

Chinese Literature



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Chinese
Literature

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Lu Jian

In Ye Shengtao's Home

It was a fine mid-winter day, with no biting wind and no trace of the snow which had recently fallen. I made my way some distance down one of Beijing's little back streets till I came to the house of the old writer Ye Shengtao.

"It's been a long time!" he greeted me, coming out.

We sat as usual side by side on the sofa, two steaming cups of fragrant green tea on the low table before us.

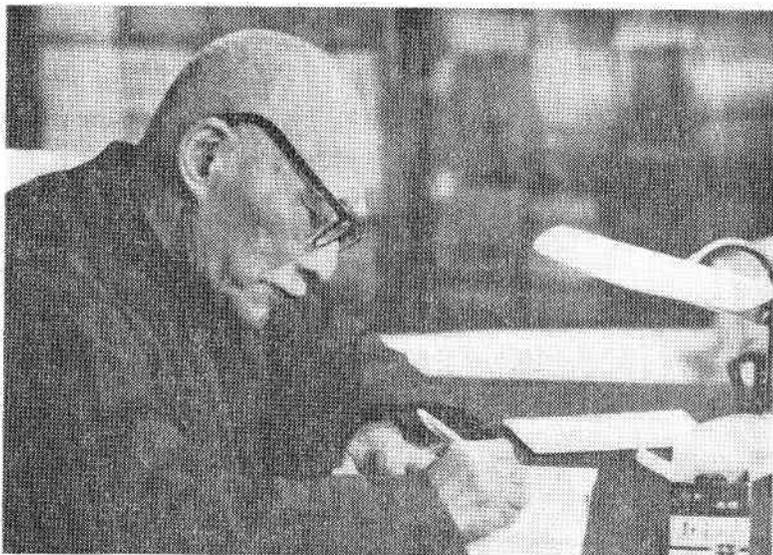
"I've come this time to thank you in person!" I said.

"For what?" He looked at me with an inquiring smile.

In the early thirties when I was a high school student, the name of Ye Shengtao — then known as Ye Shaojun — was very familiar. I used to borrow from our library his short stories published in the first half of the twenties, *Misunderstanding*, *Conflagration* and *Below the Horizon*, and his collection of children's tales *The Scarecrow*. He was then the editor of the influential Shanghai monthly *High School Students* and I was one of its fans.

This magazine and his stories made me imagine him as a warm-

Lu Jian is a poet, who is on the staff of *Chinese Literature*.



Ye Shengtao

hearted, tireless mentor. I longed to meet him. But of course that was out of the question while I was in the Shandong countryside with no chance of going to the far-away metropolis of Shanghai.

At last I had the good fortune to meet him, however. Not in Shanghai but in Beijing after Liberation — about twenty years after I had first heard his name. On the invitation of Zhou Enlai, in March 1949 he had gone to Beijing to attend an important political conference before the new People's Republic was founded. In July the First Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists was held. It was at this congress that I first met him. He was exactly as I had imagined him, kindly, modest and warm-hearted.

That October the People's Republic was established. He was first appointed a deputy head of the Publishing Administration, then a vice-minister of Education. This left him no time to write stories but he led an active life, often going out on fact-finding tours. He wrote many essays and poems in both the classical and

new style, and encouraged and helped middle-aged and young writers. During the Cultural Revolution, despite his age and integrity he did not escape persecution by the "gang of four" and his books were banned.

Today his works are being reprinted. Not long ago he gave me an autographed copy of a new de luxe edition of his novel *Schoolmaster Ni Huanzhi*,* and I now expressed my congratulations and thanks. Then he told me, "My children's stories and a volume of essays I wrote after Liberation have been republished too..." He gave me copies of both.

I said, "The worst thing for a writer is to be unable to get his work published. Now we're all better off in this respect."

We started talking of *Schoolmaster Ni Huanzhi*, a major modern Chinese novel. When it first came out the noted critic Mao Dun described it as "powerful writing", and as a young man I was moved by it.

I asked how he had come to write this book.

"A friend of mine in Shanghai was editing the *Education Journal*," Ye Shengtao explained. "He asked me to write a novel about education for him to serialize. I made it up as I went along, handing in one instalment each month. It came to thirty chapters altogether and I finished it in November 1928 — just over half a century ago."

The hero of the novel *Ni Huanzhi* is a young schoolmaster with high ideals who believes that education is the only way to save China and that his "ideal educational system" will sweep away all the darkness of the old society. He falls in love with Jin Peizhang who has similar dreams, and by working together they hope to achieve a happy new-style marriage. But their dreams come to nothing. During the May 4th Movement of 1919, influenced by the revolutionary Wang Leshan, Ni begins to take a broader view and work for social reforms. After his arrival in Shanghai he is drawn into the May 30th Movement of 1925 against imperialism and follows the lead of the Communist Party,

* An English translation has been published by the Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.

until 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek betrays the revolution and plunges the whole country into chaos. Then Ni Huanzhi loses heart and dies in despair. However, this spurs Jin Peizhang to soldier on, and thus the author ends on a note of hope.

Schoolmaster Ni Huanzhi gives us a picture of the life and outlook of many intellectuals from 1911 to 1927, especially after the May 4th Movement. The hero evolves from a reformist to a believer in revolution; but his inherent weaknesses make him unable to struggle on to the end. This was true of many progressives among the intelligentsia of that time. Herein lies the main significance of the novel.

Ye Shengtao said, "I took great pains over the character of Ni Huanzhi. But I must admit that the second half of the book is weak. I was never satisfied with it."

At this I remembered the postscript to the new edition. Here he wrote, "There were young people like Ni Huanzhi in the twenties. It was very hard for them to find the truth. In those tumultuous years because all his plans came to nothing he vaguely realized, 'Only people completely unlike me will succeed in future.' I hope that young people today will treasure their good fortune and abandon all outdated conventions to win the liberation of mankind!" Ye Shengtao both condemns Ni Huanzhi and sympathizes with him. But the writer is no defeatist and has high hopes for the next generation.

In the late 1920s and the 1930s Ye Shengtao published, in addition to *Schoolmaster Ni Huanzhi*, three collections of short stories, three of essays and one of children's tales.

I asked him how he had started writing stories.

"I had no teacher," he said. "I tried my hand at writing in my teens. But I wouldn't have attempted the short-story form if I hadn't been reading foreign literature. In my high school days I was delighted by Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*. In 1914 I wrote a story in classical Chinese called 'Poverty' about a destitute mother and her son, which was published in the short story weekly *Saturday*. And during the following year I wrote several more."

But Ye Shengtao's stories were unlike the others published in that weekly. As he told a friend, he was for truthful writing without exaggeration, unlike the general run of stories then circulating. Another time he said, "Those first stories of mine, like my later ones, were mostly about ordinary people."

A writer's point of departure and the road he chooses to take are not a matter of chance.

Ye Shengtao was born on October 28, 1894 in Suzhou in the province of Jiangsu. When he was eight he went to a private school, and later finished high school; but as his father could not afford to send him to college, in 1911 he started teaching in an elementary school in Suzhou. In 1917 he transferred to a senior primary school where he stayed for six years. He was devoted to teaching and helped to introduce important reforms. In 1923 he moved to Shanghai, where he worked as editor of a publishing house and a teacher in high school and college. On the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937 he moved to Sichuan for eight years, returning to Shanghai after the war ended. Thus because of his family background and experience in the teaching and publishing world, he knew how different intellectuals and the lower strata of the society lived and this gave him a solid foundation for his writing.

Two events had a direct bearing on the start of his writing career.

One was his decision to write in the vernacular. This was a major decision, not simply a question of "form".

He recalls, "After writing in classical Chinese for more than a year I stopped. I didn't take up my pen again till 1920, the year after the launching of the May 4th Movement. Gu Jiegang then studying in Beijing told me that some friends there were starting a magazine called *New Tide* and wanted me to send them a contribution. That was 'A Life'. From then on I wrote stories in the vernacular, contributing to the *Morning Paper* in Beijing and the *Short Story Monthly* in Shanghai."

The other event was the founding of the Literary Research Society.

By then the new literary movement in China was making head-

way. In May 1918, Lu Xun's first new story "A Madman's Diary" was published in the magazine *New Youth*. This pioneer work was followed by new literary societies and magazines, the Literary Research Society being formed on New Year's Day 1921.

"Zheng Zhenduo wrote from Beijing to Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun) and me proposing to form it, and it was set up in Beijing," recalled Ye Shengtao. "I was still in Suzhou then, Shen Yanbing was in Shanghai. Lu Xun didn't join, but he adopted a friendly attitude towards us."

This group called for "art for society" and was very influential at the time. But when questioned about it Ye Shengtao told me, "Members of the research society held very similar views. But Shen Yanbing probably knows more about that than I do. He's writing about it in his memoirs. He and Zheng Zhenduo wrote a number of articles on it."

In its statement of policy this society said, "The time has passed when literature can be regarded as an amusement in moments of pleasure or a diversion in moods of despair. We believe that literature has a serious purpose, and one with a close bearing on men's life." Shen Yanbing declared, "Literature is a mirror. . . . It should reflect social reality, expressing and discussing certain problems. . . . Writers should observe and describe the dark side of society as well as human sufferings and the generation gap." This was a movement for enlightenment, a reflection of humanism. If we analyse Ye Shengtao's works, we find that this was his basic approach to writing.

Ye Shengtao lives in a small quiet, walled-in compound. In summer his verandah is gay with potted plants, which in winter are moved indoors to brighten his rooms.

I asked him to tell me more about his stories.

"I wrote about what I saw and felt in real life, not from my imagination. I've lived in towns and in the countryside, and I wrote about what I saw there. Because I taught in school and had some experience of the educational system, I wrote about that. I also wrote something about the different stages of the Chinese revolution which I had seen. Most of my characters were

intellectuals or small townfolk, those being the people I knew best. Of course, in writing about them I put in my own ideas too.

"Writing in those days always seemed easy — we were under no restrictions. I don't believe in set formulas or guidelines or in starting off with a theory and then basing a story on it. We notice and experience things in real life which strike us in this way or that and compel us to write them up. Then characters and plots spring to our minds, and with that general framework we can write a story in a couple of days. I've written a children's tale in one day easily. Of course, I've written more short stories than anything else."

This is indeed his main achievement. The collections published between 1922 and 1936 make Ye Shengtao one of the major story writers in our modern literature. With a wide range of themes which he treats in depth, he reflects semi-feudal, semi-colonial China from many different angles, and the countryside and towns under comprador-capitalist oppression. His stories show us the bitter life of the workers and peasants, the illusions, endeavours and defeats of the intellectuals. Together they paint a comprehensive picture of the society of that time. But Ye Shengtao is not entirely objective. He likes to raise problems, point out abuses and set his readers trying to find solutions. I asked Ye Shengtao if he agreed with this analysis of mine.

He replied, "I always feel the urge to satirize what dissatisfies me. If I ridicule one aspect, then its obverse which I am hoping for needs no describing. So my hopes often have to be read between the lines — they're not stated explicitly."

We reverted to "A Life" which portrays the wretched lot of a village woman. She lives her life without even a name of her own, disposed of by others like an animal. This sketch was typical of many women of that day.

Ye Shengtao told me, "The May 4th Movement spread anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ideas. Among the many problems raised was that of the emancipation of women. That is why I wrote 'A Life'. Women had been ground down so long by religion, the state, their fathers and their husbands that they were often woefully ignorant. I couldn't but pity them."

"A Life" should really rank as the true beginning of his creative career.

Next he wrote "Bitter Herbs" about peasants forced to abandon their fields because they had to pay exorbitant rents. "A Stroll at Dawn" exposes even more clearly the clash between peasants and landlords. Although the tone is dispassionate, this story reveals the author's innermost feelings and democratic spirit.

Mao Dun commented on the stories of this period, "Ye Shengtao observes life dispassionately and writes objectively and realistically about the gloomy life of humble folk. Most of his early works such as 'A Friend', 'Bitter Herbs' and 'Misunderstanding' raise social problems."

I said, "I can't believe that a writer can be unaffected by happenings around him, not if he's honest."

"It's like this," explained Ye Shengtao. "I tried to be a dispassionate observer of different social types, in order to paint a truthful picture of the objective world and convey my own attitude. Some people nowadays expect us to solve problems in every story. In the past, however, if we found a subject significant, or likely to give people food for thought, we simply wrote about it. And there were no set rules about how to write."

The fact is that Ye Shengtao's balanced, cool-headed descriptions expose rotten or ridiculous social phenomena which had been taken for granted: the humdrum life of small townfolk and intellectuals, their vulgarity, selfishness, apathy, conservatism, cunning and unscrupulousness.

One of his representative works is "How Mr Pan Weathered the Storm".* Mr Pan is a contemptible, selfish creature who always plays safe in time of war, disasters and unemployment by adapting as best he can to the fast changing situation. When danger threatens he panics; when things quieten down he preens himself. He is subtly portrayed as a typical philistine out to save his own skin.

As the Chinese revolution made headway and Ye Shengtao's experience deepened, his outlook broadened. The ideological con-

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1963.

tent and form of his stories grew more mature. This is evident from his collection *In Town* published in 1926, and still more so from *Dissatisfaction* and *Forty-three* published in 1928 and 1936 respectively. Here the author shows greater concern for actual struggles and tries to portray new characters. In "Resistance" the primary-school teacher Mr Guo's attempt to organize his colleagues to demand their back pay fails, but he realizes the need for joint action and sees new hope in the working people. The teacher in "A Declaration"* loses his job because he drafts an appeal to save the country; but he neither loses heart nor considers himself in the wrong. "A Tale of a Town" describes how people welcome the Northern Expedition in 1926 but how this ends in tragedy when the local landlords and gentry seize the fruits of victory. "A Year of Good Harvest"*** is a well-known story. The peasants have a good harvest, each *mu* of land yielding three or four more pecks than usual; but because the market is flooded with imported goods, the rice merchants will not pay a fair price for their crops, and so the fine harvest ends in disaster for them. But the peasants will not take this lying down — they talk of seizing rice. This gives a truthful picture of the Chinese countryside in those years.

Ye Shengtao made special mention of "Night" which he wrote in 1927.***

"After the defeat of the revolution in 1927, there was a reign of terror. This story of mine was based on a true incident, the arrest of a young revolutionary couple. This so shocked me that I wrote it out at one sitting. As far as I remember, it was the first story to reflect Chiang Kai-shek's massacre of revolutionaries."

I was infected by Ye Shengtao's emotion. I seemed to see that fearful night and an old woman lulling her grandson to sleep when her brother tiptoed in to tell her that her daughter and son-in-law had both been shot. He had seen their dead bodies

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1963.

** See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1960.

*** See *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1963.

and brought back the note they had written before their execution. Then as Ye Shengtao wrote, "Her whole being burning with anger, she raised her voice in passionate protest for she was no longer afraid. Patting the child she cried, 'If only I could kill those fiends, to take revenge for my young daughter and son-in-law!'"

Ye Shengtao's "A Package" is akin to "Night". It describes the psychology of a teacher who sympathizes with the revolution but is a coward. At the same time it discloses the underground revolutionary activities. These later stories show how closely he kept in step with historical trends.

In the stories listed above we can see how the main characters changed, reflecting the great change in Chinese history and the difficult course traversed by the author. This period from the twenties to the forties was perhaps the most important and productive one in Ye Shengtao's career.

His stories are distinguished by their careful composition, artistry and the ability to reveal people's characters in ordinary life rather than by the invention of sensational episodes. The style is dispassionate, fluent and shot through with humour.

I often call on Ye Shengtao. Despite a difference of nearly thirty years in our age, he is so kindly and approachable that conversation comes very easily. Our talk ranges over all subjects under the sun and I often hear him praise other writers' work, but he is extraordinarily modest and unless pressed would never have told me so much about himself.

To the right of his sitting-room is a small study-bedroom where we sometimes sit. This morning the winter sunshine was streaming on to his desk where letters and manuscripts were piled by the lamp. An old magazine there reminded me of something.

For dozens of years he worked in the educational field and edited magazines and school textbooks. He spared no pains to publish the work of other writers and young people, attaching as great importance to this as to his own writing.

So I asked him how he had come to edit the *Short Story Monthly*.

"Shen Yanbing was the first editor," he told me. "It was the journal of the Literary Research Society. Then the Commercial Press asked Zheng Zhenduo to take it over, but as Zheng was going to Europe I took his place for a year, starting towards the end of 1927."

"I was told that in that year you published works by some people who became celebrated writers later," I put in.

"After the revolution was crushed in 1927, Wang Jingwei in Wuhan joined forces with Chiang Kai-shek in Nanjing. Shen Yanbing had to leave Wuhan and go to Shanghai. He, Lu Xun and I all happened to live in the same lane. Because Shen had to lie low, he started writing fiction. Before that he had done research work and written critical essays. His trilogy *Disillusionment*, *Doubt* and *The Search* gave a truthful picture of small intellectuals in the storm of revolution. I read the manuscript and was so impressed that I urged him to publish it in the *Short Story Monthly*. He did so under the pen-name Mao Dun, meaning 'contradiction'. As that didn't sound like a name, I added the 'grass' radical to the 'Mao'.* That's how he's been known ever since. I was right about those stories of his — they caused a sensation."

"I heard you were the first to publish Ba Jin's work too."

"That's right," he answered smiling. "He was in France when he wrote his novel *Destruction* and sent it to a friend in China who forwarded it to me." Its appearance made Ba Jin's name in the field of letters.

Asked about Ding Ling's works, he smiled. "When we edited the magazine, we had to read every manuscript. Among those sent us I found one entitled 'A Dream' which struck me as pretty good, an original piece of writing signed Ding Ling. I believe I made one or two minor suggestions before publishing it. That too aroused a great deal of attention. Ding Ling can't have been much more than twenty at the time. She's an old lady now."

"I remember your introducing many young writers in *High School Students*."

* i.e. he changed 茅 to 茅.

"Yes. Two of my regular contributors were Xu Ying and Zi Gang, who later married and became well-known writers and reporters. Probably there were others, but I can't remember their names now."

The old man of eighty-six sitting chatting beside me was one of the founders of our new literary movement. We are fortunate to have him with us, still guiding us today. He has devoted over sixty arduous years to our new literature and made an outstanding contribution to it.

I had no time during this visit to discuss his children's stories with him. Ye Shengtao is one of the first modern Chinese writers to have written for children, and he has done fine work in this field too. But by now I had to leave, taking with me one of this grand old writer's recent photographs as a souvenir of the occasion.

December 1979

Ye Shengtao

A Life

VILLAGE born she was never waited on or made up, never taught the feudal precepts for women or the bourgeois ideas of equality and freedom. She was indeed a very simple creature.

After leaving her mother's womb, by the time she was able to walk and talk she helped her parents glean paddy stalks and pluck herbs. At fifteen they married her off. For sooner or later she would belong to some other family anyway, and each extra year they kept her meant the cost of an extra year's food, clothing and so on. Better, then, get her off their hands early to save themselves trouble and expense simply to enrich other people.

Her husband's family had so much field work that they needed to hire help. Even if this new daughter-in-law couldn't save them taking on a hired hand, she was worth half an ox to them. In less than a year, to her bewilderment, she gave birth to a son;

The four short stories by Ye Shengtao published in this issue (《一生》、《晓行》、《一包东西》、《一个小浪花》) have been taken from *Selections from Ye Shengtao's Works* (《叶圣陶文集》, 一九五八年人民文学出版社出版) .

for it seemed to her only yesterday that she had slept in her mother's arms, and now here she was holding a baby of her own. He had no cradle, no snug clothes, no airy, sunny nursery, and it was only at night that he could enjoy sleeping in her arms; by day he slept in a dark corner of the room. In less than six months he died. She cried and cried as if her heart would break. Her mother-in-law accused her of not knowing how to look after children and inveighed against her for causing the death of a perfectly good grandson. Her father-in-law swore that his line would die out — she was too ill-starred to rear children. Her husband merely remarked that he didn't care if ten sons died, if only it would bring him luck in gambling. She didn't try to fathom what they meant, simply crying from morning till night.

One day she made a strange discovery. When she opened her chest to take out the blue cotton-padded clothes that were part of her dowry, she found they had disappeared. Later, her husband when drunk told her he had pawned them. Winter came very quickly. The west wind chilled people to the bone. She screwed up her courage to beg him to get her clothes out of hock. For that he boxed her ears a couple of times. She was used to his knocking her about, which always reduced her to tears.

