

HỒ CHÍ MINH

**P** RISON  
DIARY

HANOI - 1972

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PRISON DIARY

HO CHI MINH

PRISON DIARY

*Fifth Edition*

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HANOI — 1972

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Ernest Daily  
1946



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## FOREWORD

*July 1946, Paris.*

In the reception-room of that palace on the right bank of the river, a hale and hearty journalist heckled for a quarter of an hour a thin man with deep marks of suffering and privation on his face, who had in front of him a small vase of roses.

Round about were nearly one hundred reporters and observers from all countries.

"Mr. President, you are a Communist, aren't you?" the journalist asked.

"Yes," the man replied sedately.

"Have you been in the Resistance?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"About forty years."

"Have you been in prison, too?" It was clear what the journalist was driving at.

"Yes."

"What prison?"

"Many, sir."

"Long?"

The thin man looked at the hale and hearty journalist with a faint smile and said, "In prison time is always long, you know."

The reply given in French was prompt, clear and unexpected. Was it said as a reproach, or as a flash of wit or irony?

What is certain is that at that instant Frenchmen, Englishmen and Americans in the room were astonished to notice that the goatee-bearded scholar could smile in Paris or in London as well as in Hanoi. His was the inscrutable smile of a wise man whose vision stretched far beyond today.

Have you any further questions, journalist?

"In prison, time is always long."

*August 1942, Asia.*

The second year of the war was drawing to a close. The Japanese took possession of Indochina. But new forces emerged. In Viet Nam a resistance base was firmly established in the uplands.

One day, near the Sino-Vietnamese border, Chiang Kai-shek's police arrested a man, about whom they knew nothing except that he was called Ho Chi Minh, that he wanted to go to Chungking and that he claimed to be a representative of the Vietnamese patriots.

Who was this Ho Chi Minh? Around 1926 or 1927, there existed a Vietnamese patriot by the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc — known to all the police in the Far East — who used to travel about this seething region of the world. But Nguyen the Patriot was dead.

This man looked the same age. His clothes were very simple, but small details about him revealed that he was not an ordinary man, and, strange to say, he wanted to see the Chinese authorities in Chungking. This was enough to clap a man in prison.

First he was put in Tsingsi jail; then without any plausible reason, he was taken to Nanning; from Nanning he was sent to Kweilin and from Kweilin to Liuchow, where he retraced his steps...

Before dawn, when the stars faded away, he was sent on his way on a lead, with hands bound, behind a pig carried by two guards. At nightfall, when the birds returned to their nests, he was copped up in some makeshift jail near a rubbish heap, happy to have one leg shackled so as to avoid a night's sleep on the edge of the latrine.

Transferred here and there by circuitous routes, he crossed thirteen districts of Kwangsi province, was confined in thirty prefecture and district prisons for fourteen months in all and kept in custody at Liuchow from where he later took the road back to the frontier, which he had crossed two years before.

Despite the days of fifty-kilometre walks, despite sleepless nights, hunger, cold, fever, the cangues, the prisoner kept his smile, which testified to his inexhaustible confidence in life, in its victory over evil and death.

Arms and legs bound, who can prevent you from listening to a bird's song, from enjoying the fragrance of flowers? Do solitude and inaction weigh heavy on you? The autumn moon is bright in the sky. Does the languor of the evening twilight stupefy your will? Look at that light in the distance:



*To the wood seeking shelter a bird flies, forlorn.  
Leisurely a lone cloud floats across the expanse of heaven.  
In yonder mountain hamlet a girl is grinding corn.  
The grain ground, a hot fire glows red in the oven.*

The police watch every detail of your deeds and gestures. Who can forbid you to jot down the uniqueness of a moment, an ineffable situation, the drama behind a smile. The poetry of things is in the heart of life. And if poetry could be of any use in life, it should be in the circumstances described above.

Chinese prisons at that time were much more like a Court of Miracles than the Santé cells. They were atrocious spots full of misery, filth, corruption, disease, and alive with gamblers, bugs, opium addicts, itch-mites, and syphilitics. Apart from that, you lived a family-like life, preparing your tea on a personal stove and eating with gusto, when there was something to eat, after a good hunt for lice.

