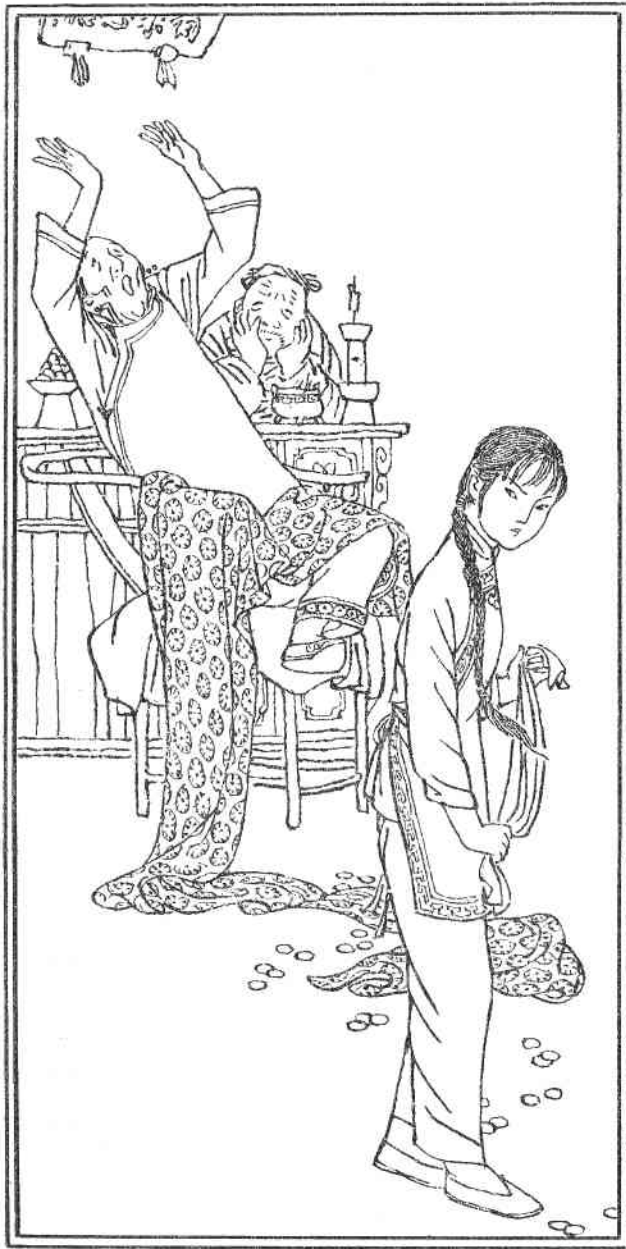
"Comrade Village Head, accusations must be based on evidence! Does being the head of the women's league give one the right to do as one pleases?"

Xing Wang was frightened when he saw Jin Wang's wife being dragged in by Little Qin. He was afraid that the whole story would come out and that it would implicate him. So he quickly slipped out. The village head, after some inquiry, spent much time in settling the argument between the two women.

Third Fairy-maid's Consent

After the two meetings, there was really little purpose in trying to keep their friendship from the eyes of the people. Little Erhei now knew he had the right to make love to anyone he liked. So the two openly put their young heads together for the next step to take.

Third Fairy-maid was quite worried. Although Little Qin was her own flesh, she found she somehow couldn't get along with her in recent years. Third Fairy-maid loved young men, but these



young men had eyes for her daughter Little Qin only. To Third Fairy-maid, young Little Erhei looked like a fresh fruit; but because of her daughter she could not taste it. She had long intended to find a husband for Little Qin and thus get rid of her. But her own reputation stood in the way, there was hardly any family willing to be related to her. Rumours had spread after the meeting that Little Erhei intended to marry Little Qin without parental consent. Should this really happen, Third Fairy-maid said to herself, she would not have a chance of coquetting even a little with Little Erhei. What a pity! So she asked everyone she could to find Little Qin a husband.

There is a saying, "Hoist the recruiting-banner, and hungry men will come and enlist." Thus a certain rich widower, by the name of Wu, said he was willing. He had seen Little Qin once at the village fair, and would have the young girl for his wife. Third Fairy-maid thought it a godsend, and only a few days after the matchmaker's first visit she accepted the engagement for her daughter, feeling as if a load had been taken off her mind.

As everything had been settled between Little Erhei and herself, Little Qin refused even to listen to her mother. The day the engagement gifts arrived, they had a violent quarrel. Little Qin threw the ornaments, silk and satin all over the floor, and stated very plainly after the matchmaker had fled: "I won't have it! Whoever accepts this junk must marry the man herself!"

Third Fairy-maid was terribly upset about all this. She kept to her bed a good part of the day, and, yawning a bit after supper, started her chanting. She claimed that the goddess had once again descended and taken possession of her. First she blamed her husband for being too weak to rule his own household, then she said that the union between Little Qin and Mr. Wu had been ordained even before either of the two was born. "Marriages are predestined by heaven," she murmured. "Whoever disobeys the will of heaven shall bring about his own destruction..." Her husband knelt down and, trembling with fear, begged the "goddess" to be merciful. The "goddess," however, ordered him to give Little Qin a good beating. When Little Qin heard this, she knew it was impossible to bring her mother, the fake medium, to her senses. So

Little Qin slipped out of the house, leaving her mother to continue her nonsense.

Little Qin ran stealthily towards the other end of the village to find Little Erhei; half-way, she met him, on his way to her house. Hand in hand they went to a secluded spot where they could discuss how to deal with Third Fairy-maid.

"Get the Two Together!"

Little Qin told Little Erhei in great detail how her mother had tried to force her into marrying Mr. Wu, and what the old woman had chanted when she pretended to be in a trance.

"There's no need to bother our heads about her," Little Erhei said to her. "The comrades at the district government have told me that any couple can apply for a marriage certificate if both are agreed. No third party can interfere."

At this moment they heard approaching footsteps. Little Erhei leaned over, and saw four or five people, one of whom was shouting:

"Get the two together, get the two together!"

Both Little Erhei and Little Qin recognized this to be Jin Wang's voice. Little Erhei shouted back in anger, "Get whom? I have done nothing wrong!"

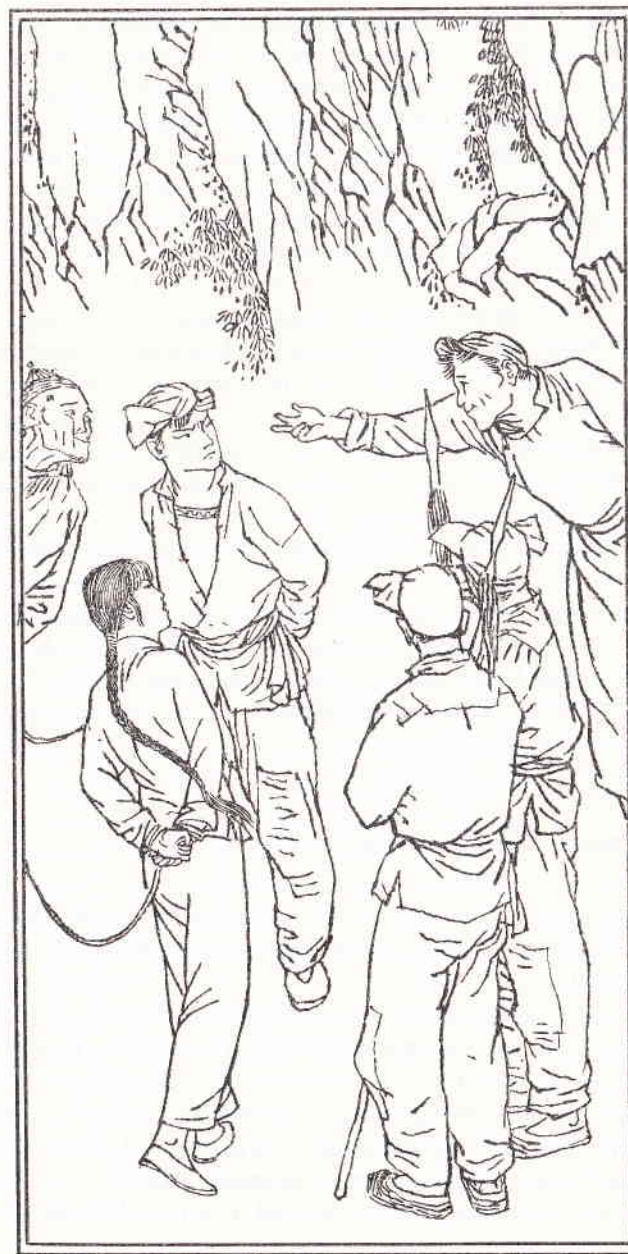
Xing Wang was there too, of course, and called out, "Don't let him get away! We'll see whether he has done anything wrong! He's been enough of a nuisance to me for quite some days!"

"I'll go wherever you say," said Little Erhei. "You can't pin anything on me even if we have to go to the Border Region Government. Go!"

"Go, eh? You won't go like that!" said Xing Wang. "Tie him up!"

Little Erhei struggled hard, but since they outnumbered him, they managed to beat and truss him up.

"Don't forget the girl," said Xing Wang. "Tie her up too! She once said accusations must be based on evidence. So here we've found them together!" Little Qin was therefore also tied with ropes.



People in the neighbourhood had not yet gone to bed. So, when they heard the commotion, some came out to see what was the matter. Under the light of torches, they saw a young couple bound with ropes and readily understood what had happened. Kong Ming the Second turned out too and, seeing his son tied up, he went down on his knees before Xing Wang, fawning.

"Xing Wang, there has never been any feud between our two families. For my sake, be lenient..."

"This matter is out of our control," said Xing Wang. "He'll be turned over to the higher authorities."

"Don't worry, father," said Little Erhei. "No matter where he sends me, I'm not guilty of anything. I've nothing to fear from him!"

"You've got a nerve," said Xing Wang. "I hope you stay so tough to the end!" Then he ordered the three militiamen, "Take them away!"

One of the militiamen asked, "Where to? The village government?"

"What's the use of taking them there?" said Xing Wang. "Weren't they released last time by the village head? This time take them to the district military committee for trial!" So it was that Little Qin and Little Erhei were dragged off to the district military committee.

Kong Ming's Horoscope

No villager dared speak up for the young couple. Not until the Wang cousins had gone did they persuade Kong Ming the Second to go home.

Sadly shaking his head, the old man said, "*Ai*, I knew some misfortune was about to befall us! Day before yesterday, in the morning, when I was on my way to the fields, I ran into a young woman in mourning riding a donkey up the hill. I knew it was a bad omen. This morning a crow cawed a dozen times on our roof. *Ai*, no one can get away from his fate!"

After this outpour, he chanted a string of meaningless words,

which bored his neighbours. So they dispersed, after trying vainly to console him.

With the exception of the little girl they had adopted, none in the house could go to sleep that night. Scratching his head, Kong Ming the Second took out three coins and cast a horoscope. His face took on an ashen pallor as he exclaimed,

"*Ai*, everything now is fraught with danger! When Erhei was elected captain of the Youth Vanguard, I told him not to accept the post."

His wife wrung her hands and stamped her foot, wailing:

"Oh, good heavens, who could have imagined he would get into such trouble?"

Their elder son Dahei tried to calm them down: "Don't worry so much. Anyway, what's done is done! This is no murder case, so Erhei can't be found guilty of any serious crime. Since he has been sent to the district government, I'll go there to find out how his case stands. You had better go to sleep." Saying this, he lighted a lantern and went off.

After Dahei had gone, Kong Ming the Second again pored over the horoscope he had just cast. Suddenly, the voice of a woman could be heard crying from afar. It came nearer and nearer. A moment later, the door was pushed open. Before he could make out who the woman was, she had grabbed hold of him wailing:

"I want my daughter back, Liu Xiude! Where has that son of yours abducted my daughter to? I want her back..."

By that time, the wife of Kong Ming the Second was beside herself with anger. Seeing that the intruder was Third Fairy-maid, she jumped down from the *kang*. Third Fairy-maid was just the person she wanted to vent her rage on. She seized Little Qin's mother shrilling:

"You've come just at the right moment! This saves me the trouble of looking for you. Both you and your daughter have seduced my son, and yet you have the cheek to come here! Let's go to the district government to settle the matter!"

The two women got into a tussle. Kong Ming the Second forgot all about his divination diagram and tried to separate them. Third Fairy-maid was already a little scared when she saw Kong

Ming the Second's wife was out for her skin. So when she managed to free herself she ran out of the house. The wife of Kong Ming the Second pursued her but was held back by her husband. She continued, however, cursing Third Fairy-maid long after the latter had taken flight.

"Be More Merciful!"

The rest of the night, Kong Ming the Second spent wakefully, fretting from time to time: "Why hasn't Dahei come back? Why hasn't he come back?" Before daybreak, he himself set out for the district government. Half-way, he descried Dahei in the distance with the three militiamen on their way back. There was also an assistant from the district government with them and a messenger. Kong Ming the Second shouted at his elder son from afar:

"Dahei, what's happened? Anything serious?"

"Nothing serious. Don't worry!"

The assistant from the district government and the three militiamen walked on as soon as they met. Dahei introduced his father and the messenger to each other, then said:

"You and Third Fairy-maid are wanted at the district government. Better go as soon as possible. There's nothing to be afraid of! Erhei and Little Qin were released as soon as they arrived. The authorities have known for some time what bad eggs Xing Wang and Jin Wang are, so they put the two of them under arrest. The assistant who came with us is to collect evidence in our village of their evil deeds. When I arrived at the district government last night, cross-examination of the Wang cousins was already over, and I heard that the district government approves of the marriage between Little Erhei and Little Qin."

"It's all right so long as they've violated no law," said Kong Ming the Second. "But they mustn't get married! Their horoscopes are against each other! Do you know why I have been summoned?"

"No," said Dahei. "Nothing much, I suppose. You'd better go right now. I'll go home and tell mother."

The messenger then turned to Kong Ming the Second, "Now you know you've been called. You'd better start while I go to inform Third Fairy-maid." At this, he went off with Dahei.

In the district government, Kong Ming the Second found Little Erhei and Little Qin sitting together on a bench. Enraged, he pointed his finger at Little Erhei and shouted at him:

"You trouble-maker! Why don't you go home now that you are released? You've nearly worried me to death! You rascal!"

"What's the matter with you?" said the district head. "Is this a place to curse people?"

Kong Ming the Second had enough sense to keep quiet. The district head then proceeded to question him, "Are you Liu Xiude?"

"Yes."

"Have you chosen a little girl for your son Erhei?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"She is twelve now."

"A girl shouldn't get engaged before she is fifteen! Send her back to her parents! Little Erhei is going to marry Little Qin."

"The girl has only her father who is a refugee and nobody knows his whereabouts," said Kong Ming the Second. "There is no place for me to send her to. It's only an official order that girls shouldn't become engaged before they are fifteen. In the village many a girl gets engaged when only seven or eight. I beg Your Honour to be more merciful, more merciful. . . ."

"Any engagement not according to the law can be cancelled if one of the parties concerned does not wish it," said the district head.

"But this is a case in which both parties have reached agreement," said Kong Ming the Second.

The district head asked Little Erhei, "Erhei, do you agree?"

"No," Little Erhei replied.

Kong Ming the Second was livid with rage. Staring angrily at his son, he said in a threatening tone of voice, "You decide now, eh?"

The district head said, "Who is getting engaged, you or your



son? Listen, grandpa, nowadays marriage is based on the free choice of both partners. It's not for you to decide! If the girl you've chosen is really homeless, then you may consider her as your own daughter."