Today when she wept her mother-in-law snapped, "Crying? Want to drown us all in your tears?"

That made her sob still more loudly. In a rage her mother-in-law snatched up the pestle for washing clothes and thwacked her back several times. For good measure her husband gave her two more slaps.

This was more than she could bear. The thought of tomorrow and the day after . . . the future . . . filled her with fearful dismay. The next morning before it was light, she slipped out of the house while luckily her husband was still asleep. The west wind was like a knife and stung her face. Never mind, it hurt less than his beatings. She hurried a dozen *li* without stopping for breath till she came to the river bank, then waited for the passenger boat to town.

When finally the boat came, she went aboard. The passengers

all seemed to have sixth sense: they saw at a glance that she had run away from home because she had been badly treated.

"You've only yourself to blame if you make your in-laws angry," they told her. "Even if they treat you shabbily, a young wife has to put up with such things. If you're so temperamental and touchy, so much the worse for you! Besides, who can you turn to now that you've run away? You'd better go back with this boat."

She didn't answer, just hanging her head in silence.

In exasperation one of the passengers said, "Who knows what she's up to? She may be eloping."

The others roared with laughter, but she paid no attention.

On reaching town she found an employment agent who got her a job as a servant. A new life began for her. Though she was on the go all day long, it was less tiring than farming, and as no one scolded her, cursed her or beat her, she thought herself extremely well off and wished she could stay there for ever. It was only when she woke at night from dreams of her dead baby that she felt unhappy.

One day while out shopping, to her consternation she met a neighbour from her husband's village. As a result, in less than three days her father-in-law came to find her.

"Run away, would you?" he bellowed. "Now I've tracked you down you won't get away again. If you've any sense, come back with me at once!"

She dared not answer but rushed indoors to cower motionless behind her mistress.

The latter called her father-in-law in and said, "Your daughter-in-law's made a contract to work here. It isn't up yet — so how can she leave?"

Stumped by this he surlily ordered his daughter-in-law, "As soon as your time's up, come back! If you run away again we won't have you back. We'll sell you wherever you are or break your legs!"

So this place where she had felt so comfortable would in no time be an illusion — how could she bear it? She dreaded the thought of the future. For the next few days her eyes were swol-



len, she couldn't eat, couldn't work. Her master, now that he knew the circumstances, thought it shouldn't be hard according to the new law to get her a divorce.

He asked her, "Do you want to break with your husband's family?"

"Of course I do!" she said.

Thereupon he drafted a petition for her, clearly stating the facts of her case and her request for a divorce, meaning to present this to the magistrate.

His wife, however, demurred, "Of course it's good to get her a divorce. But she may not be working for us all her life. Suppose she leaves us and nobody hires her, what's to become of her? By rights, her own family should take her in, but can they manage it?"

That made him less eager to take up the cudgels for her. "It can't be helped then," he said.

A few days later her father arrived, sent by her father-in-law.

Her mistress asked, "Have you any way to rescue your daughter?"

"Since she's married into their family, it's up to them if they want to beat her or curse her," he answered. "What can I do about it? I'm just passing on her father-in-law's message telling her to go home."

But backed by her mistress she refused to go.

Later her mother-in-law got a neighbour to bring her word that her husband was ill and she must go home to nurse him. She was so afraid to go that her mistress refused for her.

Four days later her father came back. "Your husband's dead," he announced. "If you still won't go back, I can't answer for it. You must come along with me."

"Yes, this time you'll have to go," her mistress said. "Otherwise they'll be coming to make trouble here."

Since everyone told her to go, she felt this time there was no help for it, much as she dreaded it.

At home, the sight of her husband stiff and stark on the bed made her feel rather sad. But she also remembered his cruelty to her. Her in-laws did not tell her to wail or put on mourning;

instead they led her to someone's house and sold her for twenty strings of cash.

Her father, father-in-law and mother-in-law all thought this right and proper, in keeping with the maxim: When your ox can no longer till the soil, sell it. To them she was an ox, not entitled to any opinions of her own, so now that they had no further use for her they had better sell her off. The money got from selling her was spent on her husband's funeral, fulfilling her last obligation.

14 February, 1919

Illustrated by He Youzhi

Ye Shengtao

A Stroll at Dawn

THE sun was rising as I crossed the fields drinking in the lovely, peaceful scenes around. The trees by the village, all an enchanting grey, seemed to be afloat. They reminded me of my first impression of the West Lake in Hangzhou. That morning, early in summer, going out of Qiantang Gate and skirting a cliff, I suddenly had a view of the whole lake. The green hills enfolding it had a mysterious beauty which overwhelmed me, making me oblivious of everything else. It was an indescribable sensation, and mulling it over I have since realized that this was the most satisfying aesthetic experience of my whole life. Now the distant village trees, like green ranges of hills, made the same impression on me as had the West Lake, although then instead of walking through the countryside I was boating. I had been hankering after the West Lake, and here unexpectedly was a comforting substitute.

The wheat was all reaped. The peasants had ploughed the land and with their water-wheels were soaking it with river water ready for paddy. So the half-grown frogs had acquired new territory. The strident croaking from their slender throats blended in one cacophony. Most were squatting on clods of mud above the water, while some hopped from place to place, their heads in the air. Looking carefully one could see their white chests throbbing. When

I passed close by they stopped croaking one after another and dived lightly into the water. Presently, when I receded, they set up a racket again behind my back.

The muddy path bore the footprints of people and cattle but not a blade of grass. On both sides though grew clumps of weeds, mostly of the grass family, bearing tiny multi-coloured flowers — not likely to be noticed except by insects. The flowers and leaves were pearly in the most delightful way with shining dewdrops. The faint smell of dung from the distance, so redolent of country life, negated my earlier notion that I was boating on the celebrated West Lake.

I reached a pond. The grass on its sides and the trees on the banks were reflected in the water, greener, fresher and lovelier than the plants themselves. The sun was not as yet shining on the pond. Its deep blue water was utterly still. In one corner floated duckweed, clusters of leaves supporting small cream flowers — these had not been out a few days ago I remembered. Tiddlers occasionally swam near the surface, setting up ripples or making the duckweed quiver.

Southeast of the pond stood a tumbledown cottage, a ditch running from its back to the pond. I strolled to the front. The single-panelled door was open, but a rickety table and some stools on the rough earthen floor were all I could see inside. The shutters by the door were raised, and a girl was standing under the window. The square front yard was the same size as the cottage. Paved with small rectangular bricks it served as a threshing-floor.

The girl's reddish hair was so sparse, she could only plait it into one small braid. Her face was very thin and sallow and there was a blank look in her eyes. She stared at me as if at a suspicious stranger.

I had never been this way before. Seeing no path through the bean field ahead I asked her, "Can I get from here to the river?" This inquiry allayed her suspicions and she nodded. "Just cut right through." With a word of thanks I was walking on when she added, "But the bean leaves are covered with dew — it'll wet your clothes and shoes." "It doesn't matter," I answered as I parted the bean stalks and set off along a narrow furrow. Although

I ignored her warning I was grateful for her concern for me — a stranger.

After crossing the bean field to the river bank, my shoes and the lower part of my clothes were sopping wet. The river was as blue and motionless as the pond, except for glints here and there caused by the current flowing unseen beneath. Some peasants were working on the other bank, looking dwarfed by the immensity of the fields. Soft serene sunshine lit up the soil as if giving boundless vitality to all creation. All matter — whether each bank, each plot of land or each hoe in a peasant's hands — seemed to have a life of its own.

I stood watching for a while, then walked on beside the river. Ahead two peasants were working a hand-operated water-wheel on the bank, each turning a handle to sluice water into the fields. Soon I came up with them. One was very tall and bronzed, his face wrinkled, with large eyes and a prominent nose. He looked as if in his forties. The other seemed little more than twenty and had the air of a student from the city. But although his skin was not too dark, his well-developed muscles showed that he was used to farming. So engrossed in their work were both that neither spoke nor even glanced at the other. This is a fairly common phenomenon. Two carpenters sawing the same piece of timber, two tailors at one table, behave as if each were alone. The onlooker imagines that they must feel unbearably lonely. But being only an onlooker how can he judge whether they are lonely or not?

The water drawn up by the water-wheel flowed into the fields through a temporary ditch which crossed my path. Both sides of it were muddy. I was hitching up my clothes to step across when the elder of the peasants said with a smile, "Watch your step or you may slip." He stopped working as he spoke, and the young fellow followed suit. The creaking of the water-wheel broke off abruptly.

"It's all right, I can manage," I answered and sprang across the ditch. As I had never taken this path before, all the sights here were new to me, and I was intrigued by the way they worked the wheel. So, since it was still early, I halted here.

Seeing me safely across they went on with their work. The elder

man looked at me and asked, "Are you from that school there, sir?"

"Yes."

"More than three hundred children, haven't you?"

"That's right, more than four hundred."

"Seem to have fun all right. Each time I pass your wall I hear them laughing and fooling about. Don't suppose they play truant, do they?"

"No, they don't." Presently I asked, "Was your wheat harvest good this year? There were no storms while it was ripening."

"Not bad at all, the best in the last five or six years."

"Will you be planting rice in this plot of yours now?"

"Yes." He pointed to a square seedling bed fifty paces away. "The seedlings there are already this tall. It's high time to transplant them."

I looked where he was pointing. The tender green seedlings in neat, orderly rows were like a square of green velvet. That natural green of theirs, a green never seen in paintings, was really enchanting.

He went on, "Once we have enough water in this field and have ploughed it, we can put in the seedlings. The afternoon of the day after tomorrow at the latest." His face lit up as he said this, with an ingenuous smile.

"You're in for some hard work," I observed. "You'll have to water and weed the fields every day, with the blazing sun grilling you too. Don't you find it tough?"

"Of course we don't have a soft life like you, but we don't find it hard either. You may think we do, but then we're used to it. Which of us villagers hasn't soaked his legs in the paddy fields? Which of us hasn't been baked in the sun? We've been used to it since we were kids, so who finds it tough?"

"You must love the crops you grow."

"Of course, they're our life. When we see them growing well, it puts fresh life into us. The year before last those pesky insects came to eat our paddy just as it was in flower. Made each stalk snap in two and wither. When we looked carefully, it was all because of those damned pests! Nothing we could do about it

but wring our hands!" At this recollection he spoke more gravely and slowly — a sure sign of anger among country folk.

"Why didn't you catch them? Weren't plenty of people sent from town to teach you how to guard against them and catch them?"

"How to guard against them, eh? We don't have much faith in that insecticide with the outlandish name. Lighting lamps in the evening and filling bowls with oil for them to drown in — that works all right. But everyone has to join in, and that can't be done. If only one or two families catch all the pests in their fields this way, when those in other people's fields have nothing left to eat they'll swarm over like refugees; so catching them is just a waste of time."

"The year before last was disastrous. Was last year better?"

"A bit." He laughed caustically. "But there's no killing them off! They've preyed on us for over ten years in a row, not leaving us one year in peace. Some years aren't quite as bad as others — that's all."

"Do the landlords reduce your rent?"

"They reckon they do." He laughed caustically again.

"By how much?"

"That depends. They're a crafty lot mostly. Maybe not all the crops are destroyed, but if most are hard hit they allow a ten per cent discount for the lot. Not so as to help those folk who've come through all right, but to make things even worse for those whose crops were wiped out. What they say is, 'This is the easiest way to calculate. How can we inspect every field to decide how much you should pay?' Some first raise the price of rice, then put up a notice announcing a twenty-five per cent discount for everyone. People hearing this think their rent has been lowered and rush to be the first to pay. The landlords end up better off than ever — they're the only ones to gain."

"What discount did you get the year before last?"

"Me?" He yanked the wheel to vent his indignation. "Ten per cent of course! Do you know whose land this is, sir?"

"No."

"Shao Hezhi's. His house is east of your school, you should know him."

I thought of the man who went every day to the teahouse in that street and sat at a corner table. His cheeks were hollow; behind his spectacles his short-sighted eyes were grim; his forehead was often wrinkled because he kept brooding. All in all, there was a calculating look about him. The only other customer I ever saw him speak to was the bailiff with whom he worked out what his tenants owed him. This was all I knew of him, but still I had to answer, "Yes, I know him."

"Just think, tilling *his* land, of course I pay ninety per cent!"

"I don't know much about him. Is he strict over the payment?"

"I'll say he is!" He paused before adding, "All landlords are, only some are more vicious than others. Mr Shao beats the lot for viciousness."

"In what way?"

"The figure he works out is like a rocky peak, there's no budging it. No matter how you beg him to cut it down a bit, nothing doing. If you owe him rent he sends the bailiff to fetch you, and sets a date on which you must pay up. Those eyes of his are so devilish, you daren't plead any more but agree and go home to think up ways and means, borrowing money or pawning whatever you have — anything rather than have to face those devilish eyes again."

They stopped and straightened up to look round and take a breather. A plop sounded from the river as if someone had thrown in a stone. "What was that?" I asked. Ripples spread slowly over the surface, disappearing when the largest reached the bank.

The youngster exclaimed, "Must have been a whopping big carp!" He kept his eyes on the water.

"That Mr Shao," the elder man went on, his voice sounding louder now that the wheel had stopped. "He's hard as flint. None harder. Once he went by boat to Yang Family Village to the east to collect rent. A family was supposed to pay up that day, but couldn't scrape together the money. The man was so frantic when he saw the boat coming, like a fool he hid himself in the latrine. When the bailiff found only a woman at home, he knew her husband was hiding. He hunted round and dragged him out of the latrine. In desperation the man said, 'I've got the

money, I'll pay in full today.' So the bailiff let go of him. Then off he rushed to throw himself into the river! All who saw set up a shout, and soon the whole village ran out. The man had already surfaced and sunk several times. Mr Shao's boatman was afraid, if he drowned, the villagers would sink his boat, so he hurriedly cast off to get away. Know what Mr Shao did? He stepped aboard and yelled to the boatman to stay put. He wasn't worried, not he! He bellowed to the villagers on the bank, 'Defaulting on rent is a crime! If he drowns, his wife will have to pay!' Everyone was worried stiff. They felt what he said was right, so how could they smash his boat? Instead they managed to rescue the man, and later he had to sell his last picul of rice to pay his rent — went short of food to clear his debt."

I was sickened by this account, and not just by the part that Shao had played either. Looking down at the river, no longer deep blue now that the sun had risen, I just grunted by way of comment.

"Working for a man like that, it pays to be civil and hand in your rent in good time." One hand on the water-wheel, he spoke as if from bitter experience.

"And how do you make out, farming?" I asked, suspecting that he was under cruel pressure.

"I manage somehow, sir, thank you. Not just by tilling these few *mu* of land. I have some other fields too which yield a couple of poor crops each year. That helps."

"Then you're not badly off." I felt relieved.

The water-wheel started turning again. The river water flowed slowly into the field. I should be starting my own work soon, not just watch other people working.

"We must have another talk some other day," I said before walking on.

Behind me the creaking of the water-wheel seemed to carry a distant voice, "Be seeing you."

11 June, 1921

Ye Shengtao

The Package

THE gentle jolting of the bus made him feel as comfortable as if a barber were massaging his back. Drowsiness was like a cap slipped over his head, and everything flashing before him blurred. He realized vaguely that the whiffs of scent drifting past his nostrils emanated from the bobbed-haired figure in a long gown who was staring out of the window, but he couldn't be troubled to look at her more closely, and felt no regret when the scent dissipated.

The bus suddenly lurched and rocked as if crossing some furrows, but then came to a stop. The passengers sighed, relieved that the tiring journey was over, then scrambled towards the door through which only one person at a time could pass. As this jostling held everyone up, they started exclaiming scathingly, "Steady on!" "What's the hurry?"

He was one of the last to stand up. As he neared the door, that bobbed-haired, long-gowned figure who seemed to be in a hurry leaned one hand on the doorway to steady herself. He halted instinctively to let her out first, and glanced casually at the smooth, rounded neck between the bobbed hair and the collar of her gown. . . . His thoughts started wandering.

"What's that?"

After he alighted this was the question asked by a man in black who had materialized before him. Over his black serge gown he had a sleeveless black brocade jacket, and his broad-brimmed hat was black too. There was something very crude about his bronzed fleshy face. One could see at a glance that he was a secret agent. He was questioning someone with a package under one arm, prodding it with thick fingers on which flashed several gold rings.

This galvanized him into recollecting the package in his own hands. He realized the danger he was in. His earlier nonchalance and drowsiness fled, leaving him as terrified as a mouse confronting a cat. He forbade himself to look at that fellow in black, as if this would make him invisible to the latter; but his refractory eyes would dart that way, and he saw that the man had let the other passenger go and his upraised eyes now seemed to be probing into the package in his own hands.

"I'm done for!" Thinking this he instinctively whirled around. Though people were milling about through the heavy traffic, how could he get away? Those baleful black eyes had already fixed on his package!

"Run for it. . . ." he thought hazily, and threw himself into a decrepit old rickshaw. As he was pulled away he could hear his heart pounding.

Actually he had no idea what that package contained. While waiting for the bus, staring raptly at the carvings on a four-storey building, someone had patted him suddenly on the back. Turning, he saw his good friend Old Li. Old Li told him he wasn't going back at once on account of some business and asked him to take this package and keep it until he could fetch it. It wasn't heavy or troublesome, just the size of a dozen journals, so no amount of soul-searching could have shown him the least reason to refuse this commission. By the time he was seated in the bus, one hand holding the package, he felt as calm as if nothing at all had happened.

But that rasping "What's that?" and that surly figure in black convinced him what the package contained just as surely as if he had opened it to look. He had known quite well for years what Old Li was up to: he was not afraid of the forces of reaction and

was charging boldly ahead to unmask their ugly faces and rip out their vicious guts. What else could he be carrying but plans for downing those devils or indictments of their crimes? On those squares of thick paper must be printed a prostrate corpse, a fearful sight weltering in blood—the most recent victim of the reactionaries. And below undoubtedly would be the caption, “He died for the people! Another enemy atrocity!”

Past him flashed the coloured signboards of shops on both sides. His mind was befogged as if from a hangover. And he felt chilled from head to foot right to the marrow of his bones, as if his whole being had shrunk there in acute discomfort. He tried to dismiss the idea, but it kept stabbing at his heart like a needle. “Is that fellow in black trailing me? Is he after me?” He could have ascertained this by looking round, but his neck seemed as stiff as a ramrod, and he believed that if he turned his head he would find himself looking up the black barrel of a revolver!

“I really don’t deserve to be arrested. Old Li now, he’s chosen his course, so he can’t complain if he gets put away. But why should someone like me, someone innocent, be involved? Still. . .”

Unconsciously he hunched up his shoulders as if a black arm were reaching for his neck and a powerful hand were about to clamp down on his head. After that, third degree . . . then he’d wallow in mud and faeces, his blood sucked by parasites of every kind, his cell-mates bearded robbers with matted hair. . . Weighed down with heavy chains he’d have to drag a great roller over a stony road which cut his feet . . . or else he’d get a bullet through his head!

As all before him turned black, he simply gritted his teeth and closed his eyes.

“Ah! To end like this before I’m even thirty! It goes against the grain. I want to live on! . . . Though it may not count as aiming very high, I did want to make a success of that school of mine; I wanted to see my students amount to something. But now, when I’ve just got going, am I to be cut off like this?” He felt so embittered, his head began to whirl.

For what seemed quite a while the rickshaw jolted forward,

but no powerful hand clamped down on his head. He opened his eyes a crack. He saw the skirt of his lined gown covering his thighs and hanging down over his knees. Sticking out beneath the hem was that paper package.

“Ah, the package!” When he had scrambled helter-skelter on to the rickshaw, how could he have put it on the foot-board like that with no attempt at concealment? This passed his understanding. And he now saw that one side of the package had at some stage been ripped open, so that passers-by could easily see the contents.

“That fellow must have seen the print of a prostrate corpse!” But he dared not stoop down to adjust the wrapping-paper. All he could do was furtively shove the package further in with his heels, and softly spread the skirt of his gown over it. At the same time he looked up as if nonchalantly at the faded number printed on the back of the rickshaw puller’s jacket. When presently he lowered his anxious eyes for another glance, he saw that he hadn’t fixed things properly. Though the front of the package was hidden, the sides were still visible.

“Caught red-handed, how can you clear yourself? At very least you’ll be charged as an agitator!” He actually shivered, his heels clamped against the package, as if eager to break the front of the seat and hide it underneath.