Sometimes in the evening, sitting in the dark, our prisoner watched all those people asleep and awake, innocent-faced men on the ground, bugs on the walls crawling like "tanks on manoeuvres," and mosquitoes "attacking in squadrons." The world was at war, while he suffered in a prison cell, far from his country, far from his comrades. It was at such moments that he took out a worn note-book and jotted down his impressions of the day. He wrote in the language of his jailers, who would have found suspicious anything written in Vietnamese.

That was the origin of a hundred-odd quatrains and Tang poems written in classical Chinese adorned here with a newly-coined word, there with a popular expression. All were sketches

taken from life and they made up what might be called the prisoner's diary.

We have translated that diary for our friends abroad. And the prisoner, as you have guessed, was none other than Nguyen the Patriot, the man who received pressmen in the reception-room of the Royal Monceau hotel one afternoon in July 1946\*, the year that should have seen the beginning of Franco-Vietnamese reconciliation.

Within the framework of this collection of translated poems, we do not wish to expatiate on the political life of the author. Besides, this would be unnecessary, for Ho Chi Minh's name has since long been well known to the public in the West.

Neither will we make a critical study of his poetry in this modest collection of texts. We refrain from taking the place of the reader, who is to make his own assessment.

Nevertheless we deem it necessary to make the following little remark:

Nowadays there are many memoirs of great statesmen. Memoirs are part of history, and history, as you know, can be told as one likes.

The public, especially in Europe, is rarely given the opportunity to read poems by those men. This for many reasons, of

\* In July 1946, President Ho Chi Minh led a Vietnamese government delegation to France to open the negotiations provided for in the Preliminary Agreements of March 6, 1946, which gave birth to the Modus Vivendi of September 14, 1946 (Fontainebleau conference). Unfortunately, the French colonialists torpedoed these agreements; the nationwide resistance of the Vietnamese people broke out on December 19, 1946, and ended in July 1954 with the Dien Bien Phu victory.

which one is worth noting, however impertinent it may seem: Great statesmen are great chiefly because of their work, their thought and their character, not always because of their sensibility. Now, poetry is something most intimate to man. It can hardly tell lies or else the poet is not a poet. So that they don't necessarily gain by revealing their inner selves.

In such men as Ho Chi Minh intelligence and sensibility are one. There is no secret door between his public and private lives. For him the sight of suffering is a call both to action and to poetical expression.

*A rose blossoms, and then fades.*

*It blooms and withers — listless.*

*But its scent the cells invades*

*And arouses the prisoners' bitterness.*

This small note-book should enable us to understand its author much better than lengthy memoirs could do.

PHAN NHUAN

## PRISON DIARY

*Thy body is in jail.*

*But thy spirit, never.*

*For the great cause to prevail,*

*Let thy spirit soar, higher!*

## BEGINNING THE DIARY

*I've never been fond of chanting poetry;  
But what else can I do in thraldom?  
These long days I'll spend composing poesy:  
Singing poems may help in the wait for freedom.*





## MORNING

## I

*Every morning the sun, emerging o'er the wall,  
Beams on the gate, but the gate is not yet open.  
Inside the prison lingers a gloomy pall,  
But we know outside the sun has risen.*

## II

*Once awake everyone starts louse-hunting.  
At eight the gong sounds for the morning meal.  
Come on, let's go and our stomachs try to fill:  
After such long misery happier days must be coming.*

## NOON

*In the cells how nice it is to have a doze!  
For hours we lie about in deep repose.  
I dream of riding a dragon up to heaven.  
Waking, I find myself still pining in prison.*

## AFTERNOON

*Two o'clock: the doors open to make the cells airy.  
Everyone lifts his eyes for a look at the heavens.  
O free spirits roaming the sky of liberty!  
Know you, one of your peers is languishing in irons?*

## EVENING

*The meal over, the sun sinks below the western horizon.  
From all corners rise folk tune and popular ditty:  
Suddenly this dismal, gloomy Zingsi prison  
Is turned into a little music academy.*