"I don't object to that at all," said Kong Ming the Second. "But please Your Honour, be more merciful; don't let Little Erhei marry Yu Fu's daughter."

"Now that's none of your business!"

"Please be more merciful, more merciful! Their horoscopes don't agree. If they marry, they'll be unhappy all their lives!" Turning to his son, he said, "Erhei, don't be so pig-headed. The happiness of your whole life is at stake!"

"Grandpa," said the district head, "it's you who must stop being pig-headed. In fact, it's you yourself who would be sorry all your life, if you actually succeeded in forcing your nineteen-year-old son into marrying a twelve-year-old girl. I'm saying this for your own good. So long as your son and Little Qin themselves want to become man and wife, it doesn't matter whether you like it or not. Go home and keep the little girl as your daughter, if she has no place to go."

Before Kong Ming the Second had time to plead again he was hustled out of the office.

The Fairy-maid Is Summoned

The reason for Third Fairy-maid's call at the house of Kong Ming the Second had been twofold: first, she wanted to show what a row she could make if she wanted to; and second, she wanted thereby to hide from the public eye her real attitude to her daughter's misfortune. She was, in fact, secretly quite happy to see Little Qin taught a lesson or two. So, when she got home after her brawl with the wife of Kong Ming the Second, she went straight to bed. She did not get up until very late the next morning. Her husband Yu Fu was really worried about their daughter. But since he could not do anything without first consulting his wife and since he did not have the courage to wake her up, he started

preparing breakfast himself. When breakfast was about ready, Third Fairy-maid got up and took her time washing her face and combing her hair.

"Aren't you going to find out what has happened to Little Qin?" Yu Fu asked her, warily.

"What for? The girl is conceited enough to think she can manage everything herself!"

Yu Fu was put out and said no more. When breakfast was ready he left it on the stove and waited until Third Fairy-maid had finished her toilet.

Before she was half-way through her meal, the messenger from the district government arrived to summon her. She seemed quite agreeable and drawled: "I haven't been able to manage that daughter of mine since she's grown up. Well, I'll ask the district head's help to bring her to reason!"

Third Fairy-maid thereupon finished her breakfast, put on a new dress, a new kerchief, a pair of embroidered shoes, and a pair of trousers with embroidered borders. She once more dabbed her face with powder and put some silver pins and combs in her hair. Then she asked Yu Fu to lead the donkey out. They set out for the district government, Third Fairy-maid riding in front, while her husband trailed behind urging the donkey along.

When they arrived, she was led into the district head's office. She knelt down, kowtowed, and exclaimed:

"My lord the district head, I trust whatever you decide will be in my favour!"

The district head was at that time bent over his desk, writing. When he saw a woman kneeling before him, her head covered with silver ornaments, he took her for a young woman who had come to him a couple of days earlier about a quarrel with her mother-in-law. So he said:

"Your mother-in-law has a guarantor, hasn't she? Why don't you go to him?"

Nonplussed, Third Fairy-maid raised her head and looked at him. The district head saw in front of him a middle-aged woman, her face heavily powdered, and realized that he had made a mistake.

The messenger in the office explained quickly, "That's the mother of Little Qin."

The district head cast another look at the woman, and said, "So you're Little Qin's mother! Get up, and don't play your sooth-saying tricks here! I know everything about you. Get up!"

Third Fairy-maid stood up.

"How old are you?"

"Forty-five," she answered.

"Have a look at yourself in the mirror, and tell me whether you look like a respectable woman of forty-five."

A girl of about ten who had been peeping in at the door burst out laughing, whereupon the messenger told her to go and play outside.

"You know how to invoke deities, don't you?" the district head continued.

Third Fairy-maid dared not answer. So the district head asked her another question:

"You found a husband for your daughter?"

"Yes, I did."

"How much money did you get from him?"

"Three thousand and five hundred dollars."

"What else?"

"Some ornaments and a few bolts of cloth."

"Did you consult your daughter about this?"

"No."

"Is your daughter willing?"

"I don't know."

"I'll send for her so that you can ask her yourself." And he told the messenger to fetch Little Qin.

The ten-year-old girl who had been told to play outside had soon spread the news that there was a middle-aged woman in the district government office who still put powder on her face and wore shoes with gaudy embroidery although she was more than forty-five years old. All the women in the neighbourhood came to see such a sight till they filled up half the courtyard of the district government. They milled about, whispering to one another.

"Forty-five! She looks it!"

"Look at that pair of trousers she's wearing!"

"Look at her embroidered shoes!"

Third Fairy-maid could hear their remarks right in the district head's office. She had never blushed before, but on this of all days she just couldn't control herself. Embarrassment was written all over her face, and beads of sweat came streaming down. Then the messenger brought Little Qin and said loudly, so that everyone could hear:

"What are you people staring at? Why, isn't she also a human being? Don't tell me you haven't seen anybody like her before! Make way, please!"

The crowd of women burst out laughing.

The district head then said to Third Fairy-maid:

"Now that your daughter is here, you can ask her whether she is willing or not."

But Third Fairy-maid was distracted by the talk of the people in the courtyard, "Forty-five . . . embroidered shoes. . . ." She was so ashamed of herself that she had to wipe the sweat from her face again and again, unable to utter even a syllable. Suddenly the people in the courtyard changed the tone of their remarks.

"Yes, that's her daughter. . . . But the mother knows more about how to make herself up. . . . She's supposed to know also how to invoke the deities. . . ."

Then someone who obviously knew all about Third Fairy-maid started relating the story about "The rice is over-cooked". By then, Third Fairy-maid wished she could kill herself by butting her head against the wall.

"If you don't ask your daughter, then I'll do it for you!" boomed the district head. Turning to the girl, he asked, "Little Qin, do you wish to marry the man your mother has chosen for you?"

"No, of course not!"

The district head turned again to Third Fairy-maid and said, "Did you hear that?" And he explained that young people were now protected by law in their freedom of choice in marriage, and that the betrothal between Little Qin and Little Erhei was therefore perfectly legal. He told Third Fairy-maid to send back the money and gifts she had received from that Wu, and let Little



Qin marry Little Erhei. With a feeling of shame, she promised the district head that she would do just as she had been told.

How Things End

When the villagers learned that Jin Wang and Xing Wang had been arrested and that the district government was sending an assistant to the village to look into the crimes the Wang cousins had committed, they clapped their hands with joy. In the afternoon, a mass meeting took place in the village temple. The village head explained the purpose and asked people to come forward to testify to the lawless acts of the Wang cousins. For a long while, nobody dared speak up. People were afraid of reprisals, if they failed to bring the charge home to the Wang cousins. One chicken-hearted villager even whispered, "Tolerance means peace." But, at last, a young man who had also been victimized by the Wang cousins came forward, saying: "Haven't I been patient and tolerant? Yet, the more tolerant I was, the more I had to suffer! If you people don't speak up, I will!"

He started by telling how Jin Wang had brought bandits to kidnap him, and enumerated several more criminal acts the two cousins had perpetrated. Then he said, "I'll leave off here. Let others continue!"

Once this young man had broken the ice, other victims hastened to bring up their charges: how the Wang cousins had accepted bribes, driven people to kill themselves, robbed them of their property and raped women; how the militiamen were made to gather firewood for the Wang cousins' private use and how peasants had been compelled to plough their fields; how they had collected and embezzled taxes, and forced the militiamen to tie up innocent people. . . . Until sunset, one charge followed another, to a total of about three-score.

On the strength of these charges, the district government turned the cousins over to the county government which, after verifying their criminal records, sentenced them to fifteen years' imprisonment besides ordering them to compensate the victims for all losses.

After this mass meeting, the villagers felt emboldened. Soon the village cadres were all re-elected. In view of past experiences, the villagers took the voting seriously this time. Jin Wang's wife, of course, failed to be re-elected as chairman of the Women's National Salvation League. But even she changed her tune and declared that she would try to be more progressive.

The two soothsayers also changed somewhat. How dreadfully embarrassed Third Fairy-maid had been when she found herself mocked at by a crowd of women in the courtyard of the district government! When she came home, she took a good look at herself in the mirror. She realized she had made herself look ridiculous long enough; that, with her daughter getting married soon, she should stop trying to deck herself out. She decided to effect a change in her outfit from top to toe, in keeping with her age. She also removed without further ado the incense-table installed thirty years ago, when she had started invoking her "deities".

When Kong Ming the Second got home from the district government, he kept harping on the conflicting horoscopes of Little Erhei and Little Qin until even his wife lost patience with him.

"Enough of your stupid fortune-telling! Didn't you foretell great danger for Erhei this time? What's the use your predicting this and that all your life? It's about time you gave it up! I think Little Qin is a nice girl, and our son is lucky to get her. What have horoscopes got to do with their marriage? Remember what happened to your 'unsuited for sowing.'" Now that even his wife ridiculed his soothsaying, Kong Ming the Second was ashamed to display it before others.

So, when Little Erhei and Little Qin returned from the district government, they discovered that their parents' outlook had already begun to change. With the help of neighbours, they had little difficulty in persuading their parents to approve of their marriage. The newly-weds led a happy life, and came to be regarded as a model couple in the village.

The two of them often indulged in exchanging a little banter about their parents. Little Erhei would mimic Third Fairy-maid chanting "Marriages are predestined by heaven," while Little Qin

would re-enact how Kong Ming the Second had pleaded with the district head to be "more merciful, their horoscopes don't agree!" Some village urchins, eavesdropping on the young couple, learned to repeat these two phrases. Hence, the two soothsayers were further remembered by their additional nicknames: Third Fairy-maid for her "Marriages are predestined by heaven" and Kong Ming the Second for his "Their horoscopes don't agree!"

1943

Illustrated by He Youzhi



Kang Zhuo

My Two Hosts

I was preparing to move from Lower Village to Upper Village. On the eve of moving I went to Upper Village to take a look at my new lodging. The room allotted to me was in a roadside house in the western part of the village. The owner of the house was an old man named Chen Yongnian.

On my return to Lower Village, Shuanzhu, from whom I was moving, asked me how I had liked the new place and offered to accompany me there on the morrow. I thanked him for his offer, but declined it:

"I haven't got many things, and a cadre like you is a busy man. Since the winter school has just opened, you had better go about your own work."

But he insisted, "It's only about five *li* away! I'm going to the fair tomorrow so we can go together. I've practically got everybody to agree to attend the winter school. So it doesn't matter if I go away for a while." Shuanzhu would not listen to my objections.

The next day, he helped me put my things on his donkey and we started out along the river bank.

It was early winter and the day was fine. It was warm in the sun. The shallow river was crusted with a thin layer of ice. Where

the ice had melted, the water flowed gently and its babbling reminded one of the tinkling of tiny brass bells. We were not the only ones on the way to the fair, but the others had all gone ahead of us. Shuanzhu and I were walking slowly, chatting away. He was not paying much attention to the donkey. The animal was quite clever. She was walking slowly in front of us. Sometimes she would stick out her muzzle to gnaw at the withered grass by the roadside, sometimes she would turn her head to stare at us, as if to tell us she was waiting for us. It was only when Shuanzhu shouted "gee-up, gee-up" that the donkey would quicken her step, although before long she would again slow down.

My former host talked almost all the time about his studies. He said he was very unhappy about my moving away from him.

"From now on, it will be really hard for me to study. Where can I find such a good teacher as you?"

"In studies, it's the pupil himself that counts," I replied, "besides, you're on your feet now, you'll be able to make out all right by yourself."

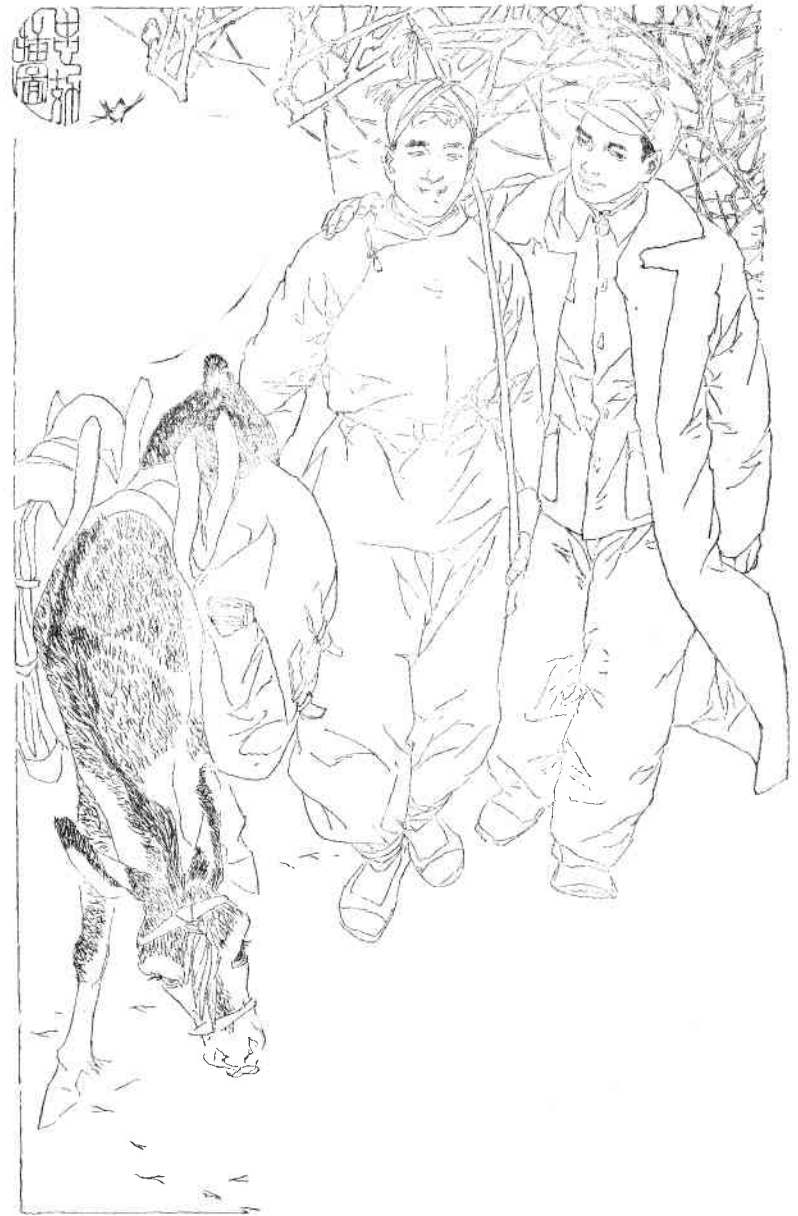
Then he said he would come and visit me, and asked me not to forget him and to teach him just as patiently as I had done in the past.

"Don't forget to buy me a pocket dictionary, Lao Kang! Please keep that in mind!"

"I won't forget it."

"Ah, if I could only have a dictionary!" he murmured as if to himself, and, looking at me, patted me on the shoulder.

Shuanzhu and other young villagers had once seen a pocket dictionary in the director's office of the district branch of the National Salvation Youth League. Since then, almost all the villagers taking part in the literacy courses were always talking about this dictionary. But we were then blockaded by the enemy. To help my pupils, I did everything to find such a dictionary, but in vain. I could not find an old copy of the dictionary even in government organizations. Some of my colleagues had once had such dictionaries, but they had either lost them in the counter-attack against the Japanese or given them to cadres of peasant origin.



For a long while, we both remained silent. Suddenly, Shuanzhu chuckled. Nudging me gently, his eyes gleaming slyly, he asked me,

"Lao Kang, have you a girl friend?"