“Old Li now, he’s chosen his course, so he can’t complain if he gets put away. But why should someone like me, someone innocent, be involved?” His thoughts were back on the old track.

But at once he felt rather ashamed. “I may be innocent; but has Old Li done anything wrong?” He thought of the various forms the diehards took and their various machinations. Red blood and raging flames, gaunt figures and dead faces flashed through his mind like a film. “This is absurd! To tolerate those devils is an insult to decent people. Old Li’s cause should be the cause of us all. I should follow his example.”

“But I have my own work to do.” His mind turned to education. “I’m teaching young people not to lapse into bad ways, and that’s very important too, besides being more basic. As for the other, I’m not up to it. They have fierce agents and absolute

power, whereas I have nothing. Only a fool tries to smash a stone with an egg." These reflections rid him of his sense of shame, and he couldn't help feeling a certain contempt for Old Li's foolhardiness. While as for Old Li asking him to carry such dangerous materials, that really put his back up.

"Which way?" the rickshaw puller turned to ask as they approached a crossroad. In the gathering dusk the distant pedestrians and traffic were dark blurred shadows.

"Turn left," he answered automatically. That was the way to his school. Had he stopped to think he would have hesitated.

"Is that fellow trailing me? . . . Surely he can't be. This cream felt hat of mine is so distinctive he'd be bound to recognize it, couldn't mistake it. I meant originally to wear my old hat, what made me put this on instead? . . . Shall I take it off? . . . Better not. If I did, he'd certainly rush over, his black revolver aimed at the back of my head. . . . Raise the rickshaw hood? . . . No good either. It's obviously not raining, so why put up the hood? That would just show him I've panicked. . . . Ah, I'm done for."

"In one or two seconds maybe, or a minute or so later, whenever that brute feels like it he can call to me to halt. Of course I'd go with him. How could I resist?" He had a mental picture of tomorrow's big newspaper headline, "Capture of a Distributor of Subversive Journals" with his name underneath. Tens of thousands of readers would discuss the matter, some sighing, "Too bad, a brave, high-minded man!" Others would jeer, "Bah, what did he hope to achieve!" Others would swear, "Fine, these pests should be wiped out!" But which of them would be right? What distressed him most was the thought of his colleagues and students reacting in the same way to the news, but all of them agreeing that they had never expected this of their head. . . . Of course this would be the end of the school: no one would collect funds now or take charge. His colleagues would go their different ways while the students would be fetched home by their families. Two years' preparation and over six months of implementing his programme had all come to nothing! Even if he were lucky enough to clear himself, he couldn't run the school any longer. He'd have to hide his face and beat a re-

treat. Visualizing all this, he felt his life had ended. Ahead was nothing but black emptiness.

But the thought of third degree and wallowing in the mud with parasites sucking his blood and robbers for cell-mates goaded him into tacking about in search of a better way out. "When they question me, of course I'll tell them nothing. If they ask who will vouch for me I'll refer them to Old Mr Wang — they should believe him. The school will be notified at once, and they can approach the educational association. I'll send a telegram to my elder brother, and the provincial governor should be able to help. But will they let me communicate with outside? Not if the crime is considered serious. What then?" He sighed again in dismay, in his mind a vague recollection of how the prisoners in one of Tolstoy's stories communicated with each other by tapping the walls of their cells.

"Here we are!" he thought, at the sight of the familiar electric light with a white porcelain shade at the school gate. For a second he hesitated: his first idea was not to go in, as that would show the agent where he lived. But since he had let the rickshaw pull him here and the brute had trailed him, he must know anyway. The best thing would be to leave the package in the rickshaw when he went in. But the fellow knew quite well who had hired the rickshaw, and could easily track him down.

In any case, the rickshaw had now reached the school gate. In a daze, screwing up more courage than ever before, he called, "Stop!" The rickshaw puller set his rickshaw down. He stuffed some coppers into his hands, and snatching up the package scuttled through the school gate.

"Meisheng, go out and see if anyone's asking for me. If so, say I'm out."

Meisheng in bewilderment gave a dubious smile and started off slowly.

"Hurry up! I'm not here, tell him that!" Going into his own room, he hastily hid the package behind a case under his bed. He then sat down, resting his head on his hands, breathing hard, his heart still thumping.

Some time passed but Meisheng didn't come back. He could hear him fanning the stove on which he heated water.

"Meisheng!" he called repressively. "Has anyone been asking for me outside?"

Meisheng's thin face appeared in the doorway. "I went to the gate just now and saw some people. . . ."

"Ah!"

"But they were just passers-by. No one asked for you, sir."

"Oh." He felt like exploding but thought better of it. Of course his mind was more at rest, yet he still seemed caught in a web which he could not unravel. He stood up and paced the room a few times, then leaned against the window to look at the brightening sky where the new moon was rising. Turning back to his bed he took out the paper package from behind the case and with curiosity mixed with apprehension placed it respectfully on his desk.

"Ha — so that's what it is!" he exclaimed, having tugged out a sheet. On the paper was printed a portrait of an old lady with a kindly face, deeply lined yet in no way desiccated or haggard. Turning to the back he saw an obituary notice, and under "your mourning grandson" was Old Li's name.

After overcoming an indefinable sensation he looked up at his own reflection in the mirror on the wall. His face was flushed red, his eyes were bright.

Sheepishly he lowered his head.

30 November, 1926

Ye Shengtao

A Minor Flutter

MR Wu sprang to his feet to turn off the wireless, and the room seemed unusually quiet, the only sound being the faint clatter of mahjong tiles from the back courtyard.

"A-er!" Mr Wu switched off his study light and hurried impatiently out. "Light your lamp, quick. I'm going out immediately."

"Oh. Right."

Mrs Wu overhearing this in the back courtyard called archly, "Who's standing treat this time? Come home early after drinking. These days the weather's bad and there's a heavy dew. If you're late you may catch cold."

"Who's going to drink?" muttered Mr Wu as he strode to the gate where A-er was lighting the rickshaw lamp. Mr Wu climbed over his shoulder to take his seat.

"Where to, sir?" A-er pocketed his match-box, then picked up the shafts.

"Nowhere special. Just take me for a run."

The rubber tires rolled over the bumpy, stony road. The evening wind ruffled Mr Wu's hair and his hands went up of their own accord to smooth it. He realized then that he had forgotten his felt hat.

"Stop here." Mr Wu held out a note in his right hand. "Change this for five dollars' worth of coppers."

A-er parked the rickshaw, took the note and changed the money in a tobacconist's. The rate was 3,400 coppers per dollar, so for five dollars he got exactly seventeen packets. Having carried these out in both hands to put them on the foot-board, A-er set off again at a run.

"Change this for another five dollars' worth of coppers." In Mr Wu's hand was another note. Glancing at the enamel notice-board he muttered, "This shop gives only 3,390, ten coppers less." Still he didn't retract the hand holding the note.

A-er glanced in some mystification at his master, then once more fetched a pile of coppers to heap on the foot-board.

He changed money like this at each tobacconist's they passed. By the time they had covered several main roads Mr Wu's lower limbs were virtually hemmed in by coppers: coppers on the foot-board reaching up to his knees; coppers below the seat making it stick up; coppers on both sides of his buttocks cutting painfully into his pelvis; coppers on his thighs which seemed heavier at each step.

"That'll do," gasped Mr Wu. "Go back."

Without a word, gulping in a breath, A-er started running back. Sweat was zigzagging down his face.

By the time they reached home Mrs Wu's mahjong party had broken up and the guests had left. Mrs Wu and the old lady were peeling lotus seeds.

A-er followed Mr Wu inside with the first armful of coppers which he put at the foot of the wooden wall.

"So you weren't out drinking?" asked Mrs Wu. "What have you changed those coppers for?"

"There's a lot more than this. This one trip I've changed a hundred and five dollars into coppers. I'd have kept on, only the rickshaw wouldn't hold any more."

"Are you crazy?" His wife was bewildered.

A-er mopped his perspiring face with one sleeve, standing stockstill for the moment, his eyes on his master. He too was wondering, "Are you crazy?"



"Crazy?" Mr Wu clenched his fists and pounded his thighs. "See here, tomorrow there's bound to be a big drop in the price, maybe to three thousand, maybe two thousand, who knows? By changing a hundred and five dollars today, I'll have cut my losses by at least ten to twenty dollars." He told A-er, "Bring in the rest of the coppers outside."

When A-er had gone Mr Wu went closer to where his wife and mother were sitting.

"It's coming tomorrow, what we've been dreading for so long," he whispered.

"Are you sure?" Catching on at once, they asked virtually in unison.

"Of course I'm sure. I just heard the announcement on the radio — it's set for tomorrow."

"Why, you. . . ." Mrs Wu sprang up, hesitated, then went off at a tangent, "Why didn't you tell me earlier instead of going out for coppers? Think ten or twenty dollars such a fine scoop? We're going to lose more than ten times that amount. More than twenty or thirty times!"

"Cutting your losses by ten or twenty dollars is always to the good." The old lady had no way of assessing the situation. As usual she was just taking her son's side.

"What time is it now?" Mrs Wu looked at her watch. "Seven thirty-eight. The night market won't have closed yet. I'm going shopping."

"What are you going to buy?" asked the old lady.

"A few bracelets. They may be too countrified to wear, but gold doesn't depreciate."

"That's true. Metal's not like paper." The old lady expressed complete approval.

Mr Wu scratched his head as he pointed out gloomily, "The banks won't open till nine tomorrow morning."

"Never you mind. A-er! Don't bring those coppers in. Put them in the gate-house. I want to go out right away."

"Oh. Right." A-er put down the second armful of coppers, then turned and ran out.

Mrs Wu hastily washed her hands. Not stopping to change

her clothes, she picked up her little purse and hurried to the gate. The coppers under the seat had not yet been removed, much to her annoyance. "Botheration! Quick! Get a move on!"

A-er hastily made two trips to clear out all the coppers under the seat. Then, like a hound ready to retrieve game, he strained forward between the shafts.

Mrs Wu having seated herself ordered briefly, "To Tianbao on Ziyang Street!"

The few shop-assistants in Tianbao were yawning. Electric lights shone on silver trinkets in glass cabinets, and the shop seemed as forlorn as an empty square in the moonlight. Reanimated by Mrs Wu's arrival, the attendants stretched themselves. On hearing that she wanted to buy bracelets, the short fat fellow serving her smiled and ushered her into a reception room at the back. His colleagues, also rather bucked, looked enviously after his short fat back.

"I suppose you want the latest fashion, madam?"

"Please bring me some to choose from." Mrs Wu sat down on a teak armchair. "I want solid gold."

Fatty brought in a teak tray, and as he unwrapped a white paper package said, "This is a western design, the latest style." He unwrapped another, announcing, "This one has only this little decoration, but it looks comfortable." When he had unwrapped half a dozen packages, the teak tray was filled with gold, glittering objects.

It was not the design, however, which interested Mrs Wu, who simply selected three of the largest. "Please weigh these," she said.

He came back having done this to announce, "Together the three weigh 9.67 ounces."

"Today's price is a hundred and fifteen dollars." Mrs Wu had looked up at the figure chalked on the copper plate in a golden frame.

"That's right, madam, a hundred and fifteen dollars." Fatty screwed up his eyes. "It's already gone down in price. A few days ago it rose to a hundred and eighteen."

"Work out what the cost will be."

He took an abacus and flicked the beads with his short, pudgy fingers, then wagging his head said, "1,112 dollars 5 cents. Plus three dollars each for the making, comes to another nine. That makes a total of 1,121 dollars 5 cents." He flicked two more beads on the abacus. "We won't count the odd dollar five cents, just charge you 1,120 dollars." This said, his eyes strayed to Mrs Wu's small blue purse.

She opened it and took out a wad of notes, which she threw on the table like a ball of waste-paper. "I'll first give a deposit of a hundred dollars, and pay the rest tomorrow when I come to collect them."

Fatty moistened two fingers in his mouth, assenting, "Very good, madam." Then with the skill born of practice he counted the notes. "A hundred dollars, no mistake. May I ask your honourable name?"

"Wu. I'll come for them tomorrow, according to today's..." She broke off here.

"Of course, of course, according to today's price. Even if gold rises to a hundred and twenty tomorrow, after taking your deposit we can't charge you a cent extra."

"Yes, that's the rule." Keeping up her pose of sophistication, Mrs Wu took the receipt and left the shop to mount the rickshaw. Struck by a sudden idea she said to herself, "A richshawful of coppers — what use is that!"

"Home now?" A-er turned to ask as he picked up the shafts.

"Go to Yeshengxing. I want to buy some chicken marinated in soy sauce."

The next morning when the local paper was delivered, Mr Wu grabbed it to look at the front page. Mrs Wu craned forward, her head level with his ear. The old lady waited wide-eyed for them to read out the news.

"Six emergency laws. From today on the notes issued by the three central banks are to be the legal tender. Legal tender, not cash, must be used in all business transactions. All silver dollars must be exchanged for legal tender..."

"What does that mean?" asked the old lady mystified.

"You can't use silver dollars, but must change any you have into banknotes," Mr Wu answered loudly.

"Who's willing to do that?" This really made no sense to the old lady.

"The paper says anyone who hoards silver dollars will be punished according to the law."

"You mean I must change those three hundred dollars in my chest for banknotes?" the old lady fumed.

"Of course," replied Mrs Wu casually. A cheering thought had just struck her.

"If you don't, you won't be able to use them," added Mr Wu.

"I'd rather not use them then," said the old lady stubbornly. "Snow-white dollars are always worth their weight in silver and bound to come in useful. If they're not safe in my chest, I can dig a hole under the floor and bury them. Who's got second sight to know I have dollars there?"

"I doubt whether that would be safe," said Mr Wu thoughtfully. "Didn't you tell me, mother, that in the time of the Long Hairs* people hid silver in vats buried in the ground? But after the Long Hairs left and they dug up the vats, there was nothing in them but dirty water."

"Bah, I don't believe such talk!" Mrs Wu eyed her husband contemptuously and moved her head away.

"It happened all right. But those folk were unlucky, or their silver wouldn't have changed into dirty water. In our case, gracious Buddha..." The old lady stopped as A-er ran eagerly in.

"You did the smart thing, sir, changing those notes into coppers yesterday," he blurted out loudly. "There are no exchange rates up in the tobacconists' today. When people ask for coppers they say they haven't any!"

"Hear that?" Mr Wu couldn't help looking at his wife with a complacent smile.

But she ignored him, turning her head away.

* The Taiping insurgents of the 19th century who wore their hair loose round their shoulders instead of in Manchu-style queues.

"All the prices have gone up! Heavens! Just flour has risen two coppers!"

"Hear that?" Mrs Wu pouted at her husband. "And you thought you were making a killing by changing a hundred and five dollars."

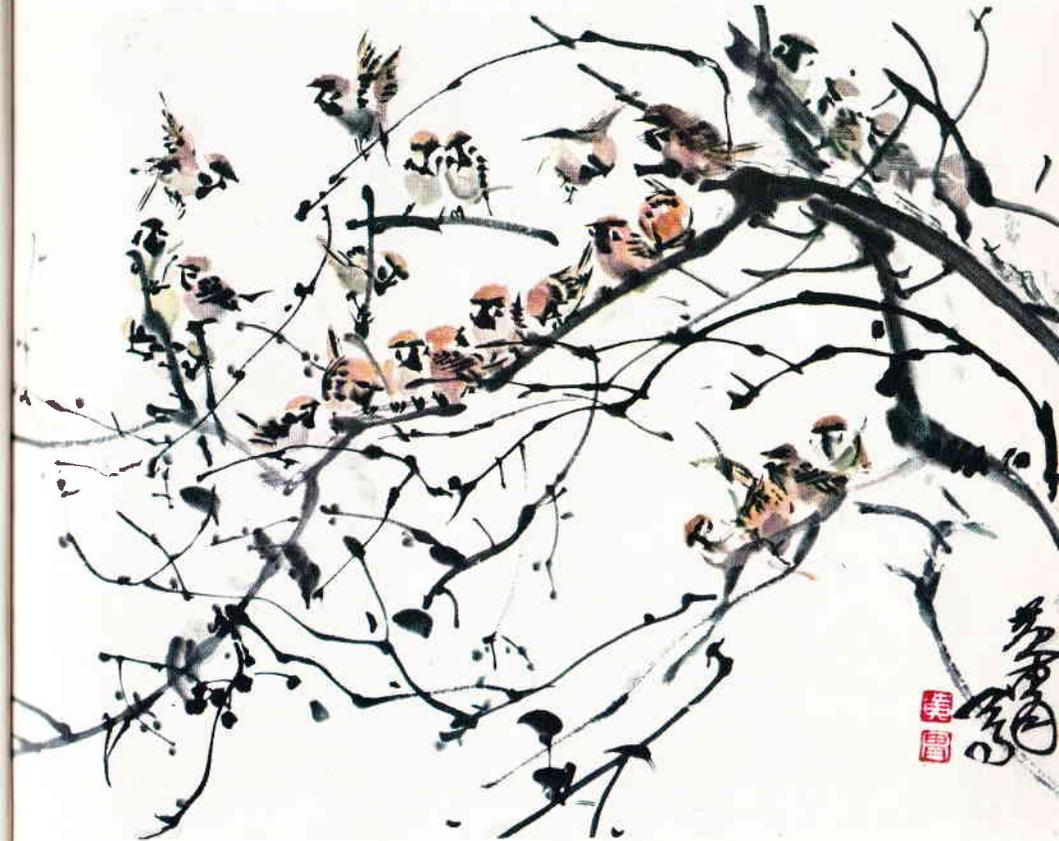
"Everyone's saying you can't use silver dollars, only notes. Using silver dollars is illegal! Amah Zhang in the Li family across the way has thirty dollars saved up. When she heard that, she beat her breast and burst out sobbing. Nobody can get her to stop. She's still sobbing away!"

"It's a scandal!" The old lady's heart bled for Amah Zhang.

"I'll tell you a joke," A-er chortled. "I've no silver dollars and no banknotes either. So whatever's used, I shan't lose any sleep. I've the strength to feed myself. If silver dollars can't be used, fine; the same goes for banknotes too. That way I can't lose out over counterfeit dollars or notes. Does that make sense to you, sir?"

Mr Wu grunted noncommittally, then asked, "Has my study been cleaned out?" Before A-er could answer, his eyes had fixed on the newspaper again.

Illustrated by He Youzhi



Sparrows

Paintings by Huang Zhou



A Uyghur Poultry Girl



Nursery Maids



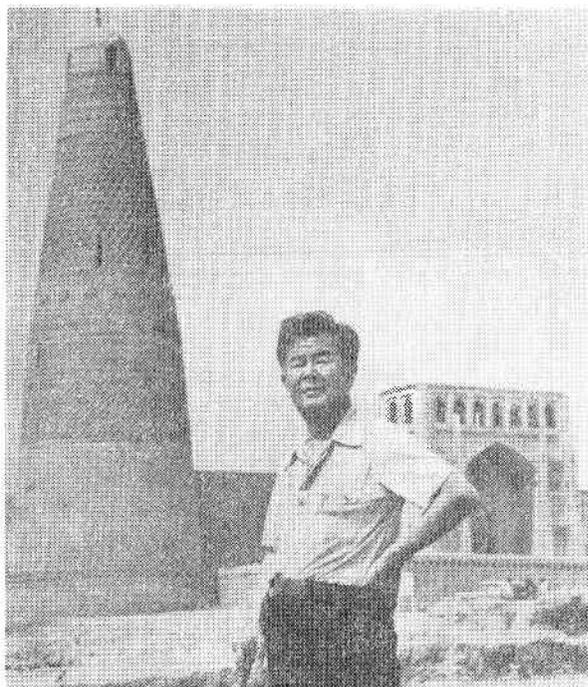
Donkeys

Wu Erlu

Huang Zhou and His Paintings

IN 1978 Premier Hua Guofeng, during his visit to Yugoslavia, presented President Tito with an impressive painting *The Eagle*. Later that year, when Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping was in Japan, he gave Emperor Hirohito a long scroll *A Hundred Donkeys* charmingly depicting many donkeys cavorting about. Who was the artist of these two works which won international acclaim? The famous Chinese painter Huang Zhou. The paintings were very precious in themselves coming from his brush, but what made them more remarkable was that Huang Zhou was at the time seriously ill in hospital, semi-paralyzed. Though he lay in bed for more than two and a half years he persisted in painting. His devotion to his art and his courage impressed all who knew him. He chose to make a large painting of the donkeys because of the deep friendship between the Chinese and Japanese peoples and in honour of the signing of the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty. The theme of a hundred donkeys has its basis in

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Huang Zhou in Xinjiang

traditional Chinese art, where there are paintings of a hundred horses, a hundred oxen, a hundred geese and a hundred deer. But Huang Zhou has made art history by painting for the first time a hundred donkeys. In fact the painting depicts ninety-seven donkeys, all different from one another.