## PRISON MEALS

*For each meal only one bowl of rice reddish brown;  
No vegetables, no salt, even no broth to wash it down.  
If you get food sent in you may soothe your hunger;  
Failing this, you'll famish and can only cry to Mother!*





## LEARNING TO PLAY CHESS

## I

*To while the time away we learn to play chess.  
 Horse and foot are engaged in pursuit endless.  
 Move with lightning speed either to attack or defend:  
 Talent and nimble feet will give you the upper hand.*

## II

*Look far ahead and ponder deeply.  
 Be resolute: attack and attack incessantly.  
 A wrong move and even your two chariots<sup>1</sup> are useless;  
 Come the right juncture: a pawn can bring you  
 success.*

## III

*The forces on both sides are balanced equally,  
 But victory will come only to one player.  
 Advance, retreat — do both with unerring strategy:  
 Only then can you be called a great commander.*

## MOONLIGHT

*In jail there is neither flower nor wine.  
What could one do when the night is so exquisite?  
To the window I go and look at the moonshine.  
Through the bars the moon gazes at the poet.*



## THE WATER RATION

*The water ration is half a basin only:  
You can either wash or make tea, just as you please.  
If you want to clean your face, then go without tea.  
Should you be keen on tea, well, you can't wash your  
phiz.*

## MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

## I

*Like a round mirror the moon shines in mid-autumn,  
Beaming on the earth her silvery light.  
You who enjoy the festival in your family's bosom,  
Think of those in prison and their sorrowful plight.*

## II

*In jail we also celebrate mid-autumn.  
But moon and wind carry a tinge of sadness.  
Barred from enjoying the autumn moon in freedom,  
My heart wanders after her across the heavens  
boundless.*



TRANSFERRED TO TIANBAO ON  
 "DOUBLE TEN" <sup>2</sup> DAY

*Every house is decked with lantern and flower :  
 It's national day, the whole country is filled with  
 delight.  
 But just now I'm put in chains for a transfer :  
 Contrary winds persist in hampering the eagle's flight.*

OUT ON THE ROAD

*Out on the road we grow fully aware of the difficulties.  
 One peak hardly climbed, another above us rises.  
 But once we've struggled up to the highest pass,  
 Ten thousand li at one glance can our eyes encompass.*





## TIANTUNG

*For each meal only a bowl of rice gruel:  
 The hungry stomach moans, wails, and curls.  
 Three yuan of rice is not enough to feed a man well  
 When wood sells as dear as cinnamon and rice as  
 pearls.*

## ARRIVAL AT TIANBAO JAIL

*Today I walked fifty-three kilometres.  
 My hat and clothes are soaked through, my shoes in  
 tatters.  
 Without a place to sleep, all through the night  
 I sit on the edge of the latrine, waiting for light.*

VISITING HER HUSBAND  
IN PRISON

*On this side of the bars, the husband.  
Outside stands the wife.  
So close, only inches distant;  
Yet as heaven from earth apart.  
What their mouths cannot let know  
Their eyes try to impart.  
Before a word is said, tears flow:  
Truly their plight rends your heart.*

THE PRESS:  
WARM WELCOME TO WILLKIE<sup>5</sup>

*Both good friends of China, for Zhongqing  
We are both heading.  
But there you are, offered the seat of honour;  
While here I am, down the steps, a prisoner.  
Like you I'm a visiting delegate;  
Why then is the difference in treatment so great?  
Such is life: coldness to some, warmth towards others.  
Forever eastward flow the waters<sup>6</sup>.*

## ADVICE TO MYSELF

*Without the cold and bleakness of winter  
 The warmth and splendour of spring there could  
 never be.  
 Misfortunes have steeled and tempered me  
 And strengthened my resolve even further.*

## COUNTRY SCENE

*When I came here the rice was still tender green.  
 Now half the autumn harvest has already been brought  
 in.  
 Everywhere peasants' faces wear smiles of gladness,  
 And the ricefields resound with songs of happiness.*