"I...I... What makes you ask this?" Realizing what he meant, I hastened to add, "I suppose you have a sweetheart?"

"No, no, not yet!" Shuanzhu turned crimson and avoided my eyes, although he smiled. Then he heehawed playfully at the donkey. It was then that I noticed he was wearing a new cotton-padded jacket and a pair of lined trousers instead of his worn-out cotton-padded pants. On his legs were trimly wound puttees and around his waist a belt which he had received when fighting at the front with the Eighth Route Army; his head was tied with a new white towel. There must have been a special reason for him to dress in his best. He was twenty-two, one year my senior. And according to rural customs, he had reached the marriageable age. He was probably going to meet his sweetheart. With these thoughts flashing in my mind, I seized him by the shoulder,

"Shuanzhu, you have a sweetheart, and you are keeping me in the dark!..."

"No, no, nothing of the kind!" He blushed.

Cracking his whip, he drove the donkey far ahead of us. "Hurry up, hurry up..." he mumbled. "Look, we've almost arrived! Let's walk faster!"

We were soon in Upper Village. When I hitched the donkey at the gate and took my things from its back, I saw that Shuanzhu was fidgeting. He was about to bring my things in, but was hesitating. Yet when I tried to do this myself, he anticipated me. It looked as though he had been struggling with himself whether or not to enter the house. Stealing a glance at the house, he finally helped me bring the things in.

"Oh, you are here!" exclaimed an old woman who was my new host's wife. She hobbled into my room with a broom in her hand and quickly climbed on to the *kang* to sweep it for me. Her boy stood timidly at the door, looking in. Seeing a red enamelled cup tied to my knapsack, he slipped into the room and looked at me. I smiled at the boy and this encouraged him and he began to

play with the cup. Shuanzhu and I lit our pipes. Shuanzhu was the only person in the room who looked ill at ease. After a couple of puffs, he put out his pipe. He kept on taking the towel off his head to wipe away the sweat on his face, would suddenly address me only to lapse into silence. . . . I happened to turn my head and saw two women standing at the door.

The one standing outside the room was the girl I had seen the previous day when I came to see the room. As she saw me looking at her, she lowered her head. Fingering a corner of her dress, she said in a low voice, "You've moved already?" The young woman inside the room looked older. She smiled at me and continued stitching a cloth sole. I turned to look at Shuanzhu. He threw the towel on his shoulder and said, "I...I must be going now..."

"Did you come with him?" The girl standing outside asked before I had a chance to say anything. She pushed the other woman forward and both were now in the room.

"I...I am going to the fair. As we were going the same way, I helped him bring his things here!" stammered Shuanzhu.

"You know each other?"

They smiled, but said nothing. Shuanzhu once again removed the towel to wipe away his sweat. At that moment, the boy turned round and, pointing at him, said:

"I know he's the director of the National Salvation Youth League in Lower Village. Isn't he, sister?"

"Yes, he is," the young woman replied casually.

The old woman, having swept clean the *kang*, got down to the floor. Dusting off her dress, she exchanged a few words with me. And then she bombarded Shuanzhu with questions: "From Lower Village? Which is your family? Did you accompany this comrade here?..."

"He's a high-ranking cadre in Lower Village — director of the National Salvation Youth League and captain of the Anti-Japanese Youth Pioneers," the girl at the door answered her mother for Shuanzhu. Then, lifting her face and looking out into the courtyard, she continued, "Mother, do you need anything from the fair?"

"Your father is already at the fair. He will buy everything we need."

"But he's going to the fair, too!"

"Yes, I . . . I must be going now. . . ." mumbled Shuanzhu and turned abruptly to look at the girl. As he approached the door, the girl dropped her head and blushed. I saw Shuanzhu looking back again from the courtyard and noticed that the girl was looking stealthily in his direction. The young woman saw this too and pushed her out of the room.

Left alone, I slowly untied my luggage and took out some stationery. The boy brought me a low-legged table and put it on the *kang*. A moment later, the old woman came in with a handful of dried dates, offered them to me and began to chat.

I learned that there were five persons in the Chen family. The old man was fifty and his wife was three years older. Their boy was called Jinsuo and the two women were their daughters, the younger named Jinfeng. The old woman had gray hair and was rather tall. Her sallowish face was quite round, and there was a rosy tinge on her cheeks. She struck me as a capable housewife — energetic if garrulous. The boy was about eleven. He was curious about everything in my room — my stationery, my toilet articles, my coat. . . .

That afternoon, I came back from a meeting and sat down on the threshold to read a newspaper. My room was in the eastern wing of the house; the western wing was the stable. The two Chen sisters were sitting on the stone steps leading to the northern rooms, doing some needlework. Jinfeng looked, at most, twenty. She had a slender figure and a square-jawed face. Her dark brown eyes sparkled. As the villagers were rather poor, they could not afford calico and floral prints for their dresses. Like other girls in the village, Jinfeng wore a black cotton jacket and trousers, with the latter even patched in some places. But she looked neat and clean. She was mending a pair of her brother's trousers. Her sister looked about thirty. She had a healthy complexion, though there were many wrinkles on her forehead and around the corners of her eyes. Her cotton-padded trousers were tied closely at the ankles. She was still stitching the cloth sole. I was reading the



newspaper, but several times I raised my eyes and looked at them both and I saw that Jinfeng was peeking at me. This embarrassed me and I went to my room.

After supper, I busied myself with making rounds of the living quarters assigned to my colleagues, and was issued with sundry articles. It was dark when I got back. I lit the lamp, intending to take a rest. We were then still using kerosene lamps in the villages. The light attracted the attention of the Chens. The old woman, holding Jinsuo by the hand, came in. Her elder daughter remained standing at the door, busy with the cloth sole. Jinfeng brought a bowl with two millet cakes stuffed with dates. She put it on the *kang* and asked me to eat. At the same time, she peeped at what I had written. I was feeling rather uneasy when the old man came in, nodding and smiling. He pointed with his pipe at the cakes and said, "Help yourself, comrade. That's the best we can offer you. This is the only village around here that produces dates. Quite a rarity, eh?"

I thanked him and then asked, "Just back from the fair? What have you bought?"

"Yes, I've just returned. I've bought some millet and cloth."

"Yes," put in the old woman, "we haven't made ourselves any new clothes for nearly three years. Now with the cloth we're going to make a quilt, some shoes and socks. We'll replace some of our worn clothes and patch others."

The old man squatted beside the *kang* and urged me to eat the cakes. Striking the flint to light his pipe, he picked up where his wife had stopped and said, "Things are not bad this year. We had a democratic movement last autumn. The old village head has been replaced with a good one, and now the Peasants' Association is working well. My rent has been reduced. That's why I have been able to get more grain."

"It doesn't help matters much," said the old woman. "He's supporting the whole family. All have to be fed while none can work."

"I'll work in the fields next year," said Jinfeng.

Her brother Jinsuo, leaning against his mother, piped up, "I'll collect manure and firewood, mother."

"You think you can do it?"

"You'll live better if you all work hard together," I said, eating a cake.

Jinsuo asked his father for a pencil when Jinfeng took out a red-coloured one from her pocket, waved it and cried, "Jinsuo, look!"

There was a scramble for the pencil. The old woman began to scold them. The elder sister leaning against the door shouted at them that they were disturbing me. The old man stood up and said,

"Jinsuo, you've got one too, in mother's sewing basket. Stop scrambling!"

Jinsuo ran away to get the pencil and the others followed him one after another. Jinfeng was the last to leave. She took out a new writing-pad and asked me to write her name on it for her, then begged me to teach her to read and write in my spare time. When after a while she left I walked to the door and saw that the Chens had all returned to their rooms. I was pleased at the thought that I was again fortunate to have good neighbours. To tell the truth, I had found it hard to part with my former host Shuanzhu!

Here, in Upper Village, my life differed little from my life in Lower Village. In the day, I was busy with my work, and no one came to disturb me. In the evening, Jinfeng and Jinsuo often came to learn some Chinese characters from me or to write something. As I also lectured on politics at the village winter school I gradually became acquainted with all the villagers. Sometimes, Jinfeng would bring other girls along with her to learn Chinese characters from me. Once she said:

"Comrade Lao Kang, you should teach us patiently, as patiently as you did . . . as you did . . . when you were teaching Shuanzhu and his friends in Lower Village."

"How did you know that I had taught Shuanzhu and his friends in Lower Village?" I asked surprised.

"Think I don't know?" she countered.

Two of the girls began to whisper to each other and then burst into laughter. Jinfeng jumped at them and playfully pum-

melled them. "Go to the devil!" she shouted laughingly, and they went out, jostling each other.

Shuanzhu turned up quite often. Once he came when the old man was away and the old woman and Jinsuo had taken the donkey to turn the millstone. Shuanzhu came with the same belt around his waist and the same puttees around his legs. After exchanging a few words with me and learning a few characters, he took out a new writing-pad. It seemed to me that I had seen it somewhere. I made some corrections and explained them while reading it through. At the same time, I praised him for the progress he had made.

Just then, the two Chen sisters entered the room. Shuanzhu appeared uneasy, and it looked as if he were sitting on thorns.

The older sister, leaning against the red wardrobe, was sewing cloth socks. She was silent as usual and, her head down, was busy with her work. Jinfeng was stitching her father's cotton-padded shoes. She came smiling to the table on the *kang* and looked at Shuanzhu's writing-pad, "Have you written all this, Shuanzhu?" she asked.

"Of course!"

"Shuanzhu knows more than you!"

"He's a big cadre!" she retorted.

"No more of it, no more of it!" Shuanzhu snatched away his pad and turned to Jinfeng, "How are you getting along with your studies? You should let me see your exercise book, too!"

"Don't worry about my studies. I'll catch up with you in no time, I learn three characters from Lao Kang every day."

"Shuanzhu, how do you know she also has an exercise book?"

My question made Shuanzhu blush. He tried to change the subject. After talking aimlessly for a while, he reminded me of his request — to buy him a dictionary. As he was walking out, Jinfeng ran after him, saying, "Shuanzhu, you may ask the National Salvation Women's League in the village what they think about it. . . ."

The rest of their conversation was inaudible. I heard them whispering for a long while in the courtyard. Jinfeng's sister

looked at me and then into the courtyard, and, sighing, turned to leave the room.

"Say, why don't you learn to read?" I asked her. She sighed again:

"I've been very much upset all this time. I haven't got the patience. . . . Besides, I'm getting old!"

She smiled and left. Why was she so upset? Her smile was so melancholy. . . . Did she really feel old? Since my arrival at this house, I had on many an occasion found her quite jolly in the company of her sister and other village girls. She appeared, at most, about twenty-five! She looked like a married woman. Was she, though?

It was 1940. Democratic elections had been held in the Shanxi-Chahaer-Hebei Border Region. The Eighth Route Army had just launched several battles against the enemy. On August 13, the Shanxi-Chahaer-Hebei Sub-bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China promulgated a twenty-article administrative programme for this border region. It was my job to explain the programme to the villagers and I began to do it during the political study hour at the winter school. The people of the border region were deeply interested in it. Although Jinfeng attended the explanations of the programme at the winter school, she would come to my room the following evening and would ask me to explain it again. Her father, mother and Jinsuo would come with her. Even her sister, who appeared indifferent to studies, would occasionally drop in to listen. While I explained, they would raise a number of questions. They never seemed tired although they had to sit up late at night. Jinsuo would sometimes doze off in his mother's arms. At other times, he would stand on the *kang*, throw his arms around my neck and bombard me with all sorts of questions: "What does a Communist look like? Have you ever seen a Communist? How is it that the Communist Party is so good? . . ." At such times, Jinfeng, who usually sat opposite me, would glower at her brother and would not look at me until her mother had led Jinsuo away. Then her eyes would brighten up. After listening to me for some time, she would bend over the small table on the *kang* and jot down something in her notebook.

The Chen family led a peaceful life. During the slack season in winter, the two sisters occupied themselves with needlework; the old man fed the pigs and raked manure; the boy went out with his father to cut firewood on the slope of the hill. The old woman's work consisted of cooking, watching the donkey turn the millstone and feeding the chickens. Life in the democratic region continued to improve. The land rent paid by the Chen family was further reduced. To tell the truth, they were pretty well-off and could afford steamed bread several times a month.

But there was something wrong with the family. They were often quarrelling, although they did not raise much noise. They squabbled in their own rooms, so I was at a loss to figure out what was the matter. I asked every one of them about it, but no one would tell me anything, although Jinsuo once remarked as if casually:

"It's all about my elder sister!"

"What about her?" I demanded.

"I don't know!"

Once, after a long squabble, the old man ran out into the courtyard, mad as a bull. Rushing out, I saw him facing the rooms where the Chens lived, stamping his feet and sputtering away:

"I... I'll have nothing to do with that! You... you decide it yourselves, I refuse to bother about it!"

Then he walked out, fuming. I asked him what it was all about, but he would not answer me. What had happened in the northern rooms? Who was it weeping convulsively there? I asked Jinsuo, and he told me it was his elder sister. I decided it would be tactless to ask any more questions and retired to my own room still wondering.

One day at noon, I went to the winter school to lecture on the administrative programme to women. In the evening, the Chens came to my room rather early. I was occupied with some work, so I suggested answering their questions the next day. Jinfeng's sister, unlike her usual self, smiled and insisted:

"Better today. After you've finished, we'll..."

"Please, Lao Kang!" urged Jinfeng. I was forced to give in. I saw the old man was not there and asked whether we should

wait for him. They said, "Let's go ahead without him!" So I started.

That day I spoke about the fourteenth article of the programme. I explained one article every three or five days and thus many days had already passed since I began the explanations. It was early January, and the small village was hit by an extremely cold spell. It had snowed in the morning and the sky had been overcast the whole day. I shivered with cold. I removed the small table and told them to sit on the *kang* around a charcoal brazier. Jinfeng's sister put away her needlework on top of the red wardrobe, but would not sit on the *kang*. She stood by, listening silently with her head down. The old woman kept looking at me and saying "yes, yes" every time I had uttered a couple of words. Jinfeng was very inquisitive. The article I explained that day was about women's problems — about women's social status, marriage, child marriage, divorce... Jinfeng asked me a string of questions: "What is a child bride?" "Why must a man be twenty and a woman eighteen before they can get married?" and so on. Her sister would lift her head every now and then to look at me.

A gust of wind was rising outside, whistling. The door of my room had not been tightly closed, and was suddenly thrown open. The flame of my lamp flickered in the wind. Jinsuo, who had fallen asleep on my overcoat, nestled closer to me, mumbling, "Mummy, mummy..." I heard someone cough outside my window. I immediately called out, "Who is it?" Jinfeng shouted, "Father!" But there was no response. Her sister closed the door, and I resumed my talk.

I spent more time than usual to explain the article, and Jinfeng asked more questions than ever before. I was dead tired when they left. Nevertheless, I continued to work late into the night to finish my job.

I got up very late the next day, hastily took a snack, and went to a meeting. On my return, the Chens were preparing lunch. Jinfeng's sister was working the bellows on the kitchen stove outside the northern rooms while, inside, the old woman was grumbling at somebody. Jinfeng's sister suddenly let go of the bellows and shouted:

"Mother, you shouldn't be so stubborn! You've already made me miserable and you want to do the same thing to Jinfeng. . . . Can't you see how much the world has changed?"

I didn't know what had happened in the family. I had been too busy with my work those few days to occupy myself with their business. For three whole days there had been a meeting of the cadres in my organization and I felt relieved when the meeting was over.