Huang Zhou was born in 1925 in Lixian County, Hebei Province. His father was an army officer, who took him to Xi'an when he was eight and who died six years later. After his father's death, Huang Zhou left school and had a tough time making his way in life. Clever and studious, he particularly loved art. His only formal training, if it can be called that, was when he learned from the painter Zhao Wangyun before Liberation. This did, however, provide him with a solid artistic foundation.

Although Huang Zhou left his native home at an early age, his

love of the area has been reflected in his later paintings. In a lyrical way, he has conjured up scenes of the north China countryside: the reeds bordering the great lake; the lotus flowers blossoming in the ponds; the people working hard weaving nets and fishing, while the happy children collect water chestnuts and tend the ducks.

In the spring of 1949, Huang Zhou joined the People's Liberation Army as an artist. Being in the army gave him the chance to travel widely in China and he spent several years in the border areas of Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu and Tibet. There he loved the colourful life of the national minority peoples and admired their industriousness and enthusiasm. What he experienced aroused in him a strong desire to capture their way of life on paper. The fifties saw a great development in his art.

He worked with astonishing diligence, collecting materials for paintings. He sketched doctors going to visit their patients by camel and later produced *Going to See Patients*; young girls harvesting the grapes — *Ripe Grapes*; frontier guards patrolling in a blizzard — *On Patrol*. His brush brought to life children study-

Huang Zhou with herdsmen



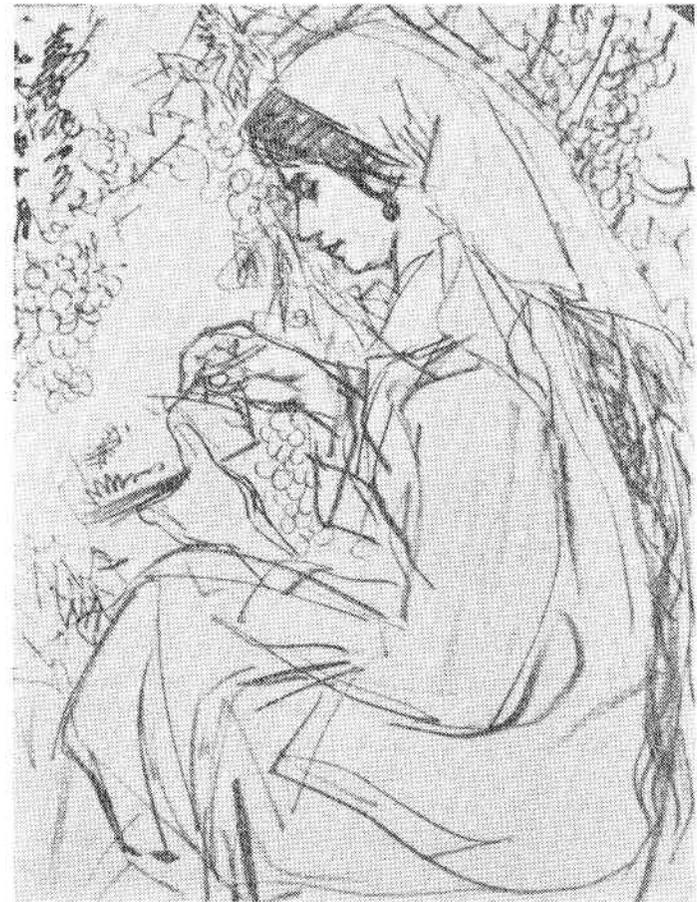


Kirkiz Schoolchildren (sketch)

ing while on horseback or old Uygur men and trumpeters making music. These and *Apple Blossom Time*, *Lambs* and *Snowstorm in the Desert* are among his best paintings from that period. The latter was born out of a chance meeting in the Qaidam Basin desert. In 1954, Huang Zhou went past there to attend the celebrations for the completion of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. As he crossed the freezing wasteland, he suddenly heard the tinkling of camel bells. Out of the whirling snow appeared a geological

prospecting team, led by a local guide. Like long lost brothers, the men and Huang Zhou greeted each other before parting again. As the camels plodded off into the snowstorm, the scene left an indelible impression on the artist. Huang Zhou determined to execute a painting in praise of the men who work far from their homes and families. *Snowstorm in the Desert* won a gold medal at the 1956 World Youth Festival as well as fame for Huang Zhou in the Chinese art world.

Uygur Woman (sketch)

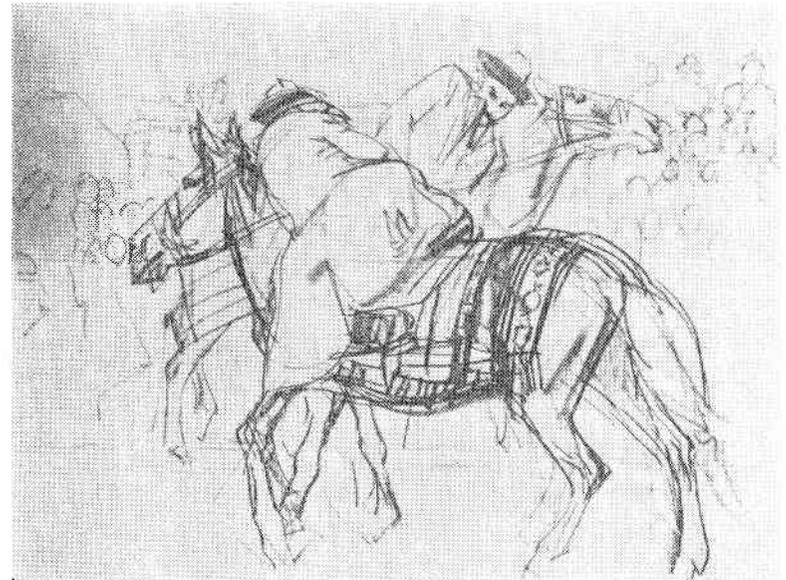




Uygur Children (sketch)

In fact the sharp eyes of Xu Beihong, the great artist, had already spotted Huang Zhou's talents in 1950. At that time Huang Zhou was still an obscure young painter. Xu Beihong and others were choosing works for an all-China art exhibition. Huang Zhou's *Sending Father Off to Fight Chiang Kai-shek* caught Xu Beihong's attention, for despite its artistic immaturity, it had something fresh both in form and theme. However, some with more conservative ideas opposed its inclusion in the exhibition. It was only through Xu Beihong's insistence that the work was finally displayed and was subsequently greatly admired. Later, at the 1952 all-China art exhibition, Huang Zhou's *Apple Blossom Time* won a first prize. Xu Beihong tried in vain many times to have Huang Zhou transferred to teach in the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

In 1955, however, Huang Zhou did come to work for the army in Beijing and later became acquainted with Deng Tuo, a noted man of letters and calligrapher. They often discussed classical literature and paintings from the various dynasties. Gradually



Wrestling on Horseback (sketch)

Huang Zhou came to realize the importance of this rich art heritage. Whenever he saw a famous classical painting, he would study or even copy it. Thus he came to love the work of Shi Tao, Ba-dashan-ren, Xu Gu, Ren Bonian and others. He copied bird and flower paintings, figure compositions and landscapes. On many of his later paintings he wrote vivid inscriptions based on what he had learned. The result was that his paintings in the early sixties saw a maturing of his technique. The compositions and figures were well arranged, the lines sure and forceful and the colours elegant. Huang Zhou also practised calligraphy, studying the inscriptions on Han- and Wei-dynasty tombstones, as well as the running and cursive scripts of the Jin and Tang Dynasties.

Then came the Cultural Revolution and Huang Zhou's art was criticized. For seven years he was confined and prevented from painting. Instead he was made to collect night-soil, clean lavatories and sweep the streets. In 1972 he was released and started to paint again. But in 1974, the "gang of four" held a notorious exhibition of so-called reactionary art in Beijing, by which they

attacked China's leading artists including Huang Zhou. Ten of his paintings were exhibited such as the one of a girl with a water buffalo. The gang said that as the girl was looking at some wild fowl which were flying to the west this meant that the youth in China admired western things. Huang Zhou was criticized at a big mass meeting and he says that, when they stated this and similar absurd charges, he couldn't help laughing, despite his terrible predicament. Finally the gang was overthrown in the

Tajik Herdsmen (sketch)



autumn of 1976. Huang Zhou became absorbed in a huge painting in memory of Premier Zhou, *Serving the People Heart and Soul*. However, the hard life in the border regions, sleeping in damp cold tents, had impaired Huang Zhou's health and he had developed rheumatism. This condition worsened as a result of severe nervous strain during the time of the gang. While he was working on his painting in memory of Premier Zhou, he began to feel a numbness and aching in his limbs. Although he said nothing about this, his health deteriorated until he finally collapsed just after he had completed the work.

Huang Zhou says, "I was very depressed. I couldn't move because I was paralyzed from the waist down. I could hardly control the brush when I painted. Sometimes three people had to hold me. I tried hard to fight against this illness. Now I'm a lot better. When I painted *A Hundred Donkeys* it took me more than two weeks to finish it. The painting was 48 feet long and 1.3 feet high."

It is well-known that Huang Zhou likes to paint donkeys, the most common and popular animal in north China. But every time he paints one he does it with profound feeling. With a few masterly strokes, lively, lovable donkeys appear on the paper. Yet Huang Zhou is never satisfied. "When I paint a donkey and then see a real one," he says, "I feel how poor my work is, because I have failed to express all that is in a donkey." Like the celebrated artists Qi Baishi and Xu Beihong, who became noted for their shrimp and horse paintings, Huang Zhou is famous today for his donkeys. Yet he also loves to paint eagles, cats, dogs, chickens and camels. With the first, he tries hard to create an image of fierceness and unyieldingness; with the last he tries to convey their willingness to bear the heaviest burden without complaint. Thus in times of difficulty, Huang Zhou has always encouraged himself, reflecting on the tenacious spirit of camels. He said, "I use my paintings to convey a message." He tries to accentuate the characteristics of the animals, giving each a symbolic meaning.

An avid sketcher, Huang Zhou's sketch-book is a treasure store of ideas and many of his sketches are in themselves fine works

of art, drawn with great care. Their sheer bulk alone is quite amazing. Yet when people speak of Huang Zhou as a gifted painter, he rejects this. Not content with his achievements, he'll remark, "I've done three thousand useless paintings!" He says that he tries to feel the beauty of his subject and then works hard to express it. "I simply use my skill to try and reach the best result. Yet in front of my subjects I feel my skill is very immature. In this way I am never satisfied. I don't pay any attention to style. Because I don't have any formal training in art, I don't have good technique," he explains modestly.

Last year Huang Zhou had recovered sufficiently to make a trip back to Xinjiang, where he had made many of his early paintings and which he had not visited for fifteen years. There Huang Zhou sought fresh inspiration. Though he was quite well and could walk, he feared that if his condition worsened again, he might never be able to go back there. "And that is something I would regret all my life!" In Xinjiang last autumn, Huang Zhou was welcomed and surrounded by crowds wherever he went. In Turpan, he saw girls singing while harvesting the grapes and old Uygur men driving home cartloads of Hami melons. In Kashi, he joined in the Muslim festival of Corban. Before the mosque the crowds gathered around him, singing and dancing. Like a thirsty traveller, Huang Zhou drank the healing waters of his beloved Xinjiang. Refreshed and excited, he forgot all about his illness and climbed the Pamirs, which even a fit man would find difficult.

A highly successful exhibition of his work was held in Shenzhen near Guangzhou earlier this year, while several books on his art have been published, though many of his paintings were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. No longer in the army, he is an advisor with the Arts and Crafts Bureau. When asked for whom he paints, he answers without any hesitation, "I want to paint for the ordinary people. I want them to understand my work. I want to serve them." And Huang Zhou's work is appreciated by the man in the street and the peasant in the commune. Apart from being one of China's top artists, he is also one of her best loved ones.

Liu Zhen

The Black Flag

IN February 1958 I was transferred from Hebei provincial women's federation to be deputy Party secretary of a township of C — County not far from Baoding. Ding Jinzhong, the Party secretary, was an enthusiastic thirty-year-old. He was extremely honest, full of energy and meticulous in his work. Year after year the township under his charge won a red flag for its good work.

When our township's co-ops merged into a people's commune a canteen was opened. Uncle Li, the old cook in his sixties, had been a pal of Ding's father. The two of them had gone begging together as boys, and Li now looked upon Ding as his own son. One day when Ding had come late for lunch Uncle Li quickly cooked something and handed it to him with two big corn buns. Ding looked at the dish. "Was this what everyone had?" he asked dubiously.

"Of course!" bluffed Uncle Li.

It happened that Feng, head of the commune women's federation, was still eating at a table nearby. Ding went over to investigate. When he came back, he angrily pushed his dish away,

This story 《黑旗》 by Liu Zhen (刘真) has been taken from the monthly *Shanghai Literature* (《上海文学》), No. 3, 1979.

telling Li, "Add this to tonight's supper!" Then he poured out a bowl of hot water and ate his buns.

That evening, under a poplar, Uncle Li, a pipe firmly in his mouth, muttered to himself, "H'm, what a man! Now I really know him."

The Great Leap Forward* was in full swing that year when one day the county Party committee called a radio conference by the radio receiver and transmitter sets. One commune Party secretary, Liu, boasted, "What's so great about catching up with England in fifteen years? We can do it in a year and a half!"

A shrill-voiced woman cried, "What? A year and a half! That's not good enough. Our commune pledges to realize communism within three years."

"Three years?" countered Liu. "Tomorrow all our commune members will eat in canteens. We'll achieve communism in three days!"

Contending voices blared out from the loudspeaker as the various communes vied with one another. No one spoke for our commune. Fortunately Xiyang Commune kept mum too, or we would have been declared an obstacle to communism.

Afterwards, Ding immediately called a meeting of our commune and brigade leaders.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "How soon can we catch up with England and when can we realize communism?"

One young secretary of a brigade Party branch said, "We can beat everyone. If eating in the canteen means communism, I'll tell my villagers to begin tonight."

A prudent-looking Party branch secretary asked, "Anyway, what is communism? What are England and the United States like? How can we catch up with them if we don't know anything about them, Secretary Ding?"

Ding turned to me. "Let's ask Luo to tell us. She worked in the city before she came here. She must have seen and heard a lot."

* A left-orientated economic programme, which China followed in 1958. "Catch up with England in fifteen years" (in gross industrial output) was one of the slogans prevailing then.

Everybody clapped, while I gaped. I had been transferred here because I was regarded as a person with conservative ideas. If I spoke my mind now, I would certainly be looked upon as a Rightist. I hesitated. But my faith in Ding prompted me to tell them the little I knew. My words sparked off a vigorous debate.

One shouted, "Good grief! They're a hundred years ahead of us! We'll be lucky to catch them up in fifteen years!"

"We're so poor. How can we achieve communism in a short while?"

Raising his hand for attention, Uncle Li cried, "Cut it out. The more talk, the more confusion. The best we can do is to work hard, make progress and never go backwards."

"Uncle Li's right," said Ding. "I agree with him completely."

"Us too!" someone cried. "Let those big mouths talk."

The meeting dispersed amid hearty laughter.

2

Early next morning, while the others went to the brigades to arrange the work, I called a mass meeting in the brigade where the commune offices were situated to inform everyone that the communes were going to be set up throughout the county, with canteens, kindergartens, nurseries and rest homes for old people. I also explained the significance of the Great Leap Forward and of catching up with England in fifteen years. The enthusiastic brigade members offered to contribute grain, cooking utensils and empty rooms for a canteen, while some girls volunteered to look after the old people in our rest homes. Everyone wanted to do their bit to create a prosperous new China. Uncle Li picked his way through the people and pressed a piece of paper in my hand. "This is for the brigade," he said. "Take it. I don't want it." It was a money order for twenty yuan.

After the meeting I made straight for the kitchen. "I know how tough things are, Uncle Li," I told him with a smile. "Your son in the army doesn't have much to spare either. He scraped together these twenty yuan for you. You must keep them." I slipped the money order back into his pocket.

Uncle Li, who was making a bun, threw the dough angrily into the basin. "What? During the Anti-Japanese War I laid mines and blew up railways for communism. Now that we're nearer to it, why stop me doing my share?"

Ding came in just then. I told him what had happened. When Ding tried to persuade Uncle Li he protested again. With a shrug of his shoulders, Ding told me to accept the money.

Back in our office, we looked out and saw Uncle Li sulking under a poplar tree. "We've offended him. You must go and calm him down," I urged.

Ding went over, paused and began, "We'll accept your money, Uncle Li. Please don't be angry with us."

"You don't understand how I feel. You don't know the miserable life my family led."

His hand on Uncle Li's shoulder, Ding went on, "My father told me how both of you met as kids begging. Please don't be angry with Secretary Luo, uncle. It's just that she knows how hard up you are. She knows you haven't even heated your brick bed this winter. She has a soft spot for your little orphan grandson."

Uncle Li called to me. "Come over here! I want to tell you something."

I walked over. He silenced me with his hand. "I know the predicament you're in. It's exactly because making revolution is no picnic that we want to go faster. I don't mind a hard life. I've never had an easy one anyway. But I don't want everybody to be always poor. I want to do all I can to help our commune."

His little grandson Shunzi came over to me, so I picked him up. I was about to say, "Look at his clothes! He's almost in rags." But I thought better of it.

3

The next day, I asked Feng to go with me to get some material to make Shunzi some clothes. Then County Party Secretary Mi's voice boomed over the loudspeaker, "All leading members of the communes and brigades go immediately to their offices for a radio

conference. Each commune is to report on their production plan for the next three years."

Li poked his head out of the kitchen and called out to me, "Where are you going, Secretary Luo? This is an important meeting."

Feng said contritely, "It's all my fault. As head of the commune women's federation, I should have looked after them better. So many problems! I forgot about Shunzi."

The brigade and team leaders arrived. Ding asked them to sit down and then beckoned me over to sit beside him at the transmitter.

We were soon scared out of our wits by what we heard. Liu opened his big mouth first. "I guarantee that our commune will produce 5,000 catties per *mu* this year."

"Fine!" Secretary Mi responded.

One of our men commented, "Such a boaster!"

After a while, the woman with a shrill voice piped up, "Our commune guarantees 8,000 catties per *mu*."

Secretary Mi's voice was even louder, "Excellent!"

Another man in our commune commented, "She and that Liu would make a good couple. They could live on their big words."

Not willing to let the woman get the better of him, Liu cried out, "We guarantee 10,000 catties!"

Secretary Mi and others cheered. Then someone near me remarked, "I wonder if Liu has 10,000 hairs on his bald head!"

We had a good laugh.

The output escalated until it reached 150,000 catties per *mu*. As one of our brigade leaders commented drily, "Bragging and lying don't break any laws or put people in jail. The boasters get praised and will never be called Rightists."

The numbers soared until Liu capped it with "We guarantee 200,000 catties!"

No one dared challenge him. Secretary Mi bellowed, "Bravo! I'll award you two cartloads of chemical fertilizer."

A young man with us jumped to his feet. "Give me the mike, Secretary Liu! I'll say that our brigade will produce 500,000 catties, and we'll get eight cartloads of fertilizer."

As he reached for the microphone a spatula came down smack on his head. He stopped and looked up. It was Uncle Li. Laughter broke out, shaking the house. Rolling up his sleeves, Uncle Li cried, "Just you dare! I'll challenge anyone who talks big and fools the people."

Secretary Mi bellowed over the loudspeaker, "Well, Ding Jinzhong, have you lost your tongue? You haven't said anything."

Everybody turned to Ding who, flushed and tense, was fidgeting, tearing up bits of paper.

Pointing at the microphone Uncle Li told him, "Tell him our plan. The one everybody agreed on. Let him dare to find fault!"

Ding spoke calmly into the microphone. "Our commune has discussed our plan. We'll try to produce 800 catties per *mu* this year, 1,500 the next and 2,000 the year after." To achieve this would require a lot of hard work from everyone. But it seemed as if no one understood this. The loudspeaker went dead.