## THE GRUEL STALL

*On the roadside, in the cool shade of a tree opulent,  
Stands a thatch hut calling itself "restaurant".  
The menu consists of cold gruel and white salt:  
Drop in, traveller, and enjoy a restful halt!*

## GODE PRISON

*Life in the ward calls for quite a bit of housekeeping:  
Wood, rice, oil, salt — everything must be bought and  
paid for.  
In front of each cell there's a little stove standing;  
On it all day boil rice, broth, and more.*

## DEPARTURE BEFORE DAWN

I

*The cocks have crowed just once: the night has not  
yet passed.  
With a retinue of stars the moon sails o'er the hills  
yonder.  
On the road for a long journey has set out the traveller,  
His face beaten by gust after gust of icy autumn blast.*

II

*The pale east has turned rosy: nascent day  
The last shadows of the night has swept away.  
A warm breath blows across the immense skies,  
And the wayfarer feels poetic inspiration rise.*



## TUNGZHENG

November 2

*Tungzheng jail can be to Pingma likened:  
Each meal a bowl of gruel, the stomach as good as  
empty.  
But water and light we can have aplenty,  
And each day for airing the cells are twice opened.*

THE PAPER BLANKET  
OF A JAIL-MATE

*Old scrolls and new books complement each other.  
A blanket of paper is indeed better than no cover.  
Do you people in jade-and-brocade beds ever think  
Of those in prison who cannot sleep a wink?*

## COLD NIGHT

*In the cold autumn night, with neither quilt nor  
mattress,  
I curl myself up for warmth but cannot close my eyes.  
Moonlight on the banana-palms adds to the chilliness.  
I look through the bars : the Little Bear has lain down  
in the skies.*

## THE BONDS

*Entwined round my arms and legs is a long dragon :  
I look like a foreign officer with braid on the shoulders.  
But the cords officers wear are of golden thread woven,  
While my decoration is but a thick rope of fibres.*



## GOOD-BYE TO A TOOTH

*You were, my friend, hard and unyielding;  
Not like the tongue, soft and stretching.  
The bitter and the sweet we have shared to this day,  
But now each of us must go his own way.*

THE WIFE OF  
A CONSCRIPT DESERTER<sup>7</sup>

*That day, never to come back, you went away,  
Leaving me alone, weighed down with sadness.  
The authorities, in pity of my loneliness,  
Invited me to prison for a temporary stay.*



## GUARDS CARRY A PIG

## I

*Going with us, guards carry a pig  
On their shoulders, while I'm dragged along rudely.  
A man is treated worse than a pig,  
Once deprived of his liberty.*

## II

*Of the thousand sources of bitterness and sorrow  
None can be worse than the loss of liberty.  
Even for a word, a gesture, you're no longer free:  
They just haul you along, like a horse or a buffalo.*

## A STUMBLE

*It was still pitch-dark when we started.  
 The road was uneven, rough and rugged.  
 I slipped and landed in a dangerous pit  
 But managed to jump out: lucky, wasn't it?*

 IN A BOAT  
 TO YONGNING (Nanning)

*Carried by the current, the boat sails towards  
 Yongning.  
 My legs are tied to the rail, a new style of hanging!  
 On both river banks a truly prosperous countryside;  
 In midstream light fishing-boats swiftly glide.*

## NANNING JAIL

*Here's a jail built on the latest model:  
All night the cells are lit up with electric lamps.  
But each meal is nothing more than a bowl of gruel,  
And one's stomach suffers continuous cramps.*

## SADNESS

*The whole world is ablaze with the flames of war.  
To the battlefield eagerly fighters ask to be sent.  
In jail inaction weighs on the prisoner all the more:  
His noble ambitions are not worth a paltry cent.*

## LISTENING TO A COCK'S CROW

*You are only a very ordinary rooster.  
Every morning you crow to announce the day nascent.  
Cock-a-doodle-doo! You rouse people from slumber.  
Truly, this feat of yours is no mean achievement.*