The weather was fine, and after breakfast I went to the playground in the southern part of the village to play basketball with some comrades. On my way, I saw Chen Yongnian riding his donkey in a southerly direction. I remembered that recently he had appeared downcast. So I went up to him and asked:

"Where are you going?"

"Eh? I'm going to look up a relative."

He still looked a bit depressed. What on earth was happening? I played basketball for a while and then returned home. When Jinfeng's sister saw me enter the courtyard, she smiled at me in greeting. Jinfeng hastened to tug at her sister's sleeve and struck her playfully.

The sister continued to smile at me and I smiled back. I asked them what it was all about. Jinfeng, her head hanging down, ran inside. Jinsuo asked me, "What do you eat these few days?" His eldest sister said, "Aren't you going to eat something better tomorrow?" I told them, "I've been eating millet all these days!" What did they mean, I wondered. Why were they asking me all these questions? Jinfeng's sister appeared changed, smiling at me slyly all the time. And Jinfeng would just scamper away without uttering a word every time she saw me. She even stopped learning Chinese characters from me. At the winter school, whenever I happened to look at her, she would blush. I was very much perplexed.

The next day, I saw Jinfeng killing a hen and saw the Chens preparing steamed bread. Jinfeng blushed and slipped away every time she saw me, while her sister kept smiling at me. Then the old woman unexpectedly invited me to dinner in the afternoon. I did my best to decline the invitation, but she pulled me by the

hand and Jinsuo did the same. I said, "I'll be criticized if I accept your invitation."

"Criticized? You've got to come even if you get beaten up later. The dinner is prepared especially for you. We've some serious business to discuss with you."

I stepped into the northern room, red in the face and greatly puzzled. The small table on the *kang* had been washed very clean and there were chopsticks and wine cups on it. Jinsuo brought in a jug of hot wine and the old woman filled my cup to the brim. I was so nervous I could hardly speak. Suddenly I heard the two sisters arguing in whispers outside the window near the stove.

"You serve it!"

"No, I won't!"

"All right, then. It's not for me, anyway!" This was followed by a suppressed laugh. It sounded like the elder sister. Then I heard Jinfeng's voice again, "Please!"

"Don't beg me! Better beg him!" And the elder sister giggled again.

"Oh, go to the devil!" Then Jinfeng came in bringing a sumptuous dish and steamed bread, and, with her head lowered, she tried hard not to look at me. Having placed the dish and steamed bread on the table, she rushed out, glowing in the face. Immediately, the two sisters began to whisper and argue anew.

Having forced me to finish a cup of wine and a leg of the chicken, the old woman sent Jinsuo away and turned to me:

"Didn't you say that evening, Lao Kang, that women are now allowed to choose their own husbands? That when a couple don't get along well, they are allowed to break up, to. . . . Eh, how do you say it? You see, I've forgotten it again, oh, yes, to divorce each other? I've invited you over exactly for this. You. . . Lao Kang, you don't know how unhappy I have been!"

The old woman sat opposite me across the small table on the *kang*. She kept wiping away her tears with the corner of her dress after every two or three sentences, but the tears continued gushing out. She blinked and bent forward closer to me, "It is now eight years since my elder daughter was married at sixteen. Her husband is ten years her senior. In her husband's home, she was ill-treated

by her in-laws and they even refused to give her food. She has been unhappy all these years and it makes my heart ache to mention it. She is my flesh and blood, after all!"

The old woman was weeping so bitterly she could not go on with her story. I was astonished to learn that the elder sister was only twenty-four.

"When did she come back?" I asked.

"She came here last autumn and has refused to return to her husband. I was told that . . . that . . . he was going around with a bad woman! Besides, his home is in the enemy-occupied area!"

"Why not divorce him? She has good reasons to do so!" I said.

I was confounded by the old woman's tears and the story of her elder daughter's unhappy marriage.

She continued, "Lao Kang, I want to speak now of my second daughter, Jinfeng. She is now nineteen and at fourteen she was engaged to a boy also ten years older than her. They say that he has made no progress and he was even criticized last autumn. I've seen that fellow. . . . Please help yourself, Lao Kang!"

She replenished my cup and passed me some chicken.

"He's as ugly as he is good-for-nothing. All he does is talk, eat and drink. They say he is also keeping a bad woman! A few months ago, God knows where, he saw my daughter, and since then he has been pressing for the wedding, asking that she be sent over this winter. Jinfeng refused to go and her sister backed her. So I have put off the matter for as long as possible. Now the fellow's family say that they will definitely take her away next spring. Lao Kang, what do you say to this? Oh, my fate is. . . ."

"You can cancel the engagement!" I said.

"What do you mean?" The old woman, it seemed, had not understood me.

"Didn't you say that they were only engaged? Now Jinfeng does not like the fellow. If he is really backward, it is perfectly all right to break off the engagement."

"Is it all right?" she appeared incredulous.

"Of course!"

The old woman opened wide her eyes and sighed as though she

had been relieved of a heavy load. She hastened to offer me another drink. I took a sip and relaxed. Glancing at the door I saw somebody sitting on the threshold. It seemed to be the old woman's elder daughter, but as she was partly hidden by the door, I could not say so for sure. Then, in the paper window, I saw the shadow of a woman eavesdropping; but as soon as I looked, the shadow disappeared. I turned to the old woman again, and the shadow reappeared in the window. Then I remembered how Jinfeng's sister had stared at me when I was explaining to them that windy night the meaning of divorce. No clause regarding the cancellation of an engagement had been included in the administrative programme and I had also forgotten to speak about it. That night, as I recalled now, Jinfeng appeared to have some questions she wanted to ask me, but had left without doing so.

"Lao Kang, we've agreed among ourselves that we should, first of all, solve Jinfeng's problem and then her sister's. Didn't you say that a divorce was allowed by the programme? Since that night, my elder daughter has been very happy. That night you didn't say that Jinfeng's matter could be settled too. That's why later we quarrelled over it!"

The old woman shut her mouth and looked as if she was displeased with me, then she smiled.

"Look here! If a married couple are allowed to get divorced, why can't an unmarried couple break off their engagement?" I asked.

"How stubborn we have been! But my husband is even worse. You know, he has gone to see what has become of Jinfeng's fiancé. We'll wait until he comes back."

"Well, there won't be any more trouble. If you have well-founded reasons, you may go to the village or district government and have the thing straightened out immediately."

In the courtyard, the two Chen sisters were again making fun of each other. Jinsuo came in and his mother gave him dinner. I left. When I got into the courtyard, the elder sister was laughing and clapping her hands. I told them it was time for them to take their meal. Jinfeng, her face red, rushed into the northern

room. Her sister smiled at me and then ran after Jinfeng, shouting happily, "Everything is all right now!"

After this, the whole family appeared happier with the exception of Chen Yongnian who remained silent after his return, and for several days did not speak to me. Every day, I saw him talking to village elders or standing at street corners chatting with village cadres. Some time later, these village cadres talked to me about Jinfeng's case and told me that her fiancé was really backward and was probably up to no good. Soon afterwards, I learned from the village cadres that the district government had annulled their engagement. When I came home, I asked Jinfeng's sister and she told me all about it. She added that she herself would divorce her husband next spring.

Trivial as it might seem, the whole thing filled me with joy. Disregarding Jinfeng's bashfulness, I started joking with her, and she became less shy with me. She went on learning Chinese characters and pursued political studies with greater enthusiasm. She now often came to my room in the day-time, sometimes to study, sometimes just to talk for a while.

Time passed quickly. It snowed twice, and we had two windstorms. Then came the lunar New Year. One morning, I was buried in work when Shuanzhu suddenly turned up. He had not been around for about twenty days. He still wore the same belt and the same puttees; on his head was a black, cotton-padded cap he had made himself and in his hands a parcel.

"Haven't got anything really good, Lao Kang. These twenty eggs are my New Year gift to you."

I wanted to tell him off. Why give me a gift of all things! He handed me his notebook to read. Seeing a newly-published copy of *Yangko Opera** on my desk, he took it away.

"Ha, I've been looking for some plays for our village troupe. This is just the right sort of book for us!"

I was then very busy, so I told him that I had no time to read his notes right away. He said there was no hurry and added that he would come back in a few days. Soon he began to talk with

* A popular song and dance opera in the Liberated Area played in the open air.

someone outside. It turned out to be Jinfeng to whom he was whispering. Later they entered my room and, leaning themselves against the big red wardrobe, continued to talk. I was so engrossed in my own writing that I did not pay the least attention to their conversation.

After the New Year holidays, Shuanzhu came even more frequently. He would come once every five or six days, always at noon, when I was taking a rest. He would call me as soon as he entered the courtyard. I would walk out and tell him to come in, but he would never do so. There in the courtyard he would give me his notebook or have a brief talk with me and then leave hurriedly. It was a custom with the Chen sisters to sit on the doorsteps in front of the northern room doing needlework in the day-time, but later I learned that Jinfeng would go inside the northern room every time Shuanzhu came. Since for some time they had not greeted each other or talked in my presence, I was greatly puzzled. Had they quarrelled? Yet, this was contradicted by the rumours in the village, "Jinfeng and Shuanzhu are seeking freedom, they are in love..." I asked Jinfeng's sister about it, and she said:

"They've been on good terms for quite a long time. These last few days there seems to be something wrong with them. I asked Jinfeng about it, but she won't say anything. You'd better ask Shuanzhu about it!"

Shuanzhu would not tell me anything either. When I asked him, he just smiled and blushed, then told me to "Wait and see".

The rumours continued to circulate. The village cadres and my colleagues even began to question me about it. What did I know? All I knew was that Shuanzhu continued to come to see me, to ask me a question or two, that he did not enter my room, and that he did not talk with Jinfeng. The moment he came, Jinfeng would disappear into the northern room. I further learned that Jinfeng often went out. One day, Jinsuo rushed in, wheezing out:

"Oh, oh... Sister Jinfeng's gone to the date grove with Shuanzhu..."

"Why make such a fuss about it?" The old man glared at the boy.

"I saw it myself!" Jinsuo said.

The old man stamped his feet and ran into the northern room, cursing. I pulled Jinsuo aside and questioned him, but he told me nothing definite. The rumours were still in the air. The old man seemed to be in a frightful temper; he had not spoken to me for many days and constantly upbraided his wife or elder daughter, often without reason. Yet every time he saw Jinfeng return, he would walk off angrily, but without a harsh word.

The days were getting warmer; it was spring again. Willow catkins were floating about, tender green leaves on the date trees were sprouting and little greenish flowers were appearing on their twigs. The villagers began to fertilize the fields and to prepare for sowing. One evening, after supper, I took a spade and went to a field in the western part of the village to work my organization's vegetable plot. Returning home, I met a comrade who wanted to have a talk with me. We sat down under a locust tree near the field. The rays of the setting sun were bathing the gate of the house where I lived. I saw a large group of girls sitting outside the gate, busy making shoes for the army. There was a lot of noise over there. Suddenly I saw Shuanzhu approaching from the northern end of the road with a spade on his shoulder. The girls must have spotted Shuanzhu too, for they tugged and jostled one another although none of them said anything. Slowly, one after another, they slipped inside the gate, carrying their benches with them. Jinfeng was the only girl to remain outside, as though she did not know what had happened around her. She turned her head to look back until he had left the gate far behind him and was about to turn. Then he paused every few steps to look back. And I clearly saw that Jinfeng, bending her head over her work, was following him with her eyes.

I did not sleep well that night. Early the next morning, I went to Lower Village to see Shuanzhu. He had not got up yet. His mother, elder brother and sister-in-law greeted me. While preparing breakfast for me, his mother said:

"Something queer has happened to him these last few days. He keeps quiet all day long and is listless. When we ask him

if he is ill, he says no. He works silently in the field after each meal."

"Don't worry, I'll help him out of it," I comforted her.

I pulled Shuanzhu out of bed and after breakfast we went to the field together. We sat on an elevated path in the field, and I asked him:

"What's the matter? Now let's be frank and tell me all about it!"

He refused to say anything. I spent a long time persuading him, but he remained silent. I lost patience and rising to my feet, shouted at him:

"Why are you so backward? And you a cadre too!"

He smiled at me, nudging me to sit down again, and said:

"To tell you the truth, I've been thinking about asking your advice."

"I'm at your service. Out with it!"

"I've been in love with Jinfeng for a long time. We promised each other a long time ago that we'd marry!"

"Then why keep it a secret?"

"Oh, we're real gawks! We're so bashful we don't know how to go about it and whom to consult."

"Why have you stopped speaking with each other?"

"Ha . . . we've spoken quite a lot!"

Shuanzhu hugged me and laughed. He said he had been calling on me for the sole purpose of meeting Jinfeng. Their rendezvous was a secluded corner in the date grove. And they arranged the time of their meetings by secret signals on the paper window-panes of my host's northern room. When I heard this, I gave him a poke and burst into laughter. He blushed, buried his face in his hands, and chuckled. I decided to make fun of him a little.

"And what did you do with her?"

"Nothing! I didn't dare! I only shook hands with her just as you do when you meet women."

I nudged him again. He felt embarrassed and went to work in the field. I told him I was sure his courtship would be successful. Then I returned to his home. When I told the story to his mother and elder brother, they said they had no objection to his marrying

Jinfeng. I returned to Upper Village and spoke about it to the old woman and Jinfeng's sister. They said that they also agreed to her marriage and that the only objections came from the obstinate old man. That evening, I invited him over and talked with him patiently. After I had finished, he said:

"I don't really object to this marriage, either." He chuckled and puffed at his pipe. "The trouble is, Lao Kang, I . . . uh . . . my way of thinking lags far behind that of the young people. Let me first talk it over with my friends. Agreed?"

The question remained to be settled when I set out for the countryside. I left the matter with the village cadres, and wrote letters to the National Salvation Women's League and the National Salvation Youth League before I went to work in another county.

I could not help thinking about the matter. After twenty days, I hurried back to Upper Village. On my way, I saw a *Pocket Dictionary for Students* at the fair in Shanbei Village. I bought it at once. I was sorry there was only one copy of it.

Jinfeng snatched the dictionary as soon as she saw it. I was very much annoyed, and told her that Shuanzhu had asked me to buy him this dictionary more than a year before that. But she refused to give it back and asked me how much it cost.

Two days later, after I had reported to my superior, the village cadres told me that Shuanzhu and Jinfeng's problem had been satisfactorily settled and that, with the approval of both families, they had become engaged. I was delighted and rushed home to congratulate Jinfeng, but she was out turning the millstone with her mother. When her sister came out, I asked her:

"Jinfeng has become engaged to Shuanzhu?"

"Yes. I've been divorced too!" she announced.

"They exchanged gifts the other day," she went on. "Shuanzhu gave her two towels, two pairs of stockings, some books and pencils. She gave him that dictionary she had snatched from you, a pair of shoes, a pair of socks, some exercise books and pencils."

"What are you babbling about?" Jinfeng asked, coming in. When I laughed loudly and bowed to congratulate her, she blushed. Jinfeng's sister took out a new towel from her pocket, waved it before my eyes and handed it to me, saying to Jinfeng, "There

must be a towel for Lao Kang, I guess. When I learned that Lao Kang had returned, I took for him one of the towels which Shuanzhu had given you. What do you say? All right?"

"That's a good idea!" her mother interposed, stepping in. Jinfeng snatched away the towel from her sister, and, looking at me from the corner of her eyes, she said, "He is going to have one anyway! This afternoon Shuanzhu will bring him a towel and a pair of socks which I have made myself. That towel is even better than this!"