After a long while, Secretary Mi said at last, "Attention. Have you all heard him?"

Angry voices screeched out from the loudspeaker, "Yes. We did."

Secretary Mi again. "What shall we do? Are they leaping forward or going backwards? Aren't they trying to impede the progress of the county? Are they sabotaging us on purpose?"

There was more clamour. "They are sabotaging us. We'll have it out with them. We'll give them hell!"

All eyes were fixed on the loudspeaker. Uncle Li jumped up, threatening to smash it.

The colour in Ding's face drained away. Uncle Li consoled him. "Don't worry. I'll speak for you." He took over the microphone and spoke into it. "Stop farting about! Let me say something!"

"Who's speaking?" From the voice I knew it was Sun, Secretary Mi's assistant.

"A mere human being."

"What kind of a human being? Who gave you the right to speak?"

"I'm one of the people. I got the right to speak by fighting the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek. What about you? Hey, Liu and

you other big mouths, you're sure you can do it? How will we penalize you if you can't produce 200,000 catties per *mu*?"

Laughter was heard. Annoyed, Sun demanded, "Who was that?"

"I'm old enough to be your father, sonny! You want to throw me into jail? OK. I've no one to look after me."

This was no joke. He really could be imprisoned. I quickly took over the microphone. Sun was still shrieking, "That man isn't one of the masses. He's a Rightist!"

4

Ding quickly spoke into the microphone. "Secretary Mi! The speaker was an army dependant."

"You have only good people in your commune, don't you?" Secretary Mi said sarcastically. "I want to talk to Luo Ping."

"Speaking. What do you want?" I asked.

Secretary Mi came straight to the point. "What's got into the people in your commune? Have you been influencing them?"

My blood boiled. I wanted to give him a piece of my mind, but I swallowed instead and retorted, "Under your guidance, Secretary Mi, they've become good, sensible leaders. I wish I could take the credit, but I can't. Still, if you'll give me this commune as my private estate, I'll be overjoyed."

"Don't be so cheeky now. Tell me what happened when Houying Brigade were planting sweet potatoes?"

So, that was how I'd landed in trouble. I told him briefly.

Fang, a deputy secretary of the county Party committee, was in charge of an experimental plot of fifteen *mu* in Houying Brigade. Two days before I had gone there with an inspection group. More than twenty people were planting sweet potatoes in a well-irrigated flat field as closely as if they were transplanting rice seedlings. No one in the inspection group had dared to criticize this, for the atmosphere in the whole county was already very tense. Anyone could be labelled a Rightist, be dismissed or arrested. But I never could keep my mouth shut. "Sweet potatoes won't grow if they're

planted so closely together. Even peanuts need more soil than that! They won't be any good!" I remarked.

After I'd repeated this into the microphone, Secretary Mi barked an order, "Debate it with her!"

Many began arguing with me. One intellectual, who had been sent to be a deputy Party secretary, said, "Her bourgeois outlook makes her see only the shortcomings and attack new ideas as soon as they emerge." I kept quiet.

Finally Secretary Mi ordered, "Ding, you and Luo come to the county Party committee right away." The loudspeaker whined and went dead. The meeting ended.

It was noon. Everyone went home for lunch. I ate with relish. But Ding stared at his food. Uncle Li approached him. "Listen, son, you're too young. If such a small matter upsets you, what will you do if something more serious happens? You won't build a new China by sulking. You must eat if you want to serve the people. If you don't want to work for them any more, starve yourself to death. That'll put an end to all your worries!"

With tears in his eyes, Ding took up a steamed bun. Uncle Li urged, "Go on. Take a bite."

All the way to the county, which was ten *li* away, Ding never said a word.

"A penny for your thoughts," I said.

"What shall I do? What kind of a Communist shall I be? I can't be honest and speak the truth. Since I first came into contact with the Communist Party twenty years ago, I've never lied to the Party. Things have changed now. In the past if you lied you were criticized. Now you get promoted and praised. If I don't boast, I'll be dismissed and punished." He stopped, his eyes held mine, waiting for a reply. My heart felt heavy.

I burst out, "The movement started last year to struggle against the Rightists is still going on. Many people have been scared into talking nonsense."

"What shall we do?" he asked me.

"Things will become even worse if nobody dares to speak the truth. We'll do what we think correct. Sooner or later everything will be put right."

You may have expected Secretary Mi to give us a severe dressing down. But no. He was a good man, who had only become impatient and coercive because he was too anxious to build up the country and transform the people's lives overnight. He had fought in the war too. In his present post, he had to attend many meetings and didn't mix often enough with the peasants and know them better. All smiles, he asked us to have a meal with him and offered us tea.

"We must raise the morale, not dampen it," he exhorted.

Ding calmed down. Things looked all right, but then Secretary Mi produced a length of black cloth from a cupboard. "Take this with you and learn a lesson," he said.

"What is it?" I asked eagerly.

Smiling he said, "A black flag for backwardness. The county Party committee has decided to give it to you." Ding's face fell. Mi folded it up and tossed it over to me. Still smiling he said, "Off you go now. Don't take it too hard. I'm going to a village. I'll see you some other time." He walked out and went away on his bicycle. Ding was stunned.

"An unthinking good person can do great harm to other good people," I remarked. I put the black flag in my bag. "Let's go," I said to Ding. "We got this flag because I criticized the planting of those sweet potatoes. It's got nothing to do with you and the commune."

"Don't try to comfort me!" he flared up.

He was silent all the way home. The commune leaders were waiting for us anxiously at the village entrance.

"Don't worry. Go back to your work," I told them. But Ding's miserable face gave the game away, and they followed us silently. Ding went to his room and plonked himself listlessly down on the brick bed. They asked me what had happened.

"Please be quiet and leave Ding alone. I was criticized for what I said the other day and that upset him. Please go back to your work."

Uncle Li said, "You're lying! I don't believe you." He went

towards Ding's room as if to try and get to the bottom of things.

Not wanting him to make things worse, I cried, "Come back, Uncle Li. I'll tell you." He returned, arms akimbo, ready for battle.

What could I tell them? If the black flag had really been meant for me, I would hang it up on the wall. Time would prove who was right.

But how would the comrades take it? Uncle Li was demanding severely, "Come on, then!"

Feng grabbed my bag and pulled out the black flag. "I called up Sun just now, and he told me about this black flag. I thought he was joking. We've always won red flags. Now the minute the people's communes are set up, we get a black flag. This was given to us, comrades. Have you ever seen anything like this before?"

Silently Uncle Li walked out. I began to say, "Comrades, everything has two sides. A bad thing may be turned to good account. . . ."

Someone countered, "What bad thing have we done? How can it be turned to good account?"

"Look at Shunzi's old trousers! Let's make him a new pair out of this material," I blurted out. "If the county Party committee finds out about it, we'll ask for more. We've many poor families who need a lot of new clothes."

Laughing, they came over to feel the cloth. Uncle Li returned, having changed into a pair of good strong shoes and tied a white towel round his head. "Let me through!" he cried. "Give it to me." No one handed it over. "What? Has it turned into a treasure?" When no one replied he added, "Give it to me! I'll take it to that Liu. He really deserves it."

There was another peal of laughter. I put my hand on his arm. "Don't do that. I can't bear to part with it. It'll make a good tunic for me."

He examined the cloth too. "Yes. It is good material. Then I won't give it to him."

When he left, Feng cut the material. Others supplied the buttons and pockets. There were many helping hands.

"Will someone go and fetch Shunzi?" Feng asked. "I'll measure

him carefully. Perhaps there'll be enough to make him a cap too. I've a red star I can pin on it." Everybody clapped joyfully.

6

We sat up late that night to make Shunzi a pair of trousers and a cap, which looked very nice with the red star on it. Early next morning Sister Wang who was in the village women's association, wiped Shunzi's face and hands clean while he was still asleep. Awakened by the wet towel, he jumped up and looked at us in astonishment. "Here are some new clothes for you," she told him.

When he had put them on, Feng took Shunzi to the commune office. Uncle Li was very pleased. "Who dressed you up so well?"

Pointing at me, Shunzi told him, "It was Auntie Luo. She knows how to get black flags."

"Well, well! So you're a lucky fellow! Go and show it to Uncle Ding and give him a nice salute. But don't tell him what it was made from."

Shunzi nodded happily just as Cheng, the Party branch secretary of the neighbouring village, came hurrying in. "Ding came to our village late last night," he panted. "He's cracked up. We've brought him back." We all gaped. Several men ran out.

"It's all my fault!" exclaimed Uncle Li. "I was with him until midnight. Then I saw him into bed and went home. I should have taken Shunzi and stayed overnight." Picking up his grandson he said, "If he's ill, what will we do?"

Shunzi wriggled out of his arms. "I want to give him a salute, grandpa." Everyone was upset. Several young men helped Ding in. He was very pale and he had a dazed look in his eyes. When he caught sight of the loudspeaker, he stood rooted to the ground. Frightened, Shunzi went up and saluted him. His little hand remaining at his forehead, he cried, "Uncle!"

Ding looked down at him stupidly. Suddenly, pointing at the little boy he cried, "He's the black flag. Ha! Ha! Ha! . . ." He laughed hysterically.

Pulling Shunzi away, Uncle Li grasped Ding's hands. "My son. Go and have a good cry. That'll make you feel better. It's bad

to bottle things up inside you." Ding's laughter, Uncle Li's pleading and his grandson's wailing distressed everyone.

When Secretary Mi heard about this he ordered us to take Ding to hospital right away. Ding was taken away in a cart while we gazed sadly after him.

Sun came, summoned the commune leaders, produced a notebook and asked us the reason for Ding's nervous breakdown. Everyone was silent. Then Feng burst out, "You know the reason."

Sun glanced at me and said, "I don't believe a black flag could cause that! It must have been something else."

I flared up at once. "What else?"

He banged his fist on the table. "Ask yourself! The county committee, the provincial committee and you yourself know what kind of a person you are."

Everyone was furious. Uncle Li butted in. "I know what kind you are, Sun! You want to get on the county Party committee and the provincial committee, climbing on top of other people! You're that sort!"

That really bugged Sun! "An army dependant shouldn't protect a big Rightist," he exploded.

Uncle Li's voice boomed even louder, "Balls!"

Shaking with fury, Sun put away his notebook. "Just you wait! I'll have you arrested," he threatened.

Shunzi came in and hugged his grandpa's legs. "Grandpa, I'm scared!"

Sun went away. I picked up Shunzi. "Don't cry. There's a good boy. They can take me. I won't let them take your grandpa."

Shunzi put his arms around me. "No. Auntie Luo. I don't want them to take you either."

Sun rode away on his bike. Feng cursed, "That bastard! What a bully! I won't have it. I'll go to the county and have it out with him. Let them take me as the biggest Rightist!" She hurried away.

I ran after her calling, "Come back! It's me they want!" But she was already out of earshot. Shunzi called after her, "Auntie, auntie!"

I put Shunzi down to chase after Feng, but he hung on to me for all he was worth. As I sat down, he took my face in his little hands and pleaded, "Don't go away, Auntie Luo."

Uncle Li said, "I'll go and reason with them, if they don't come for me."

Feng came home at dusk looking depressed. She told us, "Our commune is to be merged with Beixiang Commune. Luo is to be the fifth deputy secretary. A few of us will go, but I'm to stay here."

"Will they arrest Uncle Li?"

"Let them dare!"

In the evening in my room, Feng said, "Sister Luo, we're worried about you. They're watching you. So don't speak out any more."

"Let's hear what Uncle Li thinks," I said, taking the hand of Shunzi, who was asleep in my bed.

Sitting opposite me, Uncle Li was smoking. "You joined the Eighth Route Army as a young girl and took cover in the trenches while attacking the enemy. Of course, one ought to be straight, but that's not possible now. Last year, many people were criticized in the anti-Rightist campaign just because they spoke frankly. I know you're outspoken and don't keep your thoughts to yourself. In the past people who died for truth were honoured as martyrs. Now, one becomes a counter-revolutionary for speaking the truth. I don't know why it's like this. Everyone knows that you can't plant sweet potatoes as closely as that, yet you shouldn't say a word. How can revolutionary cadres and Communists keep quiet over such things?"

Only then did I reveal to them that I had written a letter to the provincial Party committee reporting on what was happening in the county. An investigation group had been sent and had discovered that things were worse than I had mentioned and that Beixiang Commune had been cheating and lying to win credit.

Secretary Chen of Beixiang Commune was furious. He had

questioned me, "How did the provincial committee find out? Did you report on us?"

"That's my duty," I told him.

He was mad and called me a real Rightist. I was sure he wouldn't like me to be his deputy and might make things harder for me. More trouble was probably in store.

Sun came again the following morning and announced to me, "First, you are not going to Beixiang Commune. Continue working in the fields here until further notice. Second, give the black flag to Xiyong Commune. Since you are no longer a commune, you can't keep it. Xiyong has made mistakes too. The county committee has decided to give it to them."

Uncle Li showed him Shunzi. "This is the black flag and it will stay here."

Seeing the trousers and cap, Sun pointed at me and demanded, "Was this your idea?" I nodded. Indignantly he shouted, "You're challenging the county committee. You're anti-Party and anti-socialist. Buy another black flag and take it to Xiyong. You Black Flag Secretary!"

As the people closed in on him, he dashed out and jumped on his bike.

The county committee had ordered Xiyong Commune to plant 200 *mu* of sweet potatoes too closely, only two inches apart. When their secretary Zhang refused, on the pretext that all their fields were already planted, he was told to dig up the wheat and corn which were doing very well. His refusal had earned them a black flag.

"Shall we give them a black flag?" Feng asked the comrades.

"No! And Sun can't bully us."

I walked into the office and found a red velvet flag. "Comrades," I said, "the people awarded us this in the past. Let's give it to them."

"What a brilliant idea! Let's go."

The comrades' eyes moistened at sight of the white characters on it, "To the good Party secretary who serves the people wholeheartedly." It was because Ding had been such a good Party secretary that they were given this flag.

They didn't want me to go, as I was already in trouble.

"I've decided to take my case before the provincial Party committee. I'm leaving tonight. Perhaps I won't return. One offence more won't make any difference," I argued.

So Feng and two men went with me. Uncle Li came too with Shunzi on his back.

Sun was at Xiyong Commune giving their leaders hell for not obeying his orders. Our arrival angered them more.

Sun announced, "Luo Ping has brought you the black flag. All of you stand up respectfully and accept it. After you've planted the sweet potatoes, you can give it to another commune."

They remained seated, looking grave. Sun gave Feng some drawing pins to hang up the flag. Uncle Li took my bag and said to the Xiyong peasants, "Comrades, our commune gives this flag to you. Let no one protest!" They gave him dirty looks. Feng pulled out the red flag and pinned it up with Uncle Li's help. All rose clapping, tears glistening in their eyes. Zhang grasped my hand and said with feeling, "Thank you for your support!"

Furious, Sun stood gaping. Coming over to me he fumed, "Secretary Black Flag, this is a serious counter-revolutionary act. You'll suffer for this!"

When he left, everyone burst out laughing.

Uncle Li said, "He can go to hell! We don't give a damn! Comrades, I hope the red flag will help you to fight him. You won't dig up the corn and let the revolution and yourselves suffer, will you?"

"No!" came the answer.

Picking up Shunzi, Uncle Li added, "If you should get a black flag, don't lose heart. Look at the trousers and cap Secretary Luo made for Shunzi with the one given to us. Aren't they nice?"

Everyone chuckled. Shunzi laughed and wriggled happily in his grandpa's arms.

That night I left the commune for the provincial capital. Tears dimmed my eyes when Uncle Li, Feng and many others waved goodbye at the station.

After that, I suffered for eighteen long years, during which time I often recalled C— County and its people. The county was one of those areas which suffered most during the Cultural Revolution because of the interference of Jiang Qing and her followers. People were divided into two factions, which fought each other bitterly. Terror reigned everywhere. Only the poplars we had planted along the railway grew in peace. And what of the people there? What had happened to them?

In October 1976, I went to Baoding on business. I had intended to leave as soon as I'd finished my work, but my empty stomach drove me into a restaurant near the station. Inside were many beggars. One mother, ashamed of begging herself, urged her son to stretch out his hand. But the little boy refused, hanging on to the door with all his might. Another boy in rags stood in a corner, his head bowed, not wanting to raise his eyes to look at the customers eating. I found out that most of them had come from C— County. The mention of the name of my old commune made my eyes smart. I bought some steamed buns and gave them to the hungry people. But what good could a few buns do? And these were the veterans from the old revolutionary base in the Anti-Japanese War and their children! What was China coming to!

As I was thinking, my attention was attracted by an old man who was helping to collect the dishes and bowls. He looked like another beggar by his ragged clothes and the way he ate all the leftovers. Was he really helping or trying to keep in with the young girls behind the counter so that he wouldn't get thrown out? Many questions were in my mind. What about our Great Leap Forward? Where were the rest homes and kindergartens we had set up? What had become of the grain the commune members had contributed? We had put in so much hard work then. How was Uncle Li's twenty yuan spent? Was the land the people had fought for with their lives still productive? What officials were responsible for such misery? What were the people thinking? Where were all the good cadres?

As I left the restaurant I gazed around at the old town. Sud-

denly all the loudspeakers blared out. The passers-by halted. Vehicles stopped. Everyone listened with bated breath to the announcement that the "gang of four" had been arrested. The old man ran out of the restaurant, nearly knocking me over, and was helped by many in the crowd. A waitress brought out a stool, "Sit down please, uncle."

Looking up with emotion, he asked, "You're calling me uncle again and asking me to sit down?"

Another girl brought out a bowl of boiled water. "Please have a drink, grandpa."

The old man asked, "You're saying grandpa again?" As he gulped down the water, a little of the bitterness in his heart must have been eased.

I produced some biscuits and offered them to him. "Here, uncle, please have some of these."

He pushed them away. "No, thanks! I want a special dish and, if it's cooked well, I'll chew up the bones too."

The people around him laughed. He obviously meant the "gang of four".

Gongs and drums sounded and firecrackers exploded. Trucks decorated with red flags converged on the square. The old man made his way there too. "He's waited a long time for this day. Don't let him fall over and break his neck," one man said. I quickly caught him up and helped him.

He looked round the square. As one truck drove up, he tried to hail it. When nobody heard him, he picked up a persimmon and threw it at the windscreen, splashing red juice all over the glass. The driver stuck his head out and cursed, "The son of a bitch! He must be a follower of the 'gang of four'. Grab him!" The old man clambered up beside him and rapped him on the head. When the driver saw who it was he laughed. "Oh, it's you, grandpa. I didn't spot you in the crowd." The people on the truck offered the old man their hands. "Uncle Li, come up!"

I looked at the old man closely. He was like a skeleton. The change was so great that I had not recognized him. It was amazing he was still alive and kicking. Happily I walked over as two young men lifted him on to the truck. Catching sight of me, he asked,

"You want to come up too?" Tears coursed down my cheeks, as I was helped up.

When the truck started, I examined the people on it. A grey-haired man sitting on a stool at the front instantly gave his seat to Uncle Li. I made him out to be Secretary Mi. Uncle Li clasped the hand of a man on his right. Their hands trembled with emotion. It was Ding who was well again and looking happy. They made room for me at the front. Beside me were Feng and Secretary Zhang from Xiyang Commune. I guessed the driver must be Shunzi, who of course had not recognized his Aunt Luo after so many years.



After driving round the streets, the truck entered a depot and pulled up before a row of huts. Some stools were fetched for us to sit on. Uncle Li offered me a bowl of water. "This is our home. We left our commune some years ago to work here."

Still acting the stranger, I asked, "Why didn't you stay there? Why go begging?"

He replied, "There's a man called Sun in our county, who was very ambitious. When the Cultural Revolution started, he tried to grab power. He beat up Secretary Mi, breaking two of his ribs, took over his post and made himself the county Party secretary. Every day he sent his thugs out to arrest and torture us. We had a hard time. I blew my top at him several times. He wanted to have me murdered, so I left. These people were in the same boat. They couldn't look after me." He went on after a pause, "How I hate the 'gang of four'! Our country is in such a mess thanks to them, and yet they still had the nerve to claim that the situation was excellent. It was like when I was a boy, I had to leave my village with a basket and stick and go begging." This suddenly reminded him of his things. He cried out to the young driver, "I've left them in the restaurant. Go and pick them up for me when you've had a rest."