## A JAILED GAMBLER DIES

*Nothing but skin and bone remained of him.  
He slept close to my side only last night.  
But misery, cold and hunger were the end of him,  
And this morning gone he was to the world of eternal  
night.*

## STILL ANOTHER

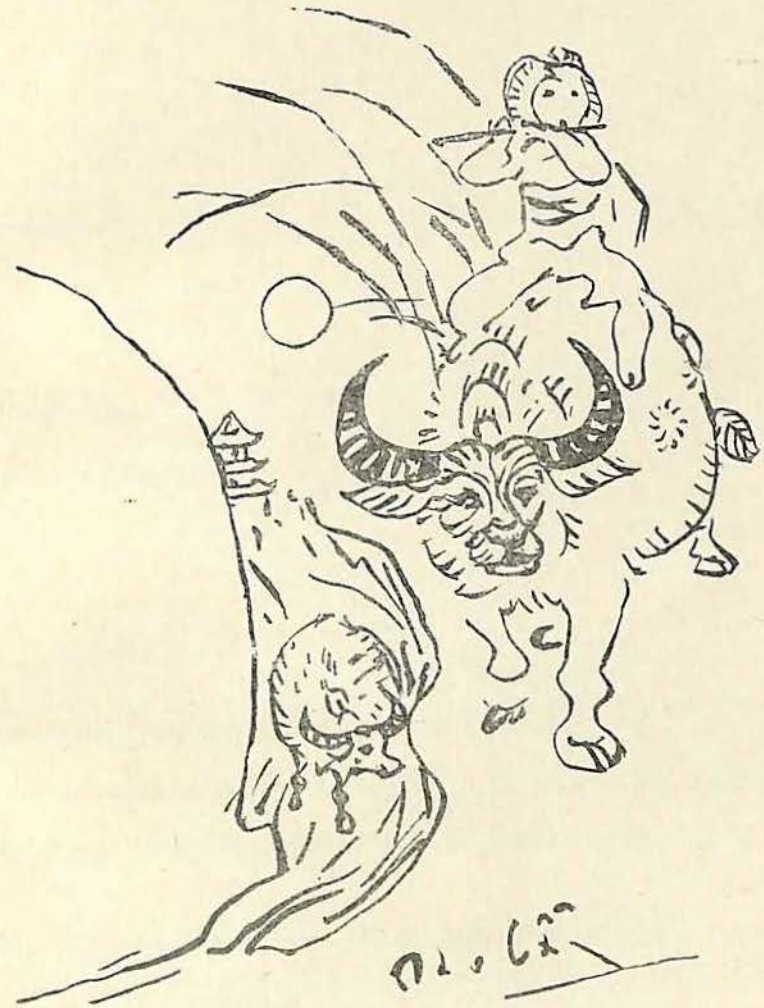
*Ba-i and Shu-ci<sup>8</sup> would not eat the Zhou's rice.  
 That man would not swallow the government's gruel.  
 Ba-i and Shu-ci died on the Shouiang mountainside;  
 The jailed gambler starved to death in his cell.*

## NO SMOKING

*Here smoking is strictly prohibited!  
 Your tobacco by the warder is quickly confiscated.  
 Of course he can smoke his pipe whenever he wants to;  
 But just try to have a puff and he'll handcuff you.*

## TWILIGHT

*The wind on mountain rocks the edge of its sword  
sharpens.  
The cold with its spear the tree-boughs pierces.  
The bell from a far-off pagoda the traveller's steps  
hastens.  
Flute-playing buffalo-boys leisurely ride home to the  
villages.*





## THE CHARGES

*Sixty cents to get a pot of rice cooked.*

*A basin of hot water costs no less than one yuan.*

*For sixty cents' worth of goods you're charged a full  
yuan:*

*How clearly the prices in prison are fixed!*

## SLEEPLESS NIGHT

*The first watch... the second... the third dies.  
I toss about, restless: sleep would not come, it seems.  
The fourth watch... the fifth... No sooner have I closed  
my eyes  
Than the five-pointed star haunts my dreams.<sup>9</sup>*