Jinsuo came home at this moment. Everybody was laughing. He jumped, craned his neck and shouted, "Hurray!" Then the old man entered the courtyard and, smiling and stamping his feet, he murmured, "Good, good. . . ." He looked at us and then disappeared into the northern room.

1946

Illustrated by Zhan Zhongxiao

Pan Zhiding

The Young Couple's Dilemma

An outsider might exchange compliments with a villager if they met by chance. Even total strangers encountering each other on the road might greet each other. But hardly a word passed between the Zhou family. Something was obviously wrong. Why, they weren't even as friendly as strangers!

Their family relations ought to have been harmonious. All three of them were good people. Manzi was an honest peasant, twenty-four years old. With his deep-set eyes, he looked a kind man. His wife, Wang Yulian, was nineteen years old and clever. She came from a big village in Yanan County, where there were some shops and small factories, as well as a school and some soldiers. Her village was quite lively, the girls had learnt how to sing and dance and she liked gaiety and fun. Zhou's mother was fifty-one years old, good-natured and thrifty, who had worked hard all her life. After the death of his father the winter before last, Zhou had married Yulian the following year. Although young, she was good at needlework, cooking and grinding flour. Zhou was a capable farmer. So what was wrong? All the villagers wondered.

"Bet she looks down on him for being simple and stupid."

"Of course, she would! But he's not simple or stupid, is he?"

"She's from a bigger place. Likes to have a good time. Must be bored in our quiet valley."

They concluded Yulian was too young and immature and needed help. In the old days, who would have cared? But ours is a new society.

One day after the autumn harvest, the head of the local women's committee, Aunt Chen, dropped in to have a chat with Zhou's mother. Both sat cross-legged on the *kang*, Aunt Chen making the sole of a shoe while she talked. Yulian was grinding some buckwheat flour outside and couldn't hear clearly what was being said because of the noise. When the donkey pulling the millstone paused automatically for a moment, Yulian heard Aunt Chen say: "... Ask him to plead with her. It's bound to work..." Yulian blushed as if she had heard something embarrassing. Raising her small hand on which she wore two silver-plated rings, she patted the donkey's rump and shouted: "Giddyap!" With a swish of its tail, the beast began to move, turning the stone with a grating sound.

Later that night, the couple went to bed. After some time Manzi turned to his wife, who lay without stirring. Yulian caught her breath, her heart pounding, expecting something unusual to happen. "I..." he began. "I just wondered..." He paused to see if she was responding. Yulian coughed to show she was listening. He continued: "Are you angry with my mother?"

Both of them were red with embarrassment, but fortunately it was too dark to see.

"No!" The girl's voice sounded a little hoarse.

"With me then?"

"No!"

"Can't you say more than that?" His voice was strained.

There was no reply.

"Oh, shit!" he cursed, and then turned over again.

The room was still. After a while came the sound of footsteps and a deep sigh. Zhou's mother had been eavesdropping. Now she was heading for her room. The night air was chilly and she shivered as she opened the door. There was a sudden commotion from the hen coop by their cave home. A hen clucked and her

chickens cheeped. Then silence was resumed.

A winter school was opened, and both Manzi and Yulian were enrolled. He went in the evenings, while she attended in the mornings. They studied very hard. She was quicker than he.

They were still not on very good terms, however. After some weeks, Aunt Chen went to discuss the matter with one of the teachers, hoping to enlist his help in putting things right. The teacher agreed to carry out her plan.

Yulian learnt many characters at school and was beginning to be happier and livelier. One day, while talking to her, the teacher hinted that she ought to make it up with her husband. Later he also had a frank talk to Manzi offering his advice.

After school one night, the teacher said as he took out a newspaper: "Since the night is still young, I'll read you some news."

"Fine! Great!" Everyone was delighted.

"The more the better!"

"Read us something about the Russian October Revolution!"

.....

The young peasants were very enthusiastic.

"O.K. I'll start," the teacher said, "but on one condition. The women students are busy washing dishes and feeding the pigs and dogs before coming to school. They only have less than two hours study each day and no time at all to read the newspapers. You remember what I say to you and then tell them. If you agree, I'll read the paper every day to you. What do you think?"

"Agreed. Fair enough!"

"No problem!"

"What about you, Manzi?" the teacher asked in a friendly way.

"Well . . . all right."

"Mind you, I'll give them all a test later."

The class looked at Manzi. After a moment he hesitated and said: "But what if she won't listen to me?" Then he continued as if talking to himself: "Whenever I speak to her, she just pulls a long face as if I've done something wrong. I can't bear it. . . ."

"Oh . . . never mind. Don't worry. You should. . . ."

Everyone put their heads together to help him. After this the teacher read the paper to them for an hour.

The next day the teacher questioned the women to see if the men had kept their word. To start with, no one dared speak. But gradually they answered the questions, including Yulian. Pleased, the teacher chatted with them after the lesson. He helped them to form family self-help groups, where either the husband or the wife would be the assistant teacher. When the teacher listed the assistants, everyone except Aunt Chen giggled.

"There's nothing to laugh about!" she tried to stop them, until she herself began laughing.

"One more thing," announced the teacher. "It concerns Zhou Manzi. He missed the lesson 'Run the Household Together' that we had two days ago because he was on sentry duty. Yulian, will you teach him that?"

The girl blushed, glaring at the teacher like a child. But pressured by the teacher she at last said in embarrassment: "What if he's too busy?"

"Too busy at night?" the others teased her.

"Yes. You can help him tonight, can't you?" suggested the teacher. "All you assistants must do your job. . . . Well, you must be hungry now. Time for home."

That evening, Yulian was busy spinning yarn in her mother-in-law's room while the older woman podded the beans ready for the next day's meals. They were waiting for Manzi to return from night school. The kerosene lamp burned low. Then a dog barked, and they heard the noise of shuffling feet. In came Manzi. After a few words, his mother urged him to go to bed.

Manzi lit the lamp in his room and then to his surprise saw his wife groping in her pocket for something. He looked at her, wide-eyed.

At last she produced a crushed text-book and said: "The teacher said you had missed one lesson and that you'd better learn it tonight."

So she wants me to make up what I missed, he thought. "O.K." he smiled.

They moved the light over to the *kang* which served as the table. While one leant over the *kang*, the other lay along it.

They looked at the lesson. Yulian read first while Manzi followed, their heads close together.

Yulian said, "This is *mu* and this is *lu*."

"Ah, *yu*."

"Not *yu, lu!*"

"Oh, no? *Yu!*"

The inexperienced young teacher did not know what to say and so she laughed, embarrassing her husband. However, when Manzi looked at his cheerful wife, he couldn't help laughing too. They carried on until he got everything right. Then she explained the text. It was easy at the beginning, but she found it difficult to go deeper because of their own problems. Still, she did what she could.

"I understand it now," Manzi said after a while.

"You should learn to write the words tomorrow," she smiled at him.

"You're tired. We'd better get some sleep."

But Manzi got down from the *kang* and made for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To give some more food to the horses."

"I've done it already."

"You! . . . That was very considerate!"

"Oh, come off it!"

"How about going to bed?"

They laughed again, for no obvious reason.

Hearing their happy laughter, Zhou's mother heaved a sigh of relief and said to herself: "Thank goodness! It's all because of. . . . Now everything's fine again."

1945



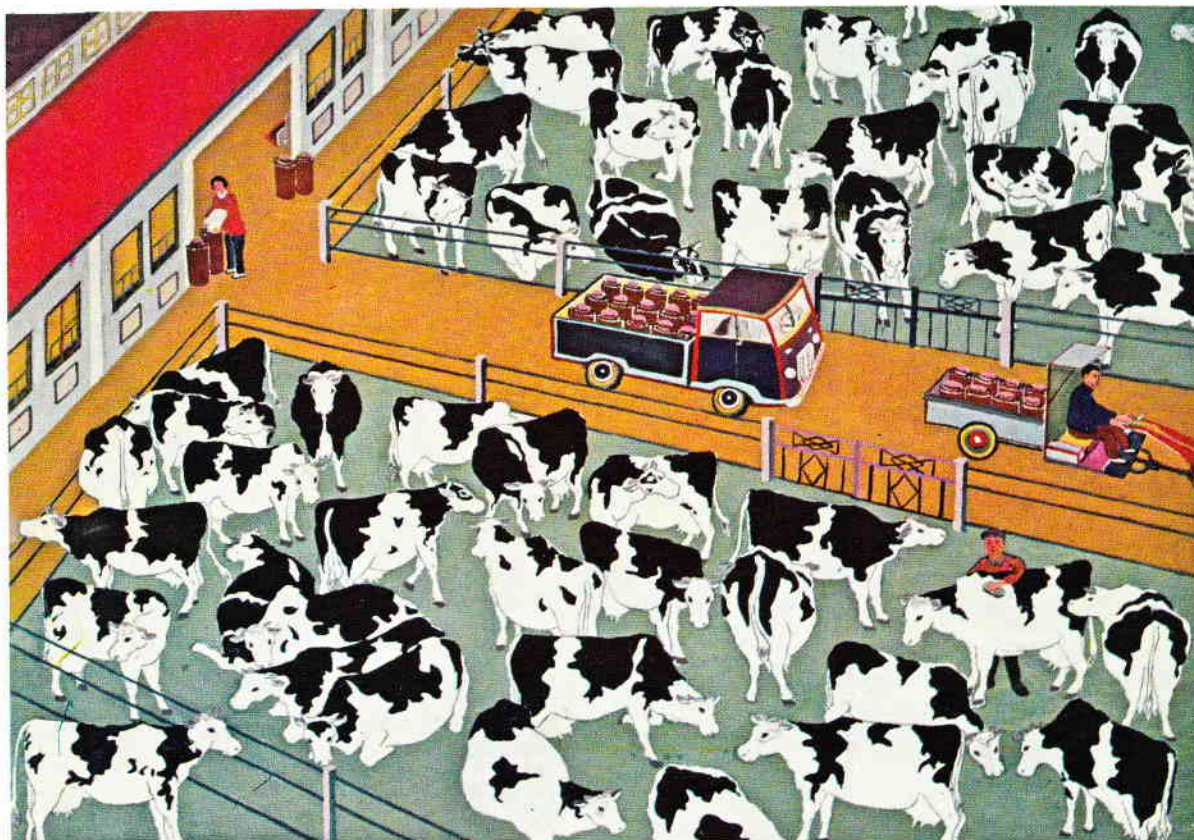
The Girl Collecting Medicinal Herbs

by Cao Xiuwen



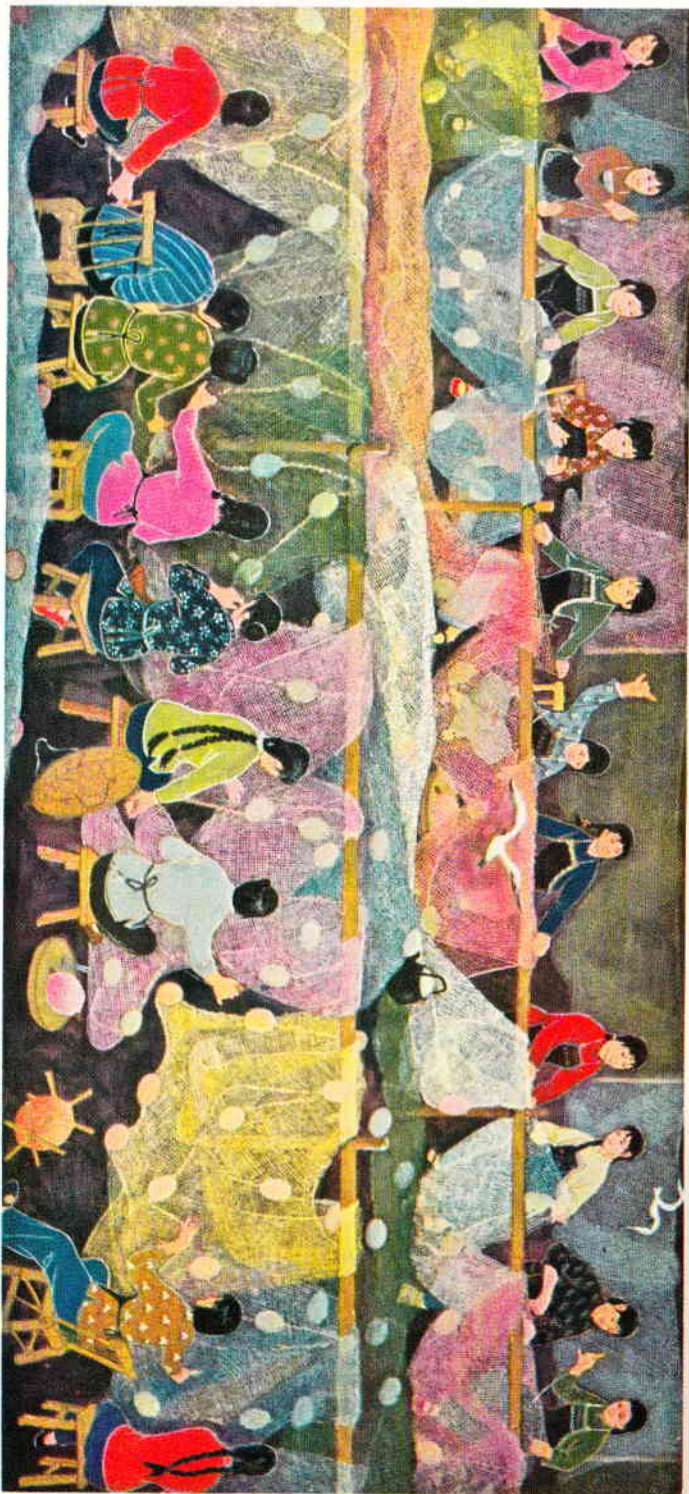
Beautiful Yangzi Valley

by Weng Shuguang



The Dairy Farm

by Shen Dexian



Wu Tongzhang

Jinshan County Peasant Paintings

China is an agricultural country, with eighty per cent of its people peasants. All art originates from productive labour, when people devote their spare time to creative pursuits. Thus China's vast peasant population has produced a rich amateur art. In *Chinese Literature*, No. 12, 1973, were featured peasant paintings from Huxian County in Shaanxi Province. In this issue are introduced peasant paintings from Jinshan County, a southern suburb of Shanghai near Hangzhou Bay. The district is rich and fertile, with beautiful scenery, so that the peasants are susceptible to beauty and have a strong folk art tradition. Their blue batik work is delightful and their furniture exquisitely carved. Many homes have painted designs over their fireplaces. Women weave, embroider and do other needlework with great skill. At New Year and on other festivals, New-Year paintings and scissor-cuts adorn the homes. It is from this tradition that the peasant paintings have been derived. As early as 1958, when they first established the people's communes, the amateur artists decorated their village with murals reflecting their joy at the setting up of their commune and their determination to transform their country. Since then, peasant paintings with a strong local flavour have developed. Now there are more than three hundred amateur artists including men

and women, old and young. Local people love to see small exhibitions of these paintings when they are held at the village fairs or in the county town.

Lu Xun once said: "Art must have local colour." This is true of the peasant paintings with their local flavour and realistic imagery. The relationship between their art and their collective labour is deep. The paintings are usually very decorative with vivid colours and artistic exaggeration for a romantic effect. The themes reflect their collective life and labour, instead of any one artist's style or personal feelings. In this they differ from the work of professional artists. These are, of course, features in common with all Chinese peasant paintings, yet because of different localities and traditions, each shows some local characteristic whether in the choice of theme, its expression or use of colour. This is evident when we compare the Huxian peasant paintings with those of Jinshan. Jinshan County is south of the Changjiang (Yangzi) River, whereas Huxian is on the northwest loess plateau. In the former, as the women are skilled in needlework and weaving, their paintings are more decorative and vivid.