"No need for them now, grandpa. Let them be."

"So, you've forgotten what you've gone through? You can't throw my things away." Pointing at the patches on his knees, he continued, "These are all that's left of that black flag. These were the brim of your cap." I pulled away his hands and looked at the frayed patches carefully.

Shunzi threw him a glance and said, "Don't rub it in, grandpa. Secretary Mi has also suffered much. Don't bring it up again."

Secretary Mi stood up. "Let him say whatever he likes. I'm grateful to him for keeping it all these years."

Uncle Li said, "You see? His sufferings have made him a better man. I'll die content when I've poured out everything to him."

Secretary Mi walked over and asked respectfully, "Will you give me these patches? I'll keep them as a reminder."

Uncle Li turned to Ding. "Shall I give them to him?"

Ding grasped Mi's hand. "If he wants them."

Feng got a pair of scissors, unpicked the thread and put the patches in Mi's hands. "That was much easier than sewing those trousers and cap," she said. "Three of us sat up late that night. And Secretary Luo had to leave after that."

Looking at the black cloth, Secretary Mi sighed. "Oh, the black flag! The storms and struggles opened my eyes at last to my own weaknesses and to those bad characters. I feel really sad when I remember our good comrades." Ding turned away, his eyes moist.

My eyes dimmed too. Grasping Uncle Li's hands I cried, "Uncle Li, I'm Luo Ping. I still remember those delicious corn buns you made, and how you charged over to the loudspeaker threatening to smash it and hung up the red flag in Xiyang Commune, showing them Shunzi's pants and cap made from the black flag! And you were so angry when I rejected your contribution of twenty yuan. We went through so much together in the past. Though my hair's grey and my face is lined, don't you recognize me any more?"

Feng put her arms around me. "Sister Luo? Why didn't you tell us? How we missed you!"

Shunzi said with feeling, "Aunt Luo, grandpa was so upset when you left that he quit cooking in the canteen."

Ding was choked with emotion, and Secretary Zhang from Xiyang Commune said, "You've played hide-and-seek with us all this time!"

I kept the red flag you gave us, but in the last ten years I couldn't do anything for the people."

Secretary Mi grasped my hands. "It's a long story, Luo. I never expected to see you again. Now we can have a heart-to-heart talk. Get all your criticisms off your chest first. That'll make you feel better."

I shook his hand and laughed.

Then I grasped Ding's hands and said, "Say something! I want to hear your voice again."

Feng said, "When he came back from the hospital and found you gone he nearly went out of his mind again."

Ding spoke. "You may have forgotten us. But we never forgot you."

Taking me and Ding over to Secretary Mi, Uncle Li said, "I'm eighty this year, but I can still make corn buns. I'll work with you. Forget about that black flag and be happy, Secretary Mi."

Secretary Mi's hand went unconsciously to his breast pocket where he had put the patches. His eyes moistened and he smiled solemnly.

About the Author

Liu Zhen, a woman writer, was born in Xiajin County, Shandong Province, in 1930. She joined an Eighth Route Army cultural troupe at the age of nine and the Chinese Communist Party at thirteen. She began writing in 1948. Her first work *The Good Old Woman* was published in 1951 and won a third prize for children's literature. Then she studied in the Central Institute of Literature in Beijing. In 1954 she worked in the Wuhan branch of the Writers' Association. Her works include selections of short stories such as *The Secret of the Walnuts*, *The Mysterious Forest* and *The Long River*.

Since the overthrow of the "gang of four" Liu Zhen has published more than twenty short stories, essays and short novels. As "The Black Flag" was very popular among Chinese readers, we are publishing it in this issue.

Lu Weifen

Yuan-Dynasty Drama and "San-Qu" Songs

THE Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) is an important period in the history of Chinese literature. Yuan drama, like *shi* poetry in the Tang Dynasty and *ci* poetry in the Song Dynasty, is a landmark in the development of classical Chinese poetry.

The Yuan Dynasty was set up as a result of the military might of the northern Mongolian rulers. With their slave system and military power, they cruelly exploited and oppressed the Han people. The expansion of their territory during this period, however, furthered communications between China and foreign countries and facilitated the development of commerce, handicrafts and transport. The cities prospered and, with the introduction to China of foreign music, literature and art flourished among the petty-bourgeoisie. This gave rise to Yuan drama.

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There were also *san-qu* songs, which were lyrical poems set to music, rather like Song-dynasty *ci* poetry. Yuan drama combined singing, dialogue and dramatic action. Its singing was made up of sets of *san-qu* songs.

San-qu songs consisted either of one independent song or of a cycle of songs in the same key. Several such cycles belonging to the same key could be grouped together to narrate a story. Several groups could contain three or four or even more than thirty different melodies. These formed a part of Yuan drama or existed independently as lyrical songs. This form of poetry is free, lively and less strict than older forms, with irregular verse patterns.

More than two hundred names of Yuan poets writing in this form are known. The early *san-qu* songs, which developed from folk poetry, are more earthy and natural, with lively expressions. The later ones pay more attention to literary language and versification, thus losing some of their freshness. The better poets came from the lower strata of society. They were usually dramatists, who spent most of their time with courtesans and actors and who had much contact with the lower classes. One famous Yuan dramatist and poet Guan Hanqing (?-1279) wrote some well-known *san-qu* songs, like *A Life of Leisure*, which expresses his tranquil state of mind, his love of rustic life and his aversion to the world of fame and profit. The poem conveys to the reader a peaceful, leisurely atmosphere.

But the most famous *san-qu* writer in the Yuan Dynasty was Ma Zhiyuan, whose exact dates are unknown. He raised *san-qu* poetry to a higher level through his literary brilliance and his fine choice of words. His famous song *Autumn Thoughts* was often quoted by later poets:

Withered vine on an old tree; crows alight at dusk;
A small bridge over the flowing stream; some cottages;
On the old road, a lean horse in the west wind;
The sun sets; my heart breaks;
The traveller has reached the horizon.

Through this description of an autumn scene, the poet's feelings

are expressed poignantly. His feelings and the scene are merged into one. His song *Sails Returning to a Distant Harbour* conveys a similar sentiment. Another of his famous *san-qu* songs, *Boat Sailing at Night*, expresses his aversion to wealth and fame and his scorn for those who seek them. Another well-known *san-qu* writer, Bai Pu (1226-1306), was famous for his refined language. His *san-qu* songs retain the best characteristics of earlier *shi* and *ci* poetry, while showing the special distinction of the *san-qu* form of verse. The song describing the four seasons is a good example of his style.

Sui Jingchen, whose exact dates are unknown, wrote a remarkable *san-qu* song *The Emperor Returning to His Native Village*. The emperor mentioned in this song was the founder of the Han Dynasty in 206 BC, who overthrew the Qin Dynasty in a peasant rebellion. This emperor, Liu Bang, came from a peasant family and had served as a petty official in his village. In his early life he was known as a ruffian. It was recorded in history that after he became emperor he visited his native village. This song, in the words of a local villager, describes how the emperor put on airs. It is very sarcastic. The poem is well constructed, setting the scene and describing the different characters and their actions. Though the story was set in the Han Dynasty, it actually reflects the poet's contempt for the authorities of his time.

Yuan drama was developed from the earlier song and dance forms and folk ballads. Some early types of drama already existed during the Tang Dynasty. In the Song Dynasty, folk drama became quite popular and puppet shows and shadow-plays began to appear. These early dramas were actually a mixture of song and dance, acrobatics and comic dialogues. The plots were simple, without much characterization or dramatic tension. In the Jin period there was a kind of ballad called *zhu-gong-diao* (a set of songs in different keys), which told a story in a ballad form. This had a definite influence on the development of Yuan drama.

The most famous Yuan dramatist Guan Hanqing, who lived at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, was reputed to have written more than sixty dramas. His works reveal various aspects of the society in that period with a penetrating analysis and great skill.

One of his best known works is *Snow in Midsummer* (see *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1957). It truthfully depicts life in the Yuan Dynasty. The fate of the woman Dou E shows the suffering of the common people. There was usury and oppression from the Mongolian ruling class, and corruption among the officials. In this tragedy, the writer depicts a woman with a strong rebellious spirit, who points out in indignation:

Because officers here have no concern for justice,
The common citizens cannot tell the truth!

She also condemns Heaven and Earth:

The good are poor, and die before their time;
The wicked are rich, and live to a great old age.
The gods are afraid of the mighty and bully the weak,
If we judge by the way they let evil take its course.
Ah, Earth! If you won't distinguish good from bad,
And, Heaven! If you won't distinguish wise from foolish,
You don't deserve to be worshipped as Heaven and
Earth!

Such a strong and courageous condemnation of tyranny was rarely seen in Chinese feudal society.

Guan Hanqing also wrote dramas about love. These describe the true and steadfast loyalty of some women, their courageous defiance of feudal moral codes and despotic authority, as well as their contempt for hypocrisy and falsehood. He depicted courtesans, who belonged to the oppressed classes, but who retained their dignity and sense of justice. He also wrote about some historical characters and legal problems, which revealed the despotic Yuan rule.

The Western Chamber, by Wang Shifu (c. 1260-1336), is probably the best-known Yuan drama in China and abroad. The story is based on a tale written by the poet Yuan Zhen in the Tang Dynasty. The story became very popular, and in the Jin period a poet called Dong Jieyuan wrote it as a dramatic ballad. Wang Shifu improved on this and adapted it into a drama. Though a

tale of love and romance, it had a greater social significance, because it attacked feudal codes of morality. Confucian scholars considered this drama as immoral and prohibited it. The story tells of a young scholar, Zhang Gong, who meets by accident at a monastery a girl, Cui Yingying, who is the daughter of the prime minister. They fall in love with each other. The monastery is then besieged by some rebellious troops, and the rebel officer wants to have the girl. In desperation the Cui family promises to marry the girl to anyone who can extricate them from the danger. Zhang Gong manages to get help and drive away the rebel troops. However, the girl's mother feels that his family is too poor, so she goes back on her word. A maid servant, Hongniang, secretly helps her young mistress and the young scholar to become engaged and finally they are happily married. This work praises the courageous stand of these lovers and their rebellious spirit. The three main characters are vividly drawn. Zhang Gong is an honest yet pedantic youth, who wins Yingying's heart with his loyalty and talent. Yingying, influenced by feudal ideas, wavers until she finally makes up her mind to break through these fetters and seek true love. Her maid, Hongniang, is intelligent and has a strong sense of justice. She embodies the fine qualities of women from the lower strata of society and is one of the best loved figures in Chinese drama.

Other well-known Yuan dramatists are Bai Pu and Ma Zhiyuan. Bai Pu's famous drama *Over the Wall and into the Saddle* is also about young lovers seeking the freedom of their choice. Another popular drama of his, *Rain on the Plane Tree*, tells of the love between the Tang Emperor Minghuang and Lady Yang. It reflects the licentious living of the ruling class and the corruption in politics. Bai Pu was good at describing the mental conflict of his characters, showing a high artistic skill. Ma Zhiyuan's drama *Autumn in the Han Palace* is also about court life. It tells of a palace maid, Wang Zhaojun, in the first century BC, who leaves her country to marry the Khan of the Huns, so as to avoid a war. Unable to bear this, she drowns herself in a river. This work is a poignant tragedy. Another of his well-known dramas is *The Stone Tablet Struck by Lightning*, which describes the sorrow of a

scholar whose talents are unrecognized, reflecting another important aspect of Yuan society.

In the early period of Yuan drama, there were many talented dramatists, and the works show a wide range of subjects and variety in style. In the later period the works became more formalistic, gradually turning away from the realist tradition, as more emphasis was placed on literary language and strict verse patterns.

Yuan drama opened up a new path in the history of Chinese drama and had a profound influence on its later development.

"San-Qu" Songs of the Yuan Dynasty

Ma Zhiyuan

Sails Returning to a Distant Harbour

IN the setting sun,
The tavern sign hangs idle.
Two or three boats have still to reach land.
The water is scented with fallen flowers.
Dusk is falling over the thatched cottages.
Fishmongers disperse at the end of the broken bridge.

Guan Hanqing

A Life of Leisure

WHEREVER I please, I go.
With an easy mind, I sit.
When I'm thirsty, I drink;
When I'm hungry, I eat;
When I'm tipsy, I sing;
When I'm drowsy, I lie on the grass.
The days are long;
The world is wide.
How good this life of leisure!

I down the old wine,
Then pour out the new.
Laughing aloud by the old jug,
Chanting poems with village elders.
He provides two hens,
And I offer a goose.
How good this life of leisure!

I rein in my wild thoughts,
Curb my mischievous desires,
Escaping from the storms of this world.
No one disturbs my siesta under the tree.
I have turned my back on fame and profit,
Happy and peaceful in my retreat.
How good this life of leisure!

I plough the southern field,
And rest in the eastern hills.
I have seen much of the world;
Idly I ponder the past.
Perhaps they are wise;
Perhaps I'm a fool.
Why dispute it?

Bai Pu

The Four Seasons

GREEN hills, warm sunlight, gentle breeze.
Pavilions with balustrades, bamboo-curtained windows.
Willows and swings in the courtyard.
Singing orioles, dancing swallows.
A small bridge, flowing water, crimson petals. (Spring)

The rain over, the clouds vanish and the ripples increase.
In the high tower, the melon cooled in water tastes sweet.
The painted eaves are shaded by overhanging trees.
By the cupboard covered with gauze and the rattan mat,
A lovely girl cools herself with a light silk fan. (Summer)

A lonely hamlet, the setting sun, wisps of rosy clouds.
A light haze, old trees and some jackdaws.
Wild geese in flight, a speck of shadow in the sky.
Mountains still green, the waters blue.
With grey grass, red leaves and yellow chrysanthemums.
(Autumn)

The painted bugle's note is heard by the wicker gate.
The crescent moon lights up half the courtyard at dusk.
Water at the foot of the snow-covered hills.
Thatched cottages enclosed by bamboo fences.
A mist over the withered grass by the lonely hamlet. (Winter)



Sui Jingchen

The Emperor Returning to His Native Village

THE village head announced at every door:
No excuses accepted to shirk any task;
This is a most unusual mission.
On the one hand, we must gather fodder;
On the other, we must work unpaid.
We must do our duties on this occasion.
Some say an imperial equipage approaches;
We guess it is the emperor's carriage.
Today the emperor returns to his birth-place.
Old Bumpkin Wang carries a tray in his hands;
Busybody Zhao clasps a wine-gourd in his arms.
Their caps are newly brushed;
Their silk gowns newly starched.
They are pretending to be local gentry.

Bleary-eyed Wang Liu leads a troupe of costumed players.
Playing flutes and beating drums at random.
Then I see horses and men at the village gate;
At the head of the procession, several flags.
One flag shows a hare inside a white circle;
Another a crow inside a red ring.
One depicts a cock learning to dance;
Another a dog with two wings.
The last has a snake curling round a gourd.

Pitchforks are painted with red lacquer;
Axes are silver-plated;
Gilded gourds or pumpkins with gold varnish,
Gleaming stirrups hung on spears,
Snow-white goose-feather fans.
What funny fellows these are,
Holding such strange objects,
Wearing such grotesque garments!

There are only horses pulling the carriages;
No donkeys are harnessed to them.
The handles of the yellow silk umbrellas are crooked.
Before the carriages are eight guardian deities;
Behind there are some runners.
Pretty girls, dressed in the same fashion,
All wearing the same make-up.

As that big fellow alights from his carriage,
The men come and pay their respects.

But he treats them as beneath his notice.
When the elders bow and kowtow before him,
He only raises his hand to stop them.
Then I raise my head and look at him.
After a moment's scrutiny I recognize him
And nearly explode with anger.

Your original family name is Liu;
Your wife's name is Lu.
I know the background of your two families.
You used to be a bailiff, too fond of the cup;
Your father-in-law, a teacher, had read a few books.
You used to live on the east side of my house,
Chopped fodder to feed my cattle,
And harrowed and hoed the fields for me.

You plucked my mulberry leaves in spring;
Borrowed grain from me in winter.
You begged rice and wheat many times.
When renewing the lease, you took by force some hemp;
When paying your wine debt, you stole some beans.
These are not false accusations:
The items and dates are recorded;
The evidence is in writing.

As for the money you owe me,
Repay me with the taxes you extorted.

As for the grain you owe me,
Deduct it from the levies on my land.
Just call yourself Liu the Third,
And nobody will nab you.
Why did you change your name,
Calling yourself the First Emperor of Han?



Yaolong Mountain

—A folktale from Hunan

AT the foot of Yaolong Mountain is a small village called White Pear Village which has orchards everywhere. In spring it is a sea of peach blossom; in summer the trees are laden with pears like golden bells; and in autumn persimmons cover the mountainsides like clusters of red lanterns. Tasting the fresh fruit, the old folk tell the children stories.

Once upon a time many trees surrounded the village. One year, before February, the pink peach blossom and white pear blossom bloomed more magnificently than ever before. People were beside themselves with joy at the prospect of a fine harvest. Old men beamed; children skipped here and there, chasing after butterflies all over the mountain; girls planned to make new clothes; and young women hoped to visit their mothers when the fruit had been gathered in.

But then disaster struck. Right up to the Qingming Festival in April there fell not a drop of rain. The blossom withered, little of it forming fruit, and under the scorching sun the unripe fruit began to fall from the trees.

With aching hearts the villagers waited anxiously for rain, but not a wisp of cloud could they see in the sky. The cracks in the ground grew wider each passing day.

At the foot of the mountain, among a row of fruit trees, there

was a small cottage in which lived Yaolong and his mother. When he was five, his father slipped over a cliff and died. His mother wept day and night with grief until she was blind. At ten, Yaolong did the work of a grown man. In addition to tending the fruit trees, he had to collect firewood from the mountain. In years of good harvest, he could just earn a living. But now, with this fearful drought, how could he support his mother? He had to go up the mountain to dig up grass roots.

However, all the trees and plants had withered, all the grass roots had been dug up. Yaolong slogged along over scorched earth and fiery hot rocks, climbed over precipices and pushed his way through brambles. Finally reaching a high peak he spotted some dry grass. He squatted down to uproot it, working away until he ached all over. But when the sun set in the west, there were still very few roots in his basket.

Night began to fall, the wind rattled the trees' dry branches, and Yaolong started for home. He had just climbed over a cliff when he heard a faint groaning coming from its foot, as if someone was sobbing there. Yaolong shivered with fright. Had someone slipped over the cliff? He decided to go down to have a look, but could find no way leading down. He shouted several times at the top of his lungs, but there was no reply. Sticking his knife in his belt, he scrambled down through the brambles.

The moon rose in the east, lighting up the valley. He made out a dark cave at the foot of the cliff from which some sounds were coming. At the mouth of the cave, beside a big iron chain which must have weighed a thousand catties lay an old woman of about eighty or ninety with snow-white hair. Her eyes tightly closed, she was groaning.

Yaolong hurried over and sat down beside the old woman, then called softly, "Granny! Granny!"

After a long while, the old woman slowly opened her eyes and heaved a sigh before asking, "Where are you from, child?"

Pointing to the distance, the boy said, "I live at the foot of that mountain, and I've come up here to dig grass roots. Where is your home? Why are you lying by this cave on this deserted mountain? Did you come here for grass roots too and then slip over the cliff?"

The old woman looked at the kind-hearted boy but said nothing.

Suddenly, Yaolong saw that the chain was locked round the old woman's neck. He let out a cry, stepping backward, and asked, "Why are you chained up? Are you a ghost or a monster?"

The old woman heaved a long sigh, her hands shaking, sweat beading her forehead. In a trembling voice she answered, "I'm no ghost or monster, nor did I slip over the cliff. I'm the wife of the Dragon King living in the Crystal Palace at the bottom of the sea. Long ago, I bore him a princess, who grew prettier year after year. The Python Monster of the West Mountain took a fancy to her and insisted on marrying her, sending over betrothal gifts. When the old Dragon King saw the valuable gifts, he gave his consent. In desperation the princess wept day and night, refusing to eat or drink. It was more than I could bear, so I ran away with her. We fled for three days and nights, but the king sent troops in pursuit and they carried us back. He gave me three hundred strokes on my back and locked me in this cave deep in the mountains. Day after day for five hundred years, I have been exposed to the sun, rain and frost." She wept sadly until her clothes were soaked with tears.

Tears of sympathy welled up in Yaolong's eyes. "Don't be too sad, granny," he said. "I'll do my best to save you."