一更...二更...又三更。輾轉徘徊細睡不成。  
四、五更時才合眼。夢魂環繞五尖星。  
憶友  
昔君送我至江濱，問我歸期指谷新。  
現在新田已弊好，他鄉亦作獄中人。  
替誰友們寫報告  
同升共濟義難辭，替友編修報告書。  
奉此等因。今始學，多多博得感恩詞。

Facsimile of  
President Ho Chi Minh's handwriting

## THINKING OF A FRIEND

*That day you went with me to the edge of the river :  
"When will you be back?" — "When you see the rice  
ripen."*

*But now that the fields have been ploughed for the  
next season,*

*In a foreign land I still remain a prisoner.*

WRITING A PETITION  
FOR JAIL-MATES

*Being in the same boat, how could I refuse to help you?  
On your behalf to the authorities I wrote that petition.  
"Whereas... in consequence of..." — For such newly-  
learnt jargon  
No end of thanks I got as my due.*

SCABIES

*Covered with red and blue as though dressed in  
brocade;  
Scratching all day long, we seem to be playing the  
guitar;  
Honoured guests, of our rich garbs we make a parade.  
Strange virtuosos, sharing an itch for music we  
surely are!*

LISTENING TO THE SOUND  
OF RICE-POUNDING

*Under the pestle how terribly the rice suffers!  
But it comes out of the pounding as white as cotton.  
The same thing to man in this world occurs :  
Hard trials turn him into polished diamond.*

THE ELEVENTH OF NOVEMBER

I

*Formerly when came the Eleventh of November,  
Of the armistice in Europe was observed the  
anniversary.  
Today bloody fighting rages the five continents over :  
The wicked Nazis for this crime bear the responsibility.*

## II

*Now China has been resisting for almost six years.  
Her heroic feats of arms are known all the world over.  
Although victory is just around the corner,  
Even more effort is needed when counter-offensive  
time appears.*

## III

*All over Asia anti-Japanese flags flutter.  
Big flags, little flags — in size they differ.  
Of course the big banners must be present;  
But the little ones can never be absent.*

## AIR-RAID WARNING

*November 12*

*Enemy planes come roaring in the sky.  
People flee helter-skelter, leaving the place empty.  
Out of prison we are ordered for safety:  
How gladly we all hasten to comply!*



## THE MORNING SUN

*The morning sun into the prison penetrates:  
The smoke clears away, the mist dissipates.  
The breath of life suddenly fills the skies,  
And the prisoners' faces are now all smiles.*

## COMMOTION IN VIET NAM

*News reports in the Nanning press*

*Death rather than servitude! Everywhere  
in my country  
The flags of insurrection again proudly flutter.  
Oh, how sad at such a time to be a prisoner:  
To rush into battle I wish I could be free!*



## A BRITISH DELEGATION IN CHINA

November 18

*The Americans gone, now the Britons are there.  
Their delegation is warmly received everywhere.  
Though I'm also a delegate on a visit friendly,  
Of a peculiar kind is the welcome accorded me!*

## TAKEN BACK TO WUMING

*They transferred me to Nanning;  
Now they are taking me back to Wuming.  
Transfer after complicated transfer:  
My journey they seek to hinder.  
Oh, how bitter!*

## DOG-MEAT AT BAOXIANG

*At Gode the guards relished fish fresh.  
 Now at Baoxiang they savour dog flesh.  
 Ah, even that gang of turnkeys  
 At times show a taste for delicacies!*

## THE ROAD-MENDER

*Drenched with rain, flogged by the wind, given a rest  
 never:  
 In what wretched conditions you work, road-mender!  
 Of all who pass — on foot, on horseback, or in a  
 carriage —  
 How many show any gratitude to you ever?*

TO MY STAFF,  
STOLEN BY A GUARD

*All your time with me you've been upright  
and unbending.  
Hand in hand we've passed many seasons  
of mist and snow.  
Cursed be the rogue who caused our parting!  
A long, long time will last our sorrow.*

THE MILESTONE

*Neither high up nor far away,  
On neither emperor's nor king's throne,  
You're only a little slab of stone  
Standing on the edge of the highway.  
People ask you for guidance;  
You stop them from going astray,  
And tell them the distance  
O'er which they must journey.  
The service you render is no small one;  
People will remember what you've done.*

THE CHILD  
IN BINIANG PRISON?