The painting, *The Commune Fishpond*, adopts the local batik style to depict the scenery. The artist, Cao Jinying, is a peasant woman aged forty-five. As a young girl, she was already known for her beautiful embroidery. People in her village called her "Sister Clever-fingers". The pillows, curtain borders and aprons she embroidered combined traditional art patterns with new themes reflecting the new society after Liberation. One day she found some of the embroidery she made when she was young in a suitcase and decided to air it in the courtyard. The embroidery looked splendid in the sun and caught the attention of a local cadre, who had dropped in to pay a visit. He was so impressed that he asked her to try and create peasant paintings. Since then she has been participating in this work. *The Commune Fishpond* is her second painting.

The Girl Collecting Medicinal Herbs is by a girl, Cao Xiuwen, whose job it is to collect medicinal herbs for her brigade. These herbs are profuse in the Yangzi Valley and the artist has had practical experience. She was inspired by popular lacquer work

to use black as a background, and the flowers vividly highlight the girl in the centre. Her painting has a unique style.

Weng Shuguang, who painted *Collecting Pigweed*, is a young peasant who frequently works on a boat. In Jinshan County pig-breeding is encouraged, and water-plants in the many rivers and streams are utilized as pig-fodder. Adapting designs from folk embroidery, this young artist has created a lovely work expressing his enthusiasm for the new society.

In the county there is also a dairy farm. An older artist, fifty-three-year-old Shen Dexian, has this as his theme for his painting *The Dairy Farm*. He has always loved drawing animals and has produced many fine pictures of farm animals such as cows, horses, pigs and sheep. Mainly in black with a white background, this painting owes something to the tradition of decorating the fireplaces. The effect is simple but decorative.

As well as the unique local flavour of the Jinshan peasant paintings, there is a discernible individuality among some young artists. The painters of *The Fishing Harbour* and *Making Nets* live near Hangzhou Bay and their families have been fishermen for several generations. Yet the styles of these two paintings are quite different. The former employs strong bright colour to suggest the busy life of the harbour, and the composition is very decorative. The latter gives an effect of tranquillity and relaxation.

The Jinshan peasant paintings have been exhibited twice in Shanghai in recent years and were highly praised. This year on 16th January, the Shanghai Cultural Bureau, the Jinshan County Revolutionary Committee and Shanghai Artists' Association jointly organized a meeting to give the peasant artists awards. The county's local cultural centre which did much to help the peasants in their artistic work was presented with a banner of honour and ten of the amateur artists, including Cao Xiuwen, Cao Jinying and Shen Dexian received awards.

Qiao Xiangzhong and Wu Gengshun

Tang Dynasty Poets (I)

The Tang Dynasty (618-907) was the golden age of Chinese feudal society. Its prosperity created a splendid civilization with a rich heritage of literature, music, painting, sculpture and calligraphy.

Tang literary achievements are varied. There were the *chuanqi* or prose romances, the precursors of later longer ones. Prose was developed into the form in which it remained for the next thousand years and more. Poetry reached a standard which was never surpassed in the feudal period. Some fifty thousand Tang poems still survive, written by more than two thousand poets, the most famous of whom are Li Bai, Du Fu and Bai Juyi. There were also many others whose distinctive styles influenced later poets.

Tang-dynasty poetry can be divided into three periods, early, middle and late Tang, which correspond to the rise and decline of the dynasty. The poetry of each period shows its unique features. In this first article, we shall introduce early and middle Tang poetry and some of its main poets.

In the early period from 618 to 712, a little less than one hundred years, classical poetry began to change from the euphuistic, formalistic style into a more vigorous one. Emperor Taizong, the founder of the Tang empire, loved literature and encouraged the flourishing of poetry, but the early poems were still artificial and ornate. His reign produced no great poets.

During the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian, who declared herself emperor and reigned for fifty years, court poets wrote for her amusement, but their poems were all insipid eulogies devoid of real content. There was, however, emphasis on musical quality and eloquence. A new form of poetry began to develop, however, and among its writers were Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen.

Apart from these court poets were some minor officials, who were politically frustrated. Among these were the four greatest poets of that early period, Wang Bo, Yang Jiong, Lu Zhaolin and Le Binwang. They were not limited to the forms of court poetry but also commented on society. They played an influential role in changing the poetical trend. They were followed by Chen Zi'ang (661-702). He was a more original poet with sound political views and ideals, who strongly rebelled against the fashionable court poetry. He launched a fierce attack on its moribund, vacuous style. Instead he advocated learning from the ancient poets and demanded that poetry must reflect social reality and be clearly expressed. He wrote thirty-eight short poems expressing his thoughts and ideals. In one of these he imagined himself as a frontier guard, voicing his indignation at being held in a low post unable to serve his country better. In another short four-line poem about ascending a tower in Yiuzhou, he expressed his frustrations and his idealism. His poetry reflected his desire to change the style of poetry. Thus he is regarded as one of the exponents of the new style in poetry.

The middle Tang period in poetry was from 713 to 770, when many great Tang poets emerged, finally establishing the new form of classical poetry. Social life was reflected in all its aspects by these poets, and this period is considered the peak of Tang poetic achievement.

One aspect of life depicted was the countryside. Landlords,

who owned large manor houses and land, could live an idle pastoral life enjoying the scenery and writing poetry reflecting the beauty of nature. This kind of poetry developed after the time of Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming. The poems have an escapist quality, but they developed the tradition of depicting country life. The two most representative poets of this genre are Meng Haoran and Wang Wei.

Meng Haoran (689-740) never held an official post. He travelled widely, and his poems describe natural scenery and express his thoughts. More than two hundred of his poems survive, most in the form of *lü-shi*. Wang Wei (701-761) lived most of his life as an official in the capital, Changan. In his younger years, politically ambitious, he had served in the frontier regions. In his forties, he began to live a more retiring life, studying Buddhism, fasting and writing poetry and painting. He was skilled in various poetic forms. His scenic descriptions are beautiful.

Another poetic theme was life at the frontier. Since there were constant wars as the Tang empire expanded, there were also more commercial and cultural contacts. As people became more interested in these remote places, poets accordingly chose them for their themes. Also some poets had served in a secretarial capacity with some expeditionary forces and were thus familiar with conditions there. Of these poets Gao Shi and Cen Shen were the most famous.

Gao Shi (702-765) led a youthful vagabond life and served as a secretary at a frontier army headquarters. He opposed strongly the unequal treatment of officers and men and the class differences in the army. Cen Shen (715-770) served in the frontier regions for many years and so knew the life and scenery there. Of his three hundred and sixty poems still extant, most deal with this theme.

What made Tang poetry of this period so significant is not just the quantity of poems produced, but the appearance of immortal poets like Li Bai and Du Fu. With their genius, passionate love of their country and the people and their deep understanding of life, they developed their own styles and created poems which reflected this great period in Chinese history. They are considered as the greatest of all Chinese classical poets.

Li Bai (701-762) was born in the city of Sujab, northwest of Issyk Kul, in the Anxi Protectorate. His father was probably a rich merchant. When he was five years old, his family moved south to settle in Changlong, Mianzhou, which is present-day Jiangyiu County in Sichuan Province. His genius showed from his youth, and he studied and travelled widely. Politically ambitious, he hoped to become a high official. He left his home district when he was twenty-five, but he was forty-two before he was summoned by the Emperor Xuanzong and given a post as a court attendant, which he only received through the recommendation of a friend. In less than two years he was dismissed as a result of some slander by jealous officials. In 755, An Lushan and Shi Siming, two commanders garrisoning the northern frontier regions, started a rebellion. Li Bai fled south planning to live the life of a recluse in the Lushan Mountains. One of the emperor's sons, Prince Yong, however, invited him to be his secretary. In a later struggle for power among the royal family, Prince Yong was defeated and Li Bai was disgraced and banished to the southwest, but before he reached present-day Guizhou Province, he was pardoned and recalled. When he was sixty-one, he requested to join the armed forces suppressing the rebellion. On the way he became ill and died at Dangtu, present-day Anhui Province, in his uncle's quarters.

He was a prolific poet, and nearly one thousand of his poems remain. They are on a wide variety of themes. Some expose the corruption at court, the hard life and sufferings of the people, the suppression of women and their feelings of revolt, and true friendship.

The most outstanding features of his poems are the following three: first, in some of his poems about the wars he expresses his patriotism and his concern for the fate of the country. He was strongly opposed to feudal wars, but supported those for defence purposes and unity. Before An Lushan's rebellion, he praised the soldiers fighting in the frontier regions in his poems, but after the rebellion he was full of sorrow and indignation.

Second, in other poems he expressed his opposition to feudalism and his quest for a better society. He did not respect his emperor or the nobility. He protested against a society which wasted money

on pleasure and ill-treated talented people. He sometimes expressed his pessimism, or escaped into a dream world of beautiful scenery. Third, in many of his poems he praised China's magnificent scenery, since he had travelled widely and could describe with extraordinary beauty the Yellow River racing to the sea, the sails on the Changjiang River (the Yangzi), the waterfalls at Lushan or the mountainous road leading to Sichuan.

His poetry shows a high degree of romanticism. He despised those who imitated the styles of others, though he himself had absorbed the fine traditions of early Chinese poetry such as the *chu ci* and *yue fu* songs. With his vivid imagination, skill in the use of exaggeration, and lively natural language, he was a true successor of the ancient poet Qu Yuan. He further developed the range of Chinese poetry.

Du Fu (712-770) was very versatile in his youth and had many interests. Apart from literature he studied art and enjoyed music, dancing, painting and calligraphy. When he was nineteen, he began to travel, making friends with other well-known poets such as Li Bai, Wang Wei, Gao Shi and Cen Shen. Although he was talented he failed in his examinations because of official corruption. He remained unemployed in the capital for nearly ten years. Then in 755, he was given the minor post of an officer in charge of an armoury. With the start of An Lushan's rebellion, he and his family went to northern Shaanxi in 756. He went on his own initiative to speak to the new Emperor Shuzong, but was captured en route by rebels and taken to Changan, which they then occupied. The following year he managed to escape and reach the government at Fengxiang. There he was made a government adviser, but because he was too outspoken, he soon offended the emperor and was demoted to serve as a secretary in the army. Later he gave up this post and went with his family to Chengdu in Sichuan. There he worked as a secretary in the local commissioner Yen Wu's office. Yen Wu was an old friend. After the death of Yen Wu, he went by boat to Kuizhou to recuperate after an illness. In the spring of 768, he went down river to Jiangling and travelled around Hubei and Hunan until he died on a boat on the way to Chenzhou in 770.

More than fourteen hundred of his poems remain. Many of the best were written after An Lushan's rebellion. They profoundly reflect the society and his feelings and sorrows. They are like a historical account written in poetry.

Most of his best poems have a strong political content, and many are penetrating exposures of the iniquities of the old society. Towards the end of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, corrupt ministers and powerful eunuchs controlled the government, sharpening class contradictions. The succeeding reigns of the emperors Shuzong and Daizong were in some ways worse. Du Fu in his poems continually criticized the social evils. In one poem about the imperial relatives amusing themselves in spring outings, he vividly described the wanton luxury of the court and their abuse of power. In another dealing with local army commanders, he criticized them for their arrogance and disobedience to the central government. He told how they suppressed the masses and killed those who dared to voice any comments. Although other Tang poets criticized officials, Du Fu was the first to criticize the emperor and his court directly. He contrasted court extravagances to the sufferings of the people. He wrote:

Wine and meat rot behind vermilion gates;
While at the roadside, people freeze to death.

He pointed out that this situation applied also to the provinces, where people had only husks to eat.

Du Fu was not merely a sympathetic bystander, but reflected the misery of the people with a depth not attained by other poets. He described women kidnapped by government troops, and soldiers driven like dogs and chickens. He told of fishermen who had to fish in winter or peasants who had to sell their children to pay taxes. All these and other evils in the society deeply distressed him and in his poems he tried to depict these sufferings.

He criticized those rulers who engaged in wars of aggression, as well as the local generals, Tibetan and Uighur tribesmen who caused havoc among the people. He worried constantly about An Lushan's rebellion, and, on hearing of its being crushed, he expressed his elation in his poems. In 759, travelling west from

Leyang, he wrote some famous poems about the scenes at the roadside. While glad that the rebellion had been crushed, he pointed out the misery conscription and war had caused the people.

Du Fu's poems follow the realist tradition in poetry dating from the time of the *Book of Songs*. The poetic *lü-sbi* form reached its full development in his work. He and Li Bai are considered the greatest representatives of Tang poetry. Thus another famous Tang poet, Han Yu, once said:

The writings of Li Bai and Du Fu will remain,
Shedding their splendour far and wide.

The early development of Tang poetry began with Chen Zi'ang's bold reform. Then in the middle period, the great poets Li Bai and Du Fu made Tang poetry one of the most glorious achievements in Chinese literature.

Poems of Li Bai

Travelling Is Hard

Clear wine in golden goblets, ten thousand cash a cup,
And costly delicacies on jade platters.
Yet I spurn drinking and toss away my chopsticks,
Sword in hand, restless, I wonder what to do.
I want to cross the Yellow River, but it's ice-bound;
I want to climb the Taihang Mountains, but they're
snow-covered.
So idly I fish by a limpid stream,*
Dreaming of sailing towards the sun.**
Travelling is hard! Travelling is hard!
So many crossroads; which to choose?
One day I'll skim the waves, blown by the wind,
With sails hoisted high, across the vast ocean.

* Lü Shang used to fish by the Wei River before he met King Wen of Zhou and helped him to conquer the Shangs.

** Yi Yin before he was discovered by King Tang of Shang dreamed that he was sailing in a barge towards the sun.

Departure from Baidicheng at Dawn*

In the bright dawn clouds I left Baidicheng;
A thousand *li* to Jiangling** only takes a day.
I hear the incessant cry of monkeys from the banks;
My light barge has passed countless folds of hills.

* Baidicheng (the city of the white emperor) was situated on a hill in eastern Sichuan.

** Jiangling is in Hubei Province. One reaches there by travelling through the Changjiang (Yangzi) Gorges.

A Farewell to Li Yun in the Xie Tiao Pavilion*

Yesterday has passed and gone beyond recall;
Today worries and sorrows assail my mind.
Gazing at wild geese flying in the autumn wind,
Let us drink our fill in this high pavilion.
Here is one who writes with great scholarship;
His spirited style and poems compare with Xie Tiao.
Our lofty ambitions soar high;
Seeking to reach the moon in the sky.
Cut water with a sword, the water flows on;
Quench sorrow with wine, the sorrow increases.
In our lifetime, our wishes are unfulfilled;
Tomorrow, hair unbound, we'll sail away in a boat.

* Li Yun, or Li Hua, was an editor in the imperial library and a friend of Li Bai. The Xie Tiao Pavilion was built by the poet Xie Tiao (464-499). It was situated in Xuancheng, Anhui Province.

To a Friend Departing

Green hills skirt the northern suburb;
A sparkling stream circuits the eastern city.
After our leave-taking in this place,
Like thistle-down, you'll drift ten thousand *li*.
A wanderer is aimless like a floating cloud;
An old friend lingers like the setting sun.
We wave as you start on your way;
Our horses separated sadly neigh.