At once her face brightened and she gave a faint smile. "How I've been longing for this day, child!" she exclaimed. "If you really want to rescue me, it's not too difficult. You must find three thousand oak leaves as big as the palm of your hand, and set fire to them when it is dark. Then the chain will melt. But you must be brave and not panic. Don't shut your eyes the whole night, and keep the fire burning until daybreak."

Yaolong nodded and went off to look for oak leaves.

The hot sun had withered all the trees. To find three thousand oak leaves was no easy task. Yaolong scaled one mountain after another, climbed tree after tree, tormented by hunger and thirst. When he fell he struggled to his feet again. After searching for forty-nine days, he finally amassed three thousand oak leaves. With all the strength left in him he carried them to the mouth

of the cave. To light a fire, he struck his knife on a rock till sparks flew and set fire to the leaves.

Being dry they flared up at once, with smoke rising to the sky. Squatting, Yaolong kept adding more leaves. The smoke brought tears to his eyes, and the fierce heat soaked him with sweat.

The licking flames turned the sky red.

All of a sudden, a gust of wind from the forest swirled the flames round and round, while a huge tiger sprang down from the top of the mountain, its roaring shaking the earth. Yaolong was in a cold sweat, but when he saw the fire was dying down he hastily gripped his knife and went on adding leaves to it. Blinded by the smoke, the tiger shook its head, lashed its tail and with a roar leapt up the slope.

When the moon sank westward late at night, the fire attracted swarms of insects and hornets. They buzzed around to sting the boy, while underfoot crawled centipedes and snakes. Yaolong endured all this. When he could hardly keep his eyes open, he pinched his thigh to stay awake. At last the long night passed, and as the first light appeared at the eastern horizon there came a thunderous explosion. The chain had broken but the boy had fainted away.

The blazing sun hurt Yaolong's eyes with its rays like needles. He opened his eyes and saw the sun high in the sky. Sitting by his side, the old woman patted his shoulder and said with a smile, "Good child, you have saved my life. I must repay you. What would you like: pearls, treasures, or beautiful girls?"

Yaolong had no interest in any of these things.

The old woman went on, "If you want to make your fortune, I can give you a huge estate; if you want to reign over the world, I can make you an emperor; if you want to fly, I can give you wings."

Yaolong settled down to think for a while, then said, "Don't take offence, granny, but it wasn't for the sake of pearls, treasures or beauties that I came to your rescue. Nor do I want to be an emperor. But if you are willing to help, there are three favours I'd like to ask."

"Just tell me what they are, child," she said kindly.

"I've a mother who's been blind in both eyes for many years. May I ask you to restore her sight?"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the old woman said with a smile, "Your mother's eyes are sparkling like stars now."

The boy thanked her, then put forward his second request, "I want to till the land to earn a living for my mother and myself. Please give me strength that will never be exhausted."

Chuckling, the old woman told him, "That's no sooner said than done. Just clench your two fists tightly, close your eyes and take three deep breaths, then go and shake that big pine tree over there."

Yaolong did as he was told. Sure enough, he uprooted that giant tree as easily as if it were a tuft of grass.

Overjoyed, he expressed his thanks and then made his third request, "Our region has been hit by a terrible drought. Our fruit trees have withered, and all the leaves and grass roots have been eaten up. If it doesn't rain soon, everybody will starve to death. Please give us a good fall of rain to revive our fruit trees and save us from starvation."

In consternation the old woman turned pale. Shaking her head, she said with a sigh, "Don't ask me that. Heaven punishes those who privately make rain fall. I can't do this for you, child."

Yaolong fell on his knees to plead with her.

At first she simply shook her head and sighed, but finally she relented. "Since I promised you three favours," she said, "I must be as good as my word. Take this magic jar back with you." She took out an exquisite little jar and shook it three times in the air till it was brimming with water. She told Yaolong, "If you sprinkle this magic water on dried grass, it will immediately sprout; if you sprinkle it on fruit trees, they will blossom and bear fruit at once."

Looking doubtfully at the little jar, Yaolong asked, "Goddess granny, our orchards stretch farther than the eye can see; how can this small jar of water save them all?"

Pointing to the magic jar, the old woman said, "Don't look down on this little jar, child. If you take a mouthful from it and spit it out, it will water three *mu* of land; two mouthfuls will bring

on a downpour; three mouthfuls will make rain fall for hundreds of *li* around. If you spit out four mouthfuls, a year which began with a drought will end with a good harvest." After a pause, she warned him, "I can lend you the jar for three days only. When the time is up, you must return it to me and you can only water your own trees with it. If you spit out one mouthful more, you'll turn into a toad; two mouthfuls more, you'll turn into a centipede; three mouthfuls more, and the earth will swallow you up so that you'll never see your mother again."

Keeping all these instructions in mind, Yaolong dashed with the jar down the mountain. Nearing home he saw his mother leaning against the door and looking in all directions, her eyes bright and shining. Happy beyond words, he rushed to her and kissed her. Then, holding the magic jar, he ran up the mountain.

Like a ball of fire, the sun had scorched the earth, the rocks and trees. Yaolong took a mouthful of water from the jar and spat it out towards the sky. At once a rainbow appeared above the horizon, and clouds gathered in the sky. It rained hard, exactly over Yaolong's orchard. His trees turned green and blossomed, attracting swarms of bees and butterflies. In a twinkling, the trees were heavily laden with fruit. In the breeze, the fruit grew quickly, weighing the branches down.

Yaolong was overjoyed. On learning the news, all the villagers gathered round to rejoice with him; but when they thought of their own withered trees their hearts sank again. Looking at their anxious faces, Yaolong raised the magic jar. But the old woman's warnings came back to his mind: one mouthful more, you'll turn into a toad; three mouthfuls more, and the earth will swallow you up so that you'll never see your mother again. Poor mother! He raised his head and saw her standing beside him gazing fondly at him. She didn't yet know that her son was soon to leave her! Yaolong, his heart aching, threw himself into her arms and burst into tears.

"Brother Yaolong, save our trees! How else can I feed this poor child?" a woman pleaded, pointing at the crying child in her arms.

"Save our trees, Yaolong! It's a matter of life or death!" urged an old man, stroking Yaolong's head.

Yaolong's heart was afire. He didn't care if he turned into a toad or was buried alive. Holding the magic jar he raced towards the top of the mountain, his one thought: "I must save all the trees!"

When he reached the summit, he clenched his teeth and took a grip on himself. Raising the jar to his lips, he took a mouthful of water and spat it out towards the sky. At once the blue sky was covered with dark clouds. As he spat the second mouthful, deafening thunder rolled. As he spat the last mouthful, the rain poured down — it was a deluge!

The rain cleared the clouded faces of the villagers. The trees on the mountains and in the valleys turned green, blossomed and became loaded with lustrous fruit.

When the storm let up, there came a golden flash in the sky and with a sound like thunder the mountain split. Yaolong, waving and nodding to the villagers, sank down and vanished from sight.

After the rain stopped, the sun appeared in the blue sky again. The villagers helped Yaolong's mother up the mountain, calling his name. But when they reached the top, the boy had disappeared. They burst into tears. Drying their eyes, they saw that the place where Yaolong had stood had become a chasm ten thousand feet deep. From it gushed a fountain of clear water, which flowed down the mountainside to irrigate the land far and near with its luxuriant fruit trees.

To commemorate the selfless boy, the villagers called the fountain the Fairy Fountain and renamed the mountain Yaolong Mountain.

Xia Yuchen

Liang Kai's "Eight Eminent Monks"

LIANG KAI was a Southern Song-dynasty painter of the palace academy in the early 13th century. He became a *taizhao*, an artist of the highest rank, and was awarded a gold girdle, which he refused to accept. He hung the girdle in the academy and left. He settled in a monastery, where he seems to have spent the rest of his life. A descendant of a prime minister of the Liang Dynasty (502-557), Liang Kai was born in Dongping, Shandong, and later settled in Hangzhou when the Song capital moved south. As he was uninhibited and fond of carousing, he was nicknamed Liang the Lunatic. Accomplished in painting figures, landscapes and birds and flowers in the sketchy fashion, he originated a style of his own, characterized by simple composition and great refinement of brushwork. His extant works include *Li Bai Composing a Poem*, *Eight Eminent Monks* and *An Autumn Tree and Two Crows*.

Eight Eminent Monks (26.6 × 64 cm), a horizontal silk painted

Xia Yuchen is an art specialist at the Shanghai Museum.

scroll, illustrates legends about eight Dhyana (*chan*) Buddhists in eight separate sections, of which the first and third are reproduced in this issue. On the tree trunks, rocks or boats painted in the second, third, fifth and eighth sections were inscribed two small characters "Liang Kai".

In the first section Bodhidharma is portrayed facing a wall. Behind him stands the monk Shenguang, paying homage and seeking instruction. This is based on the story of the famous Indian monk Bodhidharma, who arrived in the Liang-dynasty capital Jiankang (now Nanjing, Jiangsu). There, the Buddhist emperor Wu, who reigned AD 502-548, received him and asked how to build a temple and carve statues. Bodhidharma replied that there was no need to chant sutras, build temples or write scriptures. What was required was to "achieve emptiness of mind". When the emperor rejected this, Bodhidharma crossed the Yangzi River to the north to preach his Dhyana Buddhism. To the right of the Shaolin Temple in present-day Denfeng County, Henan, is a rock and to the northwest, a shrine. It was said that Bodhidharma sat there in front of the rock or wall and meditated for ten years. In the painting the setting is a secluded vale. On the rock sits Bodhidharma in a red mantle with a cowl over his head. The lower part of the mantle is flowing down. The artist has brought out the thickness and folds of the robe with a few simple lines. He has painted Bodhidharma's face with high cheek bones and eyes closed. The monk seems to be answering the questions of Shenguang, who stands behind him. But Bodhidharma informs him that the Buddhist law cannot be learned from a mortal. Shenguang says that his heart feels uneasy. Bodhidharma replies, "Then give it to me. I can set it at rest." Shenguang replies, "But my heart is nowhere to be found." So Bodhidharma assures him, "I have set your heart at ease."

The dialogue explains the Dhyana Buddhist doctrine of "achieving emptiness". As Bodhidharma sees it, Shenguang's anxiety is self-induced. The moment Bodhidharma bids him part with his heart, Shenguang immediately understands him.

The third section depicts Bai Juyi bowing to the Monk Niaoke, who is expounding the Buddhist doctrine. In AD 822, during the



reign of the Tang Emperor Muzong, the celebrated poet Bai Juyi (772-846), tired of court life in the capital Changan (now Xi'an, Shaanxi), begged to be transferred to another post outside the palace. Permission granted, he left for Hangzhou as the prefect. Hangzhou was famous at that time for its temples, Buddhist monks and Taoist priests. A monk Daolin (735-833), it was said, went to the lofty Qinwang Mountain to the south of Hangzhou, where he meditated on a sloping pine-tree trunk for forty years. Therefore the people named him Niaohe, meaning "Bird's Nest". To the right of the painting is an outline of the mountain peak, on which groups of thick ink dots are applied to express vegetation. Hands crossed in front of his chest, Bai Juyi stands in the shade, bowing to Niaohe, who is pointing a forefinger at him and answering his questions. The old servant behind Bai is spellbound by their conversation. Bai remarks, "Master, your seat is very precarious!" Niaohe replies, "As prefect, you are in greater danger." "Why?" Bai Juyi inquires. "The rivers and mountains are guarded by me. From where can danger come?" The monk answers, "Your heart is tortured by lusts and anxieties, as if burning in a blazing fire. Isn't that dangerous?" So the poet asks, "What is the Buddhist dharma?" "Do no evil; only do good." Then Bai Juyi retorts, "Even a child of three can talk like that!" Niaohe, pointing his finger at him, makes the wise rejoinder, "Though a child of three can say that, yet an old man of eighty can't practise it!" Convinced, Bai Juyi gratefully turns away.

Eight Eminent Monks is one of Liang Kai's carefully executed works. The figures and their states of mind are vividly portrayed and magnificently set off by a simple background. Once in the collection of the Qing court, the painting was stamped with the seals of the emperor Qianlong and others. The emperor had not noticed Liang Kai's signature on the tree trunks, rocks or boats, and mistook it for an anonymous Song-dynasty work. Because of the signature and the style which was similar to Liang Kai's other paintings, art experts have certified that the scroll *Eight Eminent Monks* is a genuine Liang Kai. Now it is housed in the Shanghai Museum.

Peng Chengliang

A Bing, the Blind Folk Musician

LAST year the army August First Studio released a cinemascope colour feature film, which had nothing to do with military themes. *The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain*,* directed by Yan Jizhou, is a musical film based on the life of the celebrated blind folk musician A Bing (1893-1950). The title is taken from one of A Bing's famous compositions, an *erhu* solo.

A Bing, whose original name was Hua Yanjun, was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu. His father, Hua Qinghe, was a Taoist priest. It was from him that A Bing first learned to play music at a very early age. He could play many folk instruments and composed over two hundred pieces, but only six have been handed down to us. For the *pipa*, a four-string lute-like instrument, he composed *Sands in the Waves*, *Wang Zhaojun Leaving the Border* and *The Dragon Boat*. For the *erhu*, a two-string fiddle, he composed *Chill Spring Wind*, *Listening to the Pines* and the film's theme music. The last is his best loved work. Composed in 1939, it is full of feeling, expressing A Bing's sufferings. He went blind at the early age of thirty-five because of lack of medical treatment

Peng Chengliang is a film critic.

* This refers to the Second Fountain in China, which is one of the well-known scenic spots in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province.

for an eye condition. Since Liberation, this piece has been adapted for string quartets and other ensembles.

The film is loosely based on A Bing's life. The director has taken artistic licence with some details. This sparked off quite a controversy in film circles and among film-goers after its release. Some argued that even allowing for artistic exaggeration, a biographical film should adhere more to the historical facts and avoid too many fictitious characters and scenes. Others held that the film was above all a work of art and that the director should permit anything which served the theme. In fact almost all the characters were fictitious except A Bing. But some of the audience even doubted his authenticity. Yan Jizhou, the director, while acknowledging the different opinions, nevertheless defended his portrayal of A Bing. This is a feature film based on the life of a historical figure, not a biographical account. He explained that the fictitious characters or scenes were based on the historical facts of those times. As for A Bing, Yan Jizhou said, "We

Young A Bing learning from his father





A Bing and Xiao Qin performing in the streets

should neither glorify him as a Communist and a hero, nor advertise his shortcomings. We are portraying a folk musician, not just for China but for the whole world.”

In the film A Bing loses his mother while still very young and goes to live in a Taoist temple in Wuxi with his father, where he becomes a priest. Gifted in music, he and his father develop a master-disciple relationship. But unfortunately his father dies of illness leaving A Bing only his *erbu* and *pipa*. A Bing becomes an outstanding Taoist musician in the area. He has a folk musician friend Master Zhong, who gets into financial difficulties. In order to help him, A Bing accompanies his daughter, Xiao Qin, performing in the streets, thus violating Taoist law. Driven out of the temple, A Bing is soon employed by a musical troupe. But when he refuses to play at the house of a local despot Tiger Li, his boss sacks him. Destitute again, A Bing searches for Master

Zhong and Xiao Qin but fails to find them. So he earns his living playing his *erbu* in the streets.

One day, while he is playing to himself by Lake Taihu, a boat passes in which Xiao Qin has been working as a sing-song girl since the death of her father. Hearing the music, she sings and begs to go ashore, but her employer refuses. That night A Bing sits by the Second Fountain, which is bathed in bright moonlight. He plays his *erbu* to express his feelings, thus creating his piece *The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain*. Escaping from the boat, Xiao Qin is drawn to the spot by the haunting music and is thus reunited with her lover. They marry and, for a brief period, enjoy a time of deep happiness despite their poverty.

But their joy is soon shattered. One day, while performing in the streets, they are spotted by Tiger Li's thugs and forced aboard a boat to perform at a banquet in honour of Tiger Li. When A Bing refuses, he is beaten unconscious and thrown ashore. Xiao Qin, to avoid being raped, commits suicide by drowning herself

Blind A Bing, homeless and destitute



in the lake. When A Bing comes to, he is blind because of the injuries to his eyes.

He suffers a miserable life until Liberation. The government invites him to Beijing to teach music. Then friends take him to Xiao Qin's grave, where he again plays his *erhu* solo *The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain*, in memory of her. The film thus ends in this hopeful but poignant mood.

The scenario was written by three amateur writers E Yunwen, Liu Baoyi and Rong Lei. They concentrated their efforts in creating a new style of lyrical narration. In this they have been successful, aided by the experienced director Yan Jizhou. A soldier since 1938, he first worked in an army cultural troupe during the wars. In the fifties he began his film work with such films as *The Bitter Chill Before the Dawn*, *Prairie Fire and Spring Breeze in an Old City* and *Intrepid Fighters*, all of which were action films. His colleagues were rather astonished, therefore, when he began to work on the film *The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain*.

In fact it wasn't so surprising, because Yan Jizhou was born in a picturesque area of the south. He loved folk music and as a child played many of the local instruments. It had long been his dream to bring to life on the screen the beauty of his native area. Yan Jizhou said that the script had a tragic feeling, so he wanted the film to look like "an elegant traditional ink and wash painting, rather than a magnificent water-colour". To achieve this effect he adopted many new ideas and methods. Certain scenes of Lake Taihu, flecked with sailing boats, and bordered by pavilions and flower gardens, look like traditional Chinese paintings.

The music for the film was performed by the noted composer and *erhu* soloist Zhang Rui. His interpretation and playing certainly added to the film's success. Zhang Rui also adapted the folk songs which are sung by Xiao Qin.

In choosing the cast, the director decided that A Bing must be played by a tall, thin actor "with limpid, penetrating eyes that can express the sorrow and perplexities of A Bing's thoughts". He also required him to be a gifted musician. In Zheng Songmao, a promising young actor with the Frontline Drama Troupe in

Nanjing, he found his A Bing. Zheng Songmao's family were folk musicians and he is an expert *pipa*, *erhu* and *dong xiao* (a vertical bamboo flute) player. He gives a moving and convincing performance, especially after A Bing has become blind. He is now engaged in another film production.

For Xiao Qin, Yan Jizhou searched for an actress who could convey the difficulties of a wandering street singer and show Xiao Qin's quiet, introvert character. And, of course, she had to be able to sing folk songs. He finally chose Yuan Mengya, an actress with the *Xiju* Opera Troupe of Wuxi, who acts and sings charmingly. For both her and Zheng Songmao this was their first film, but they adapted their acting well from stage to screen.

The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain is a film which appeals not only to Chinese audiences, but also to foreign ones. Indeed one foreign viewer was so enchanted by the film and music that she regretted not having smuggled her tape-recorder into the cinema to tape the music.

Xin Min

Modern Drama in Tibet

THERE were no modern Tibetan dramas until 1962. Before then a few modern dramas were performed in Chinese in cities in Tibet where the language was largely understood.

After the democratic reform movement, which began in 1959, the people's government made efforts to develop Tibetan songs, dances and local dramas, as well as to introduce new forms of art to enrich the people's cultural life. In 1959, thirty young people, children of former serfs, were sent to study at the Shanghai Drama Academy. Upon their graduation in 1962, they presented a modern historical play *Princess Wencheng* in the Tibetan language. This told of the marriage in AD 635 of the Tibetan king Songzan Ganbo to a Tang princess. That summer the first batch of Tibetan actors returned home bringing their people this new art form.

Though *Princess Wencheng*, a play written by the noted dramatist Tian Han, was translated into Tibetan, the language was not colloquial enough to be easily understood by the ordinary people. The Tibetan language has few synonyms, so Tibetans use many similes to express themselves and explain and describe things with which they are familiar. Thus the language reads like poetry. One

Xin Min is a dramatist who worked in Tibet.

serf depicted his sufferings in the old society with the following verse:

Between the mountains hung clouds and mists,
Our sorrows and woes.
The river flowed with our sweat and blood;
On the grasslands our tears trickled.

The Tibetans have many proverbs too, such as: Wind scares no crow, water no duck; when the river freezes no fish can see the sky; and, an old ox's horns don't break, an old tiger keeps its stripes.

Tibetan dramatists have therefore made great efforts to write and translate plays in colloquial Tibetan, at times incorporating ballads. The drama *No Right to Be Born* staged in 1964 was a great success.