*Boohoo! Away ran my conscript Daddy:  
He was afraid to serve in the army.  
That's why I'm here in jail with Mummy  
Though I'm half a year old barely.*

LIGHTING COSTS

*For the cost of lighting every newcomer pays:  
Six yuan per person in local currency.  
In this realm of darkness and haze  
Light is worth only that much money.*

## PRISON LIFE

*A stove for each of the prison folk,  
 And earthen pots of every imaginable size,  
 For making tea, boiling vegetables, and cooking rice:  
 All day the whole place is filled with smoke.*

## Mr. GUO

*Like duckweed meeting water, glad we were to see  
 each other.*

*How kind and cordial Mr. Guo was to me!*

*Nothing much: "A little gift of coal in wintry  
 weather."*

*Yet, that such people still exist is a blessing truly.*

## Mr. MO, THE CHIEF-WARDER

*A generous man, Mr Mo, the Biniang chief-warder !  
He buys rice for the prisoners with his own money ;  
At night he takes the fetters off for them to sleep  
better ;  
He never resorts to force, only uses bounty.*

## ON THE TRAIN TO LAIBIN

*After weeks of trudging along wearily,  
Today we board a train happily.  
Although our seats are but a heap of coal,  
Still it's much better than to resume our stroll !*



## ARRIVAL AT LIUZHOU

*December 9*

*There must come an end sometime to suffering:  
 On the ninth, here I arrive in Liuzhou now.  
 As from o'er a hundred days' nightmare I'm awaking,  
 A trace of sadness still lingers on my brow.*

LONG DETENTION  
WITHOUT INTERROGATION

*A bitter drug tastes all the more bitter when the cup is  
 almost empty.  
 The last stage of a hard journey is often the hardest  
 of all.  
 To the mandarin's residence the distance is no more  
 than one li:  
 Why then for so long have I been kept in thrall?*



## MIDNIGHT

*In sleep an honest look all faces adorn ;  
Only when people wake does good or evil show.  
Good and evil are not qualities inborn ;  
More often than not from education they flow.*

## AT THE MANDARIN'S RESIDENCE

*We had thought this was to be the last gate,  
And the day of deliverance was approaching.  
Alas, there is another pass to negotiate.  
Transfer! Now we are going to Guilin.*

## FOUR MONTHS HAVE PASSED

*"One day within prison walls seems as long as a  
 thousand years without."  
 How right the ancients were, no doubt!  
 Four months of a subhuman life, it appears,  
 Have aged me even more than ten years.*

Indeed

*For four months I've lived on meagre fare;  
 For four months I've never had a sound sleep;  
 For four months I've never changed my wear;  
 For four months I've never taken a dip.*

And so

*One of my teeth has fallen away;  
 Much of my hair has turned grey;  
 Scabies covers my body;  
 I'm dark and thin like a demon hungry.*

Fortunately

*Stubborn and persevering,  
 I've not yielded an inch.  
 Physically I'm suffering,  
 But my spirit will ne'er flinch.*

## SERIOUSLY ILL

*With my health harmed by China's fickle weather,  
 And my heart grieved by Viet Nam's long suffering,  
 Oh, to fall ill in prison, what a trial bitter!  
 Enough to make you weep, but I prefer to sing.*

ARRIVAL AT GUILIN<sup>21</sup>

*Neither forest nor cinnamon is found in Guilin;  
 Only high mountains and deep rivers are in sight.  
 In the shade of a banyan the prison looks terrifying:  
 Dark in the daytime, grim and desolate at night.*



?!