Reflections on the Moon While Drinking

When did the moon first appear in the sky?
I stop drinking to pose this question.
The moon is beyond the reach of man,
Yet it follows wherever you go.
Like a bright mirror high above crimson palaces;
The green mist disperses revealing its splendour.
At night we see it rising above the ocean;
At dawn we know not where it goes among the clouds.
Year after year the white hare pounds medicine;*
Who is there to keep the lonely Chang E company?
People today cannot see the moon of ages past;
Yet the moon today has shone on our ancestors.
People pass away like a flowing stream;
Yet all have seen the moon like this.
My only wish singing and drinking wine
Is to see the moonlight in my golden goblet.

* According to Chinese legend, a white hare prepares medicine with a mortar and pestle on the moon. The goddess of the moon, Chang E, has fled there after stealing some elixir of life from her husband.

A Reply to Someone in the Mountains

You ask why I choose to live among the green hills;
I smile without answering, my heart at peace.
Peach blossoms float away with the stream;
There are heavens and earths beyond the world of men.

Ascending Taibai Peak*

Ascending Taibai Peak from the west,
I reach the summit in the sunset.
The morning star speaks to me,
Opening the gate of Heaven.
I wish to go with the wind,
Emerge from the floating clouds,
Raise my hand to touch the moon
And travel over all the mountains.
Once I have left Wugong,
When shall I return again?

* Taibai Peak is in Wugong, Shaanxi Province, Taibai means the morning star in Chinese. It is a fine peak in the Qinling Mountain Range.

Zi Ye's Song*

The moon shines upon Changan city;
From all households the sound of pounding clothes.**
The autumn wind cannot blow away all longing and anguish
For our men beyond the Jade Pass.***
When will the hordes of Huns be conquered,
So our husbands can return from their long expedition?

* Zi Ye was a Jin-dynasty girl who composed this tune.

** Clothes were laundered by pounding them with a pestle. In autumn women would busy themselves with this before making winter clothes for their husbands.

*** The Jade Pass was situated in present-day Gansu Province. It was the gateway to Xinjiang and Central Asia.

Listening to the Lyre of a Monk Named Jun

This monk with his lyre came from the land of Shu*
In the west, from the high Emei Mountains.
Plucking the strings, he played for me.
I heard murmuring pines in many valleys.
Like flowing water, the music cleansed my heart,
Leaving its echo in the frosty bell.
Dusk came unnoticed to these green hills,
As the autumn clouds grew darker and darker.

* The land of Shu is present-day Sichuan.

Poems of Du Fu

Thoughts

Since the loss of Tongguan to the rebels last year,
I've long been parted from my wife and children.
This summer as the grass and trees grew,
I freed myself and went westwards.
Still in my hempen sandals I met the emperor;
My sleeves were worn, my elbows exposed.
Officials praised me for my safe return;
Relatives and friends were sad to see I'd aged.
With tears of gratitude I took an adviser's post,
My emperor's benevolence in my distress.
Although I could return to my country home,
I could not immediately mention my desire.
I wrote a letter to send to Sanchuan,
Wondering if my home still existed.
Then I heard that district had been razed;
Even chickens and dogs had been slaughtered.
Who would be waiting at the door

Of my dilapidated, thatched, mountain hut?
The old pine is crushed at the root;
The ground is cold with rotting corpses.
How many have escaped with their lives?
How many families remain intact?
Sick at heart I look back
To the mountain village which the tigers ravaged.
Since the day I sent my letter,
Ten months have passed already.
I dread to receive news from home;
What hope can lie within my heart?
This is the time to revive our dynasty,
As I grow old and fond of wine.
When I think of our happy reunion,
I fear to end my days alone and poor.

Fleeing Through Pengya

I recall when I first fled the rebels,
Northwards through dangers and difficulties.
Late at night trudging through Pengya,
The moon shone on the Baishui Mountains.
Long had my family gone on foot,
Unashamed to meet a stranger.
Occasionally hearing only the sound of birds,
Seldom seeing a traveller returning.
Crazed with hunger my daughter bit me, crying,
While I feared a tiger or wolf might hear.
Stopping her mouth I carried her in my arms,
While she struggled, howling even more.
My son, thinking he was clever,
Demanded bitter, wild berries to eat.
Thunderstorms for half the ten days;
We dragged each other through the mud.
With no protection against the rain,
The path slippery, our bodies cold.
Sometimes the way seemed impassable,
In one day we covered only a few *li*.

We fed on wild fruits,
Low branches were our roof.
Mornings we waded through water, stepping on stones;
Evenings we rested on the misty heights.
Briefly we paused at Tongjiawa,
Considering going by the Luzi Pass.
There I found an old friend, Sun Zai,
Whose sense of friendship reached the clouds.
It was night when he invited me home,
Taking his lamp, unbarring his door.
Then he brought hot water to wash my feet,
And cut paper charms to invoke my spirit.
Summoning forth his wife and children,
We looked at each other shedding tears.
My children were fast asleep;
So I awoke them and ate together.
He vowed to always be my sworn brother;
Then left his sitting-room
For our comfort and ease.
Who else would be so generous, opening his heart
At a time when I was in such a sorry plight?
A year has passed since our parting;
The Tartar rebels are still making trouble.
If only I had wings
To fly and see you again.

On Women Selling Firewood

Kuizhou* women remain single till middle-age,
Their hair already turning grey.
In time of wars and death, marriage is more difficult;
So they sigh and regret their lives.
By custom the man sits while the woman stands;
He is master of the house; she the servant.
Most women bring firewood home to sell
While officials take the money as levies.
They age with their girlish tresses at their necks,
Wild flowers and leaves caught in a silver clasp.
Their bodies ache from the perilous climb to the fairs;
Tears smear the powder on their faces,
They risk death to sell illegal salt for profit.**
Thinly clad they struggle below the narrow rocks.
If you say such women are coarse and plain,
Why was a village named after Wang Zhaojun?***

* Kuizhou is in eastern Sichuan Province.

** Salt wells were located near Kuizhou, but were a government monopoly. People selling salt illegally could be severely punished.

*** Wang Zhaojun was a well-known beauty in the Han Dynasty. Her native village was near Kuizhou.

Sorrow at the End of the Canal

A peasant from Shaoling suppresses a sob,*
Wandering quietly in spring by the canal.**
All the palace's thousand gates are locked;
Who enjoys the green willows and rushes?
He recalls the emperor's gay banners,
Which increased the splendour of the south park.
There was the first lady of the Zhaoyang Palace***
Who rode with the emperor in the same carriage.
Before went a maid with bow and arrows,
Upon a white steed with a golden bit and bridle.
Leaning back, she shot an arrow at the clouds;
A bird fell, and the lady smiled.
Where is this beauty with bright eyes and teeth?
Her blood-stained, restless ghost shall never return.

* Shaoling was Du Fu's ancestral district.

** The canal referred to was the Qujiang Canal, situated in southeast Changan.

*** Zhaoyang Palace was the palace of the Empress Zhao Feiyan in the Han Dynasty. The first lady referred to here was Lady Yang, the favourite of the Emperor Xuanzong.

The clear Wei River flows east; the Sword Pass is
distant.*

No communication between the living and the dead.
People with feeling must shed tears.
Water flows on, and blossoms fade.
At dusk as the Huns return, dust rises over the city.
Wanting to go south, he still looks north.

* In 765, An Lushan revolted and captured the capital. The emperor fled to Sichuan. On the way at Mawei Station, the guards mutinied and demanded the death of Lady Yang. The emperor was forced to sacrifice her. The Wei River was near the spot where she was killed. The Sword Pass was where the emperor passed on his way to Sichuan.

Thinking of My Brothers in the Moonlight

The drum from the watchtower sounds; all are forbidden
to move.

In autumn in this frontier town, a lone swan is heard.

This is the season when the dew turns white,*

But the moon seems brighter at my home.

I have brothers but all are scattered.

Homeless now, I know not if they're alive or dead.

The letters I have written never reach them,

Especially now that war is raging.

* According to the Chinese calendar there are twenty-four festivals each year. The White Dew Festival falls about 8th September.

Climbing the Yueyang Tower

I have long heard of Lake Dongting;
Now I ascend the Yueyang Tower.*
It separates the lands of Wu and Chu,**
One in the east, the other in the south.
The sun and moon seem to float there day and night.
I have heard nothing from my family and friends;
Growing old and ill, alone I sail in a barge.
War rages in the northern mountain passes;
Leaning on a balustrade I shed tears.

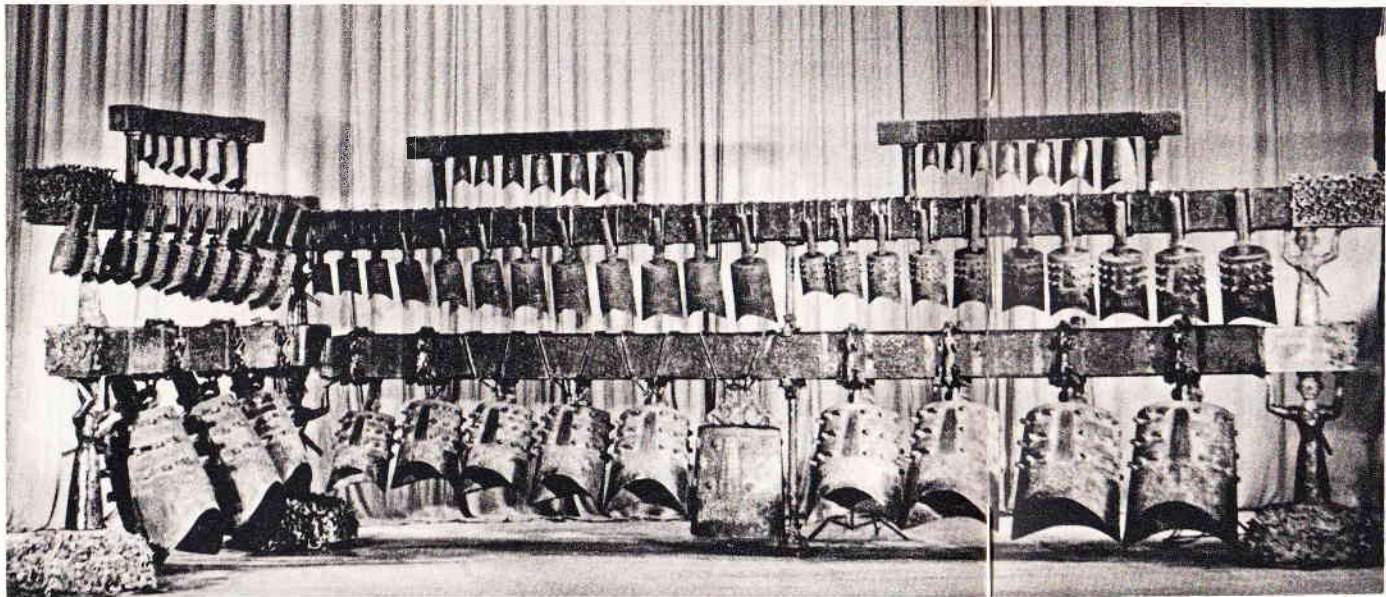
* The Yueyang Tower was the west gate-tower of Yueyang city. Lake Dongting was close beside it.

** The Kingdom of Wu was in the east, in present-day Jiangsu Province. The Kingdom of Chu was in the southwest, in present-day Hubei and Hunan.



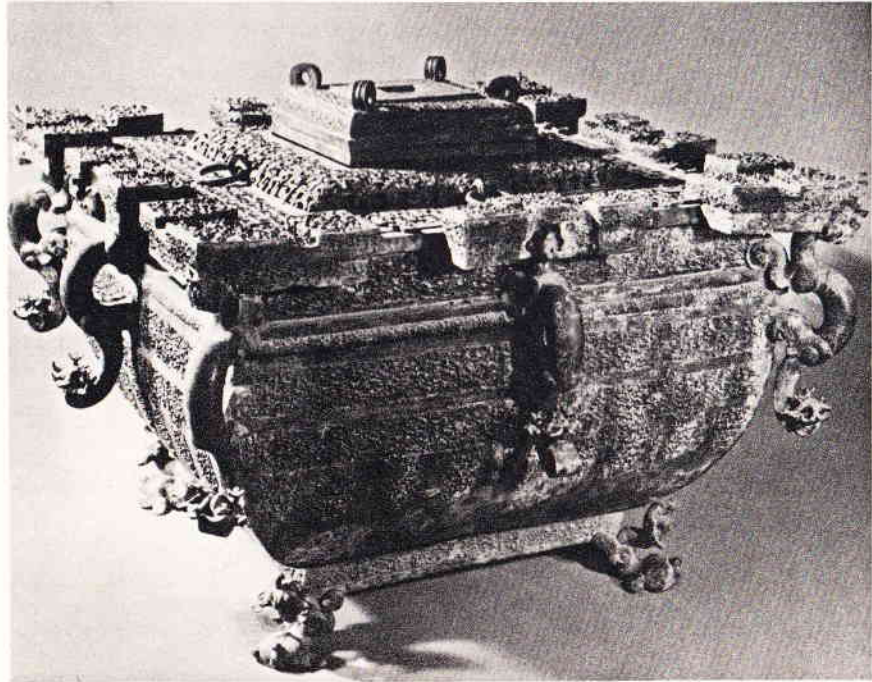
A bronze wine vessel

Objects Unearthed in Suixian County

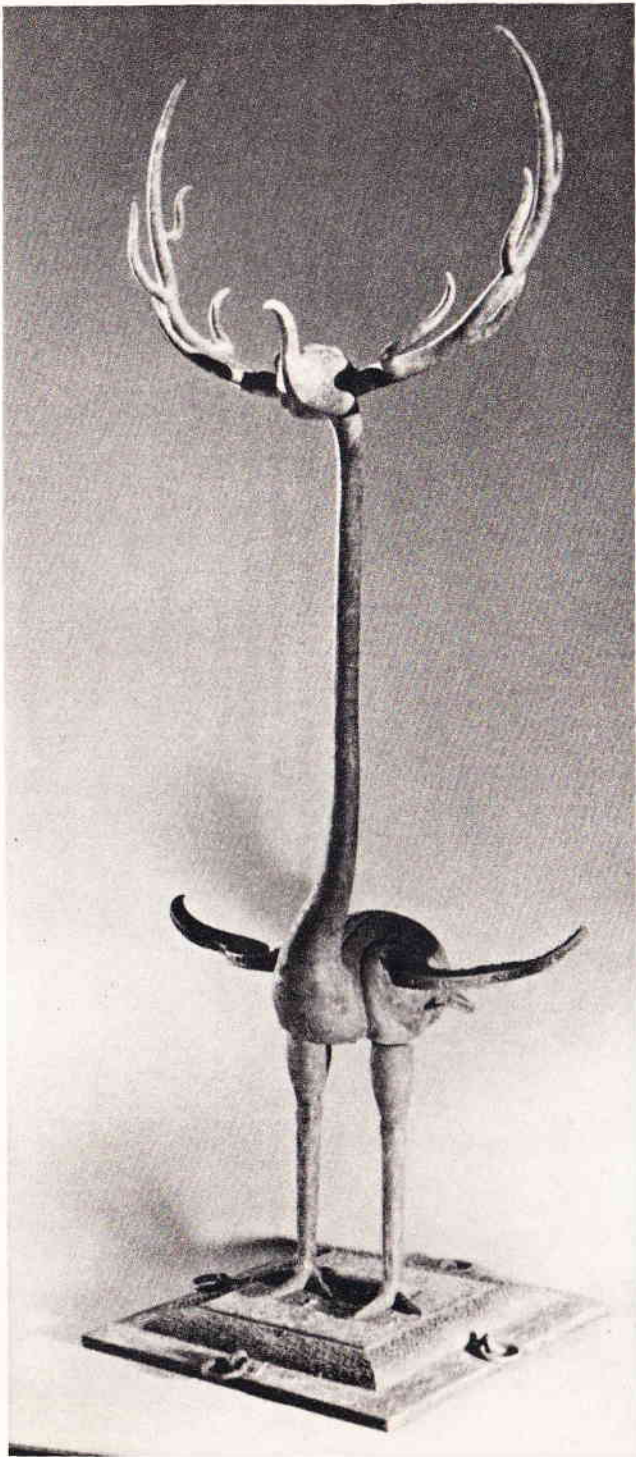


Rows of bells

Vessel for heating wine



A bronze warrior



Bronze crane with deer horns

Tang Chi

Fine Objects of Ancient Art Discovered

In the summer of 1978, some Chinese archaeologists excavated a big tomb of the early period of the Warring States (475-221 BC) in Leigudun, Suixian County, Hubei Province. Inscriptions on the bronze vessels discovered there indicated that it was the tomb of the king of the state of Zeng. More than 7,000 articles were unearthed, among them musical instruments, utensils of bronze, gold and jade and painted lacquerware.