No Right to Be Born is about a young man and a girl, both serfs, who fall in love. The girl gives birth to twin daughters. Since serfs are not allowed to choose their own mates, the girl is persecuted until she drowns herself. The man brings up the children, who are unaware that he is their real father. It is only after Liberation that the one who has survived learns the truth.

The drama had an immense effect when it was first performed in Lhasa. Many of the audience, who had shared the same fate as the characters, broke down or fainted. The performance was often interrupted. Before the final curtain many in the audience went up on to the stage to present the actors and actresses with *badas** to express their feelings.

In the past ten or more years, the Tibetan Drama Troupe has translated and performed nine dramas as well as written and staged eighteen dramas and thirteen one-act plays. Most of these are based on life in Tibet. *The Gangdise Heroes*, a seven-act play, tells the story of how the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1951 and brought a new life to the people. *The Sentinels* depicts how the soldiers and civilians unite to fight against enemy agents. *The Woman Plougher*, a one-act play, shows the improvements made by the Tibetan people since Liberation. *A Test of the Rev-*

* Ceremonial scarves.

olution is about some Han intellectuals, who have gone to settle in Tibet and help in its modernization.

Of the hundred or so staff members in the troupe, sixty per cent are Tibetans and other national minorities. The writers, directors, performers and choreographers are also mainly Tibetans. At present, the third batch of young people is studying at the Shanghai Drama Academy. Cultural troupes in the various regions in Tibet also give performances of modern dramas.

Liao Xuhe

Translations of Well-Known Chinese Literary Works Republished

SOON after the founding of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949, steps were taken to introduce systematically Chinese literature to foreign readers. Between 1951 and 1966 over two hundred classical and modern works were translated and published in English, French, German, Spanish and other foreign languages. However, after the start of the Cultural Revolution, when Jiang Qing and her clique controlled culture, the plan was suspended as nearly all those works already published were banned and withdrawn from circulation, while work on those in preparation was stopped. After the fall of the gang the Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, began to republish these works. The following are some of the most important titles in English.

Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing. Guan Hanqing was an outstanding realist playwright of the 13th century who was familiar with the life of the people. In his plays Guan Hanqing portrayed the honest and noble qualities and rebellious character of the urban lower class, especially of women. He criticized the social evils,

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expressing the indignation of the people. Of the 67 plays accredited to him, only 18 are extant. The eight plays in this selection give some idea of his remarkable range — tragedies depicting persecuted women, historical plays about heroic figures, as well as plays based on famous legal cases and tragi-comedies. The book is illustrated with traditional woodblock prints and facsimiles from early Chinese editions.

The Scholars is an 18th-century satirical novel by Wu Jingzi (Wu Ching-tzu).* The author mercilessly flays the decadence of the literati produced by the feudal imperial examination system, exposing its disastrous effects and the corrupt feudal regime. He portrays all types of characters: the scholar, the pseudo-poet, the merchant and the corrupt official, presenting a lively picture of 18th-century Chinese society. It is illustrated with 20 full-page drawings in the traditional Chinese style.

Selected Poems from the Goddesses. *The Goddesses* was the earliest collection of poems by the distinguished Chinese scholar and poet Guo Moruo (Kuo Mo-jo) (1892-1978). First published in 1921, it exerted a great influence upon China's new literary movement. It reflects the author's strong spirit of resistance to imperialism and feudalism, and expresses his fervent passion for freedom. "*The Goddesses*," writes Guo Moruo, "can be compared to a cicada emerged from the chrysalis of the old society as well as of the traditional Chinese poetry." He added, "In my view poetry is the music of men's hearts created by the age in which they live." There are all together two poetic dramas and 32 poems.

Chu Yuan is a historical play in five acts by Guo Moruo written in 1942. Chu Yuan (Qu Yuan) (c 340-278 BC) was a great poet and patriotic statesman. His love for his country and people brought him into conflict with the ruling clique and he was forced into long years of exile. Finally, in despair, he committed suicide by drowning himself in a river. In this play, the author describes the persecution of this poet patriot and his unflinching spirit. Guo

* The personal names in those reprints issued before 1979 are spelled according to the Wade system.

Moruo wrote this play to attack the Kuomintang's policy of non-resistance against Japan.

Midnight is the masterpiece of the celebrated contemporary writer Mao Dun (Mao Tun), chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association. It is set in the thirties when China was still a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. The central figure in the story is Wu Sun-fu, a capitalist in Shanghai, which was at that time the industrial and commercial centre of China. From Wu Sun-fu's story, one can see that under the pressure of imperialist economic aggression and the rule of warlords and bureaucrats, China's national bourgeoisie had no alternative but to submit to the comprador-bourgeoisie and come to terms with the forces of feudalism. Since its publication in 1933, the novel has enjoyed immense popularity in China. The famous literary critic Qu Qiubai (1899-1935) praised it as "the first successful attempt at realism in the form of a full-length novel by a Chinese writer". Contemporary literary critics generally agree that *Midnight* played a vital pioneering role in the development of revolutionary realism in Chinese literature. It is illustrated by the well-known artist Ye Qianyu.

Spring Silkworms and Other Stories is a collection of 13 short stories written by Mao Dun during the period 1927-1944. Through these stories he depicts Chinese society in the thirties: calamities in the countryside and economic depression, caused by the dual pressure of imperialist aggression and feudal exploitation, as well as the misery of the people, and the process of their awakening.

The Family is an autobiographical novel by the famous writer Ba Jin (Pa Chin), vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association. The novel is set in a large disintegrating feudal household, with all its senseless cruelty and hypocritical conventions. The author tells of tragic love affairs and broken marriages; of those who struggle and are defeated; and of the awakening younger generation who resist and break away. *The Family* exercised a deep influence on China's youth after it first appeared in 1931.

Harvest is a collection of short stories by Ye Zi (Yeh Tzu) (1912-1939), a young revolutionary writer, who took part in the great events that stirred China's countryside in the 1920s and 1930s. His stories about the peasant movement were among the earliest and

most influential in China. Of the six stories in this collection the first two describe the peasants' anti-rent movement, and another tells of the tragic fate of a peasant family, who, in escaping the exploitation of their local landlord, fall prey to the merciless imperialists and capitalists of Shanghai.

Schoolmaster Ni Huan-chih is a long novel by the well-known contemporary writer Ye Shengtao. Ni Huan-chih is an idealist, who believes that society can be reformed through education. When his illusions are shattered by the warlords he turns to the revolution. But its temporary defeat depresses him and he dies in a despairing mood. But the work he began is continued by his wife. Ni Huan-chih is an example of the Chinese petty-bourgeois intellectuals of the 1920s.

Thunderstorm and *Sunrise*, published in 1934 and 1935 respectively, are the most popular plays of Cao Yu (Tsao Yu), chairman of the Chinese Dramatists' Association. Dealing with the decadent life of the upper class in old China and their conflicts with the oppressed and injured, the plays unsparingly expose and denounce the evil social system and foretell its doom.

The Song of Youth, a popular novel by the woman writer Yang Mo, was first published in 1958. Through the experiences of the heroine Lin Tao-ching, it shows how patriotic students in Beijing fought with courage and determination against the Japanese and Kuomintang during the period 1931-1935. The clash between the different characters and their many adventures reflect the complexity of Chinese society at that time.

Tracks in the Snowy Forest is a thrilling story of a small detachment of the People's Liberation Army, which takes place in 1946, in the early period of the War of Liberation. In the bitter winter, the detachment is sent to round up a bandit force hidden in the mountain forests. After many adventures, they at last succeed in destroying the much larger bandit force. Qu Bo (Chu Po), the author, once served in a PLA unit which had participated in such mopping-up campaigns.

Builders of a New Life (first volume) first published in 1959, is a novel by the well-known writer Liu Qing (Liu Ching) (1916-

1978). It reflects China's co-operative movement in agriculture in the fifties, as seen through the development of a mutual-aid team in a small Shaanxi village. It portrays the different destinies of the Chinese peasants, the older pre-Liberation generation and the younger post-Liberation one, and the young peasant hero Liang Sheng-pao who firmly follows socialism. The author planned to write the story in four volumes, but because of persecution by the "gang of four", he was forced to stop writing for a dozen years. Soon after his rehabilitation, he died, his work unfinished.

Daughters and Sons is a novel by Yuan Jing (Yuan Ching) about young patriotic Chinese guerrillas in North China during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945). The author worked among the peasants for many years and directly took part in the resistance. She describes the characters and events vividly and realistically. The story is full of humour.

A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land, a novel by Yang Shuo (1913-1968), is based on the author's own experiences in the Korean War. It deals with a corps of Chinese railway workers who face all kinds of difficulties in order to keep a key transport line functioning. There are many moving episodes.

The Night of the Snowstorm is a collection of short stories by Wang Wenshi (Wang Wen-shih), who writes about life in the countryside. These stories deal with the situation in agriculture after the co-op movement.

An Ordinary Labourer is a collection of short stories by Wang Yuanjian (Wang Yuan-chien). One of the younger generation who began to write after the founding of New China, Wang Yuanjian specializes in revolutionary historical themes. The present volume contains eight short stories written during the period 1954-58, most of which describe life and struggles during the revolutionary war period.

Among the reprints are also popular children's books, such as *The Scarecrow* by Ye Shengtao, *The Magic Gourd* by Zhang Tian-yi, *The Story of Little Black Horse* by Yuan Jing and *Snowflakes* by Yang Shuo.

A new edition of Lu Xun's *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* has also come off the press. It deals with the development of

Chinese fiction from the ancient myths and legends to the sophisticated writings of the early 20th century. It discusses the evolution and characteristics of the Chinese novel during various historical periods and also makes a critical analysis of some of the most famous ones. This book was the first, as well as the most influential, of its kind to be written in China. It is illustrated with pictures and facsimiles.

Other books ready for publication include an enlarged edition of the *Selected Works of Lu Xun* in four volumes; a collection of Tang-dynasty stories *The Dragon King's Daughter*; a 17th-century poetic drama *The Palace of Eternal Youth* by Hong Sheng; *The Rhymes of Li Youcai and Other Stories* by Zhao Shuli; *Keep the Red Flag Flying* by Liang Bin; *The Hurricane* by Zhou Libo; *Red Sun* by Wu Qiang; two series of folk tales; and two narrative poems, *Wang Gui and Li Xiangxiang* by Li Ji and *Asbma*, which is based on a Sani legend from Yunnan Province.

Heading the list of new publications by the Foreign Languages Press are *Selections from Records of the Historian* by Sima Qian, the 18th-century masterpiece *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin (two of three volumes are out), and *Red Crag*, a contemporary novel by Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyuan. A new translation of *Heroes of the Marsh (Shui Hu Zhuan)*, in three volumes, has been completed and will be published within this year.

An Interview with the Society for the Study of Lu Xun

In "Chinese Literature" No. 9, 1979, we reported in the "Chronicle" the preparatory meeting for the founding of the Society for the Study of Lu Xun. After its establishment, our correspondent had the following interview with its general secretary, Wang Shijing, the author of "A Biography of Lu Xun".

—The Editors

Q Comrade Wang, could you please tell us first something about the founding of the society?

A The idea of forming a society for the study of Lu Xun was suggested in early 1979. As a matter of fact, quite a number of Lu Xun study sections and groups had been founded in various places. Mao Dun, chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association, and Zhou Yang, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, co-sponsored the founding of the Society for the Study of Lu Xun. On May 8, the first preparatory meeting was held and the society's regulations were drafted.

On November 14, the inaugural meeting of the society was convened, attended by more than 150 people, including researchers, Lu Xun's friends and some famous writers and artists from all over the country. The meeting accepted the society's regulations, elect-

ing Soong Ching Ling as its honorary chairperson, and Mao Dun as chairman.

Q What is the aim of the society?

A The society is an academic institution made up of both professionals and amateurs. Its aim is to systematize and promote research on Lu Xun's life and works, using a scientific approach and, of course, correcting past errors.

Q What do you mean by past errors?

A The "gang of four" advocated hypocritically that Lu Xun was the only correct writer. In fact, they distorted Lu Xun, trying to use his name for their own ends to attack others. In their view, Lu Xun was not aiming his barbs at imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, but at some individuals fighting on the same front. Thus they labelled many noted people as revisionists and then persecuted them. It was only after the fall of the gang that these innocent people were exonerated.

Q What's your plan for the future?

A We plan to hold an academic conference once a year to air different views and to edit and publish an academic journal and some works on Lu Xun. In the first half of 1980, we'll publish *Study of Lu Xun*, an academic quarterly, and *Lu Xun Study Series*. We will also sponsor discussions between Chinese and foreign researchers, as Lu Xun has been studied a lot abroad in recent years. We are very glad to offer our help to anyone engaged in this field of research.

Q The centenary of Lu Xun's birth will occur in 1981. How will you mark this occasion?

A The commemoration will be planned by the government as it is an event of great national significance. We'll certainly give our help.

Q Is there any news about the new annotated "Complete Works of Lu Xun"?

A The People's Publishing House, Beijing, will issue several volumes later this year. The whole collection will be published before the centenary in 1981.

New Films for the Spring Festival

Ten feature films, two cartoons and seven documentaries were shown throughout China during the Spring Festival, a traditional Chinese holiday.

Oh, Cradle! depicts the evacuation of a nursery from Yanan in 1947 and was made for the International Children's Year 1979. *Anxious to Return* shows how a soldier returns to his unit after innumerable hardships. *The Green Ocean on the Horizon* is about the life and work of botanists. *The Guide* tells of the Uygur people's struggle against the tsarist Russian invaders. *Look, What a Family!* is about young people and their attitude to the four modernizations. *The Dipper* describes the poor peasants' sufferings and struggles in the old society. *Patriotic Fellow-countrymen* is about the love overseas Chinese have for China. *Baptism of Blood and Fire* is the story of a doctor who becomes a revolutionary. *Tear Stains* and *The Distressed Heart* deal with the period of the "gang of four" and the persecution of cadres and intellectuals.

The two cartoons were *A Good Kitten* and *An Acrobatic Genius*.

30th Anniversary Theatrical Performances End

Theatrical performances of 137 items, which were sponsored by the Ministry of Culture to celebrate the 30th anniversary of New

China, ended recently. They began in January 1979 and lasted for over a year. Among the final 17 items were the opera *Yi Niang* and the play *From Here to the Clouds*, both of which deal with the struggle against the "gang of four" and the efforts to modernize China. *Liu Zhidan* is a Beijing opera about a veteran revolutionary; *Jian Zhen Sails to the East* is about the 8th-century Chinese Buddhist monk who went to Japan; and *Sima Qian* is a Beijing opera based on the life of the great historian. The opera *La Traviata* and the ballet *Swan Lake* were also produced.

Volume One of Cao Xueqin to Be Published

Volume one of *Cao Xueqin*, a historical novel written by the old writer Duanmu Hongliang, will soon be published by the Beijing Publishing House.

Cao Xueqin, the author of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, was a great realist writer of the 18th century. In the first volume of this novel, Duanmu Hongliang concentrates on one year in Cao Xueqin's childhood from nine to ten. In the process he reveals life in the Qing court, describing the officials and the common people.

Duanmu Hongliang intends to complete his book in two more volumes, ending with the decline of the family's fortunes and how, despite poverty and frustration, Cao Xueqin persisted in writing his great novel.

Teahouse Goes to Europe

The Beijing People's Art Theatre will perform *Teahouse*, the great writer Lao She's masterpiece, in West Germany, France and other European countries in October and November, to attend the 200th anniversary of the Mannheim National Theatre and the 300th anniversary of the Comédie Française. This will be the first time that a Chinese modern drama has been staged abroad.

Teahouse (see *Chinese Literature*, No. 12, 1979) was written in

1957 and has been performed 300 times since its première by the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1958. Set in a big teahouse in Beijing, this three-act play reflects the social changes in China from 1898 to 1948 through its 70 characters. Lao She was steeped in Beijing life and folklore, and the play is written in the racy, colloquial Beijing dialect.

The late noted director Jiao Juyin was responsible for its 1958 première. Xia Chun, who co-operated with him, has produced the current revival. The leading roles are played by Yu Shizhi, Zheng Rong, Lan Tianye, Tong Chao, Hu Zongwen, Ying Ruocheng, Huang Zongluo and others.

Selected Essays of Wu Han

The *Selected Essays of Wu Han* was recently published in Beijing by the People's Literature Publishing House. Sixty essays written both before and after Liberation were included.

Wu Han was a noted historian, as well as a staunch revolutionary fighter. During the Cultural Revolution, he was persecuted to death by Lin Biao and the "gang of four". Before Liberation, Wu Han took an active part in the democratic movement led by the Communist Party and wrote many militant essays, ruthlessly attacking the Kuomintang's reactionary rule. After Liberation, he wrote many essays about the new society and certain historical topics. There are also some criticizing bad tendencies in society.

New Literary Supplement to Wenhui Daily

In January the Shanghai *Wenhui Daily* began publishing a monthly literary supplement.

In the first issue, there were new poems by the celebrated poets Ai Qing and Gong Liu, an article in memory of Lao She written by Ba Jin, the correspondence of Mao Dun, Ye Shengtao and Yao Xueyin, cartoons by Hua Junwu, Ding Cong and others, as

well as the article "A Westerner's View of *A Dream of Red Mansions*" by Gladys Yang, who with her husband Yang Xianyi, translated the novel into English.

Living in China Issued

A collection of articles by nineteen foreigners working or living in China, one of whom has been here for more than fifty years, was recently published under the title *Living in China* by the New World Press in Beijing.

In "A Voyage into the Future", the associate professor Sam Ginsbourg tells about his experiences after his arrival in the liberated area in Shandong in 1947 and why he has remained here ever since. "My Love for a Country" by Denise Lebreton, a former teacher in France, records her twenty-five years in China with her Chinese translator husband. In "What China Has Meant to Me", Sonia Su, also married to a Chinese, compares her life in Germany, the United States and China.

The New World Press has many titles to its credit, including books by Anna Louise Strong and Rewi Alley. *Living in China* has been published by the press after a long period of suspension of its work.

Rock Paintings Discovered in Inner Mongolia

In recent years, a large number of paintings dating from the bronze era to the Ming and Qing Dynasties have been discovered on cliffs in Langshan district, in the western part of the Yinshan Mountains, Inner Mongolia. Their large number and variety are extremely rare. They will provide valuable material for research into the history of the national minorities in north China.

These paintings, which depict wild animals, people, vehicles, tents, gods, as well as hunting, dancing and battle scenes, were

chiselled on the rocks by the ancient Xiongnu (Huns), Tujue (Turks), Ouigour, Dangxiang and Mongolian nomadic tribes.

Exhibition of Paintings by Liu Haisu

Recently oil and traditional Chinese paintings dating from 1922 by Liu Haisu, a well-known artist, were exhibited in Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai. He combines both western and traditional Chinese techniques.

Liu Haisu, who studied in Europe, is now eighty-five and president of the Nanjing Art Academy. His exhibition aroused much interest.

Stories from the Qing Court Restaged in Beijing

The first part of the long historical play *Stories from the Qing Court*, by the renowned drama professor Yang Cunbin, was recently staged in Beijing. Written in 1942, the play was premiered in Chongqing that same year. In the fifties, it was criticized because it was linked with a film entitled *The Secret History of the Qing Court* made in Hong Kong.

Stories from the Qing Court is a trilogy. By showing the contradictions among the ruling factions and the struggle between the Empress Dowager Ci Xi and Emperor Guangxu, the play cleverly exposes the corruption of the Qing court and points to its inevitable collapse.

French Comedy Staged in Shanghai

Recently the Shanghai Youth Drama Troupe presented Molière's *L'Avare*. After Liberation this comedy was performed in Chinese to the delight of the Chinese audiences, but when the "gang of four" were in power all foreign classical works including those of Shakespeare and Molière were banned. This is the first time

one of Molière's plays has been restaged since the gang's downfall.

American Pianist Daniel Pollack Performs in China

Invited by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, Daniel Pollack, a professor at the University of Southern California, visited China at the end of January. His recitals in Beijing and Shanghai were acclaimed, at which he introduced the American contemporary composer Samuel Barber's *Sonata Op. 26*.

CORRECTION

In our February issue, 1980, page 104, line 6 from the bottom, "2,000 Song-dynasty *ci* are extant" should read "20,000 Song-dynasty *ci* are extant".



Buffalos (traditional Chinese painting)

by Huang Zhou



中國文學

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