*Liuzhou, Guilin, and now again Liuzhou;  
Kicked back and forth like a soccer ball.  
Innocent, I've been dragged o'er Guangsi, to and fro:  
An end to this shuttling can one ever hope to call?*

AT THE POLITICAL BUREAU  
OF THE FOURTH WAR ZONE

*Hauled o'er thirteen districts of Guangsi;  
Kept in eighteen prisons successively!  
Tell me, of what crime have you found me guilty?  
That of showing my people unflinching loyalty?*



## EVENING SCENERY

*A rose blossoms, and then fades.  
It blooms and withers — listless.  
But its scent the cells invades  
And arouses the prisoners' bitterness.*

## RESTRICTIONS

*Without freedom one leads a wretched life truly!  
Even on relieving nature restrictions are imposed.  
When the door is open the bowels are, alas, not ready;  
When one has the gripes, it remains of course closed.*

## SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

*During the long, sleepless nights in prison,  
I've written a hundred-odd poems on thraldom.  
At the end of each quatrain I put down my brush often  
And through the bars looked up at the sky of freedom.*

## ENDLESS RAINS

*Nine days of rain, of sunshine one day:  
Really the sky above has shown no feeling.  
Tattered shoes, muddy road, legs caked in clay!  
Still, tirelessly I must keep slogging.*



## REGRET AT TIME LOST

*On a militant an adverse destiny maintains its hold.  
 Eight useless months now have I spent in custody.  
 A day is worth a thousand taels of gold:  
 When can I ever again hope to be free?*

## AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS

## I

*The Little Bear lies atop the hill, it's ten in the  
 evening.  
 Autumn has come, says a cricket's intermittent  
 chirping.  
 But what does the prisoner care about the season?  
 Of only one thing does he dream: liberation.*

## II

*Last year when autumn came I was free.  
This year autumn finds me into prison cast.  
With regard to services rendered my country,  
This autumn is, let me say, equal to the last.*

PERMITTED TO TAKE A WALK  
IN THE PRISON YARD

*After such long inactivity my legs are soft like cotton.  
Trying a few steps, I stagger and totter.  
But very soon bellows the chief-warder:  
"Hey you, come back, no loitering in prison!"*





AFTER PRISON,  
PRACTISING MOUNTAIN - CLIMBING<sup>14</sup>

*The mountains embrace the clouds, the clouds hug  
the mountains.*

*The river below shines like a spotless mirror.*

*On the slopes of the Western Range, my heart throbs  
as I wander,*

*Looking towards the Southern skies and thinking of  
old friends.*

NOTES

1. The most powerful men on a Chinese chessboard.
2. Tenth of October, Chinese National Day under the Kuomintang regime.
3. Jokingly, the two legs.
4. To cook this dish, the legs of the chicken are tied crosswise. The phrase is a jocular description of the way the prisoner's limbs are bound at night.
5. Head of an American delegation to China in 1942.
6. Major Chinese rivers all flow east towards the sea.
7. Families of Kuomintang army deserters were subjected to harsh penalties.
8. Sons of the chief of a principality in ancient China. When King Wu, acting against their advice, conquered the country and founded the Chou dynasty (c. 11th century B.C.) both refused "the Chou's rice" and starved to death.
9. The national flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, founded by President Ho Chi Minh in 1945, is red, with a five-pointed gold star in the middle.

10. The poem written in Chinese ideograms :

拆 字

囚	人	出	去	或	爲	國
患	過	頭	時	始	見	忠
人	有	憂	愁	樓	點	大
籠	開	竹	門	出	真	龍

*The analysis :*

Take 人 (man) from 囚 (prison), add 或 (probability) and you get 國 (country).

Lop off the top of 患 (misfortune), that gives 忠 (loyalty).

Add 亻 (man) to 憂 (worry) to get 優 (merit).

Take 竹 (bamboo) off the top of 籠 (cell), that leaves 龍 (dragon).

11. Guilin (Kweilin) means Cinnamon Forest.
12. The word means "Pure Brightness" and designates a period in the lunar year which corresponds roughly to early April.
13. Two warriors in the period of the Three Kingdoms in China, famed for their valour and loyalty.
14. After his release from prison, Ho Chi Minh took long walks in the mountains to recover his health.

★

*In the translated poems, Chinese names are written in the Chinese latinized script.*

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