The 124 musical instruments included bells, stone-chimes, drums, stringed instruments, bamboo pipes, flutes and pan-pipes. Sixty-five bells hung in three rows on a wooden frame 270 cm. high, its crossbeams covered with coloured designs and their ends encased in carved bronze sheaths which served both to decorate and reinforce them. After 2,400 years, this strong frame still stood upright supporting the bells weighing 2.5 tons. The gold inscription on each bell recorded its musical pitch and place in the scale. Tests showed that the bells had a beautiful timbre and wide range of sound and were able to play both ancient and modern music. This is an extremely important discovery in the history of Chinese music. The six bronze figures holding up the crossbeams were of a high artistic level. The three uppermost are about 50 cm. tall, those beneath about 80 cm. They have lifelike features and well-



Bronze jars with animal-shape handles

proportioned bodies, with belts and swords at the waist like warriors or household officials. They support the crossbeams with their heads and uplifted hands, lips compressed and gazing steadily ahead, their expressions showing fortitude. These bronze figures, by far the largest yet excavated from a Warring States tomb, have a major significance in the history of Chinese sculpture.

The most striking among the hundred and more ritual bronzes was a wine vessel with most beautiful designs. A fretwork of dragons decorates the rim, and the neck has four animal-shape handles and four banana leaves with dragon designs on them. The four animals are rampant, their heads turned to look back, their mouths opened and their tongues lolling out. The effect is awe-inspiring. The four banana leaves curve with the neck as it

widens at the top. Four dragons curl in high relief on the fretwork pattern at the bottom. Apparently, the fretwork and high-relief carvings were cast separately and then welded together; yet this was so skilfully done that no traces of welding remain. This wine vessel was placed on a bronze plate with similar patterns. There were also two square vessels for heating wine, 76 cm. wide and 56 cm. high. The lids are decorated with fretwork carving while the vessels have 8 animal-shape handles and four legs in the shape of crouching animals. Inside are square wine jars with elegant designs. These are all rare works of ancient Chinese art.

There were also two identical bronze jars with animal-shape handles, 110 cm. high with a diameter of 60 cm. at the widest part. The opening is decorated with fretwork patterns and the neck has two animal-shape handles. The jar-belly is decorated with dragons and lines. The two jars were placed on a rectangular bronze plate with four legs in the shape of grotesque animals which held the plate in their mouths. Then there was a crane with deer horns

Gold wine vessel



which was 143 cm. high, standing erect with its head raised. Probably it was some mythological creature.

Gold was seldom discovered previously in Warring States tombs, but this one yielded nine gold articles including one wine vessel, cups, a food container with a lid and hooks. The wine vessel weighed 2.15 kilograms. A small golden fretwork spoon was placed in it while the three legs were in the shape of three beautiful phoenixes.

There were more than 300 jade articles. One jade ornament, 48 cm. long, was exquisitely carved out of four pieces of jade and, comprising 15 sections, could be folded up.

The coloured lacquerwares with their beautiful shapes and designs revealed a high artistic and technical level. There were four lacquer food containers with carved dragons on the lids and handles while red and yellow geometric patterns and phoenixes were painted on the black lacquer containers. A duck-shape lacquer box was extremely lifelike. The entire box was covered with decorative patterns, and the pictures of men striking bells, beating drums and dancing, painted on the two sides, were particularly vivid. Painted in colour on the inside coffin were phoenixes pecking snakes and a god with a spear to symbolize good conquering evil and the safeguarding of the dead.

These articles discovered in Suixian County, so rich in variety and style, seemed a treasure trove of ancient art. They were deliberately set out together as if for one of the banquets the deceased had enjoyed during his life. Seldom have we come across such a scene in relative entirety. These relics shed light on the ceremonies and arts of the Warring States Period.

Tian Xiu

Ren Renfa and His Painting "Zhang Guo Meets Emperor Minghuang"

Zhang Guo Meets Emperor Minghuang is painted from an old legend. Emperor Minghuang, or Xuanzong (712-756), was a Tang-dynasty emperor and Zhang Guo, often called Zhang Guolao, the *lao* meaning elder, was one of the Eight Immortals.* Since each possessed a special power, the people have a saying: "Like the Eight Immortals soaring over the ocean, each of you shows your true worth." Today this refers to those who display wisdom and ability in tackling problems.

Zhang Guo is said to have lived as a hermit during the reign of Wu Zetian (624-705), travelling on a donkey. At that time he was already several hundred years old. The empress sent for him, hoping to meet him, but he pretended to be dead. Years later he was spotted alive in the mountains and this was during the reign

* The other seven were Han Zhongli, Han Xiangzi, Cripple Li, Cao Kuojiu, Lü Dongbin, Lan Caihe and He Xiang. These Eight Immortals were mythical figures well-known to the Chinese people.

of another emperor, Minghuang, who sent an envoy to summon him to court in the year 733. The Immortal Being, however, played the same trick as before and the envoy returned without him. Then Minghuang sent an invitation written in his own hand as a sign of respect. This time Zhang Guo came to the court seated in a sedan-chair provided by the emperor. At court he demonstrated his magical powers and won the emperor's admiration. On leaving the court, he returned to his mountain and disappeared. To commemorate his visit, the emperor had a temple built, named the Qi Xia Temple, and bestowed on Zhang Guo the title of "Master Magician".

The painting depicts Zhang Guo demonstrating his magic before the emperor. According to legend, each of the Eight Immortals had a special magical device. Zhang Guo's was his donkey on which he travelled. As he had entered the court in a sedan-chair, where was his donkey? The painting gives the answer. Before entering the court, Zhang had magically reduced the size of his donkey, so that it was small enough to be put into a little box. At his audience with the emperor, he asked his young servant to open the box and release the donkey. In the painting, the donkey, no larger than a mouse, gallops towards the amazed emperor sitting on his throne. Before him sits Zhang, who seems to be explaining his magic to his sovereign and signalling to his little donkey to prance. A bystander claps in delight. Behind the emperor some attendants discuss the spectacle. Another attendant is carefully trying to pick something out of a bowl of water for the donkey to drink. The actual centre of the painting is the miniature donkey, on whom all focus their attention. There is no background, and the painting is simple and clear.

From an artistic point of view it is a fine piece of work. The artist, Ren Renfa, otherwise known as Yue Shan (1254-1327), lived in the Yuan Dynasty. He was an expert in water conservancy and helped to harness some rivers including the Yellow River. He wrote ten books on the subject. Of his many artistic works, only a few have survived. According to historical accounts he was good at painting horses. Two such studies, *Two Horses* and

The Horse Stables, in the Beijing Palace Museum are lively and vivid.

Zhang Guo Meets Emperor Minghuang shows that he was also skilled in depicting people, and that he was better at this than his predecessors. Minghuang was an ambitious emperor, who made some great contributions. During his reign, the country prospered as never before with a strong army, abundant produce and a rich cultural life. The emperor looks satisfied with himself, his full face expressing his ease and enjoyment of life. Zhang Guo, the hermit, is portrayed as a lean, benevolent old man. It is obvious who is the emperor and who the Immortal. The other figures in the composition are easily identified by their attire and expressions. The tiny donkey, amazed emperor and self-possessed Immortal are all vividly depicted. The brush-strokes are simple yet masterful; the colours bright yet harmonious.

On the back of the painting is the following inscription: "It is rare to see paintings now like *Zhang Guo Meets Emperor Minghuang*, which was painted by Yue Shan, whose brush-strokes were exquisite and refined. The characters he portrayed were very life-like. Yue Shan was a clever and versatile man who made a great contribution to the society. He was an expert in water conservancy and finance. It is a pity that he was not recognized and honoured by his contemporaries. Scholars only knew that he was skilled at painting horses, but did not know his other gifts. One of my nephews, Tanian, was his son-in-law, and so that is why I know something about him."

These words were written by the calligrapher Kong Liao, a relation of the artist. In the past, people thought that Ren Renfa must have led a successful life since he was not only an artist but a water conservancy expert. From the inscription, however, we learn that he was not appreciated by his contemporaries and that his talents were not fully demonstrated. In his painting Ren Renfa implied a complaint against his emperor, hoping that he might be invited to play an active role in the water conservancy projects and be shown respect just as Zhang Guo had been by the Tang emperor. At the time Kong Liao wrote the inscription, Ren Renfa had died.

Thus it is evident that Ren's hopes were not realized. The painting has been handed down through the ages and when we look at it today, we cannot help but think of the artist's regrets.

The painting is done on silk, 41.5 cm. long and 107.5 cm. wide, and is preserved in the Beijing Palace Museum.

Zhang Guo Meets Emperor Minghuang
(Chinese traditional painting) by *Ren Renfa*



中條山色鬢齊參
巖中有出人道
術者未許世間
知里余忽從桐
寧獨裁儀坐出
粘痕并野色故
出驢跳去不罷
可惜難尋仙菜
能醫
甲申夏六月上
沈海旭



重開任終筆



Beijing Theatres Begin Celebrations

The Ministry of Culture has sponsored a series of theatrical performances to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Republic. They opened in January this year.

More than 160 items will be performed, including plays, operas, dance dramas, music, dancing, acrobatics, puppet shows, ballads and cross-talk, Beijing operas and various local operas. Some are new creations on contemporary as well as historical themes; others are earlier works which have been revised. They will be presented in turn. The first series comprises six plays: *Thunder in Autumn*, *Yang Kaibui*, *The Sian Incident*, *Chen Yi Comes Out from the Mountains* and *Break of Dawn*. The second series of eight operas includes a Beijing opera *The Red Lantern Society* and a Shaoxing opera *Song of the Newspaper Boy*.

The performances will be judged and awards will be given by a committee set up by the Ministry of Culture.

Lao She Commemorated in Beijing

The 80th birthday of the late Lao She (1899-1966), a noted Chinese writer and playwright, was marked by a performance of his works in Beijing.

Lao She was a hard-working and prolific writer. His early works sharply exposed the cruelty and darkness of the old society

and showed deep sympathy for the labouring people. His novel *Camel Xiangzi** was one of these. When New China came into being, Lao She fervently sang the praises of the people's life and struggle in the new society through a large number of works including plays, poetry, ballads and cross-talk. His language, lively and humorous, was rich in local colour. He was awarded the honourable title of People's Artist.

In memory of Lao She, excerpts from his well-known plays *The Teahouse* and *Family Reunion* as well as comic cross-talk were presented by the China Youth Art Theatre, the Beijing People's Art Theatre and the Beijing Ballad Group.

"Folk Literature" Resumes Publication

Folk Literature compiled by the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association has resumed publication this year.

The monthly magazine will carry new folk songs and revolutionary stories by the many nationalities of our country as well as selections from our excellent heritage of folk literature including epics, narrative poems, ballads, fairy tales and legends. Foreign folk literature will also be included; special articles and commentaries on the history of the folk literature of our various nationalities will be carried too.

"Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" Restaged

The historical play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, written by the well-known historian Wu Han in 1961, has been restaged by the Beijing Opera Group and widely acclaimed by Beijing audiences.

The play was about a 16th-century official who was dismissed from office because he spoke up for the persecuted and challenged the authorities to reverse an unjust verdict. This play presenting

* See *Chinese Literature* Nos. 11 and 12, 1978.

Hai Rui's defiance of reactionary forces and his championship of the good won popular approval.

In 1965, Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan of the "gang of four" brought false charges against Wu Han, claiming that this play was a big poisonous weed "challenging proletarian dictatorship on behalf of counter-revolutionaries". Wu Han, together with Ma Lianliang, a well-known actor who played Hai Rui, were both hounded to death. They were posthumously rehabilitated after the overthrow of the "gang of four".

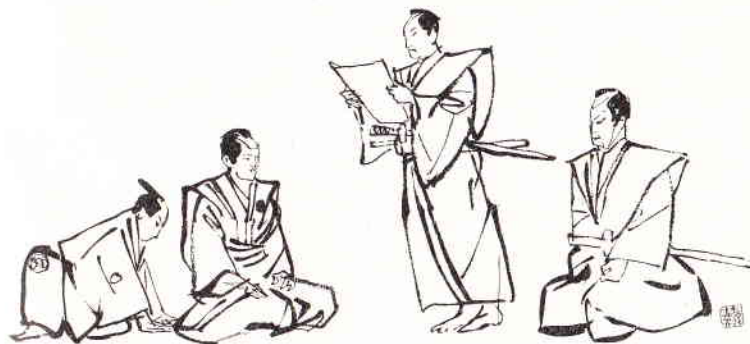
Japanese Kabuki Artists Perform in Beijing

Japanese Kabuki artists performed in Beijing in January this year.

The Japanese classical art Kabuki has a history of three hundred years. Japanese artists presented to the Chinese audience the traditional items *Chushingura* and *Kagami-jishi*.

Chushingura depicts an honest official who is compelled by his vicious superior to commit hara-kiri. After slashing himself, the honest official hands the knife to his major-domo who vows to avenge his master. *Kagami-jishi* is a dance drama.

Shoroku Onoe and Baiko Onoe, well-known Japanese actors, gave excellent performances.



Literary Journal "Harvest" Resumes Publication

Harvest, the literary bi-monthly edited by noted writer Ba Jin, resumed publication in Shanghai this year. It began publication in 1957 and had many distinguished contributors prior to its suspension.

The first issue following resumption carries a novel, a film script, poetry, essays and memoirs. The novel is Volume Three of *Morning in Shanghai* by Zhou Erfu. The film script is *Hurricane Song* by noted dramatist Chen Baichen.

The issue also carries *Bai Juyi and His Contemporary Poets*, a foreword by Mao Dun to Rewi Alley's English translation of *Selected Poems by Bai Juyi* and Ba Jin's memoirs *On "Autumn in Spring" and Other Writings*.

Album of Paintings in the Palace Museum Collection

The Palace Museum has recently published the first album of paintings in its collection, including 19 works by 17 painters from the third to the ninth centuries. They include such masterpieces as *The Goddess of Lo* and *Ladies* by Gu Kaizhi, *Spring Outing* by Zhan Ziqian, *An Excursion by Carriage* by Yan Liben, *Scholars* and *Five Oxen* by Zhou Fang, *Still Poultry* by Huang Quan, *An Evening Party of Han Xizai* by Gu Hongzhong and *Bamboo Lodge* by Dong Yuan.



The Commune Fishpond (a Jinshan peasant painting)

by Cao Jinying



中国文学

英文月刊1979年第5期

本刊代号2—916