

asked. "They will all be delighted to see you!" Finally we consented, but we went to visit each one of them first.

Thus the two beggars were again transformed into honorable guests. We remained in Yiyang for three days before continuing our journey to Yuankiang. When we left, Mr. Chang insisted upon our accepting four dollars for emergency expenses and he ordered the gatekeeper to accompany us as far as the city wall. We assured him that we did not need the company, but Mr. Chang would not hear of our going alone.

When we were out on the road, I said to the gatekeeper, "Your master is a very good man! He would not hear of beggars being tied up and sent to prison. Instead he has entertained us charmingly!" The gatekeeper lowered his head, but spoke not a word.

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The Yuankiang Flood

The gatekeeper from Mr. Chang's yamen left us near the Yuankiang signpost just outside the city gate, indicating that the main road led to the district city of Yuankiang. The District of Yuankiang is one of the largest in Hunan. Once we were alone, we began to discuss this latest experience.

Mao criticized our host, Mr. Chang, "Although that doorkeeper was hateful and intolerant, his master, Mr. Chang was really worse. After all, the doorkeeper was only obeying the orders and Mr. Chang had positively given him instructions not to let poor people come in! Mr. Chang is what you call a *shih li hsiao jen*, a person whose chief aim in life is the obtaining of personal influence and money, and whose mind seems to be incapable of rising to higher thoughts. As for the gatekeeper, I've seen many better types! They're not all like that!"

"No, and not all the district magistrates are like that either," I replied. "There's an old saying, 'The doors of the yamen are wide open like a figure *pa* (eight); but however good your case, it is useless to go in for justice if you have no money! Money is Justice!'"

"Yes," agreed Mao. "There are very few people in the community who do not share that attitude. Money is one of the most powerful

influences in human affairs. Money gives power.”

“Power is a bad thing,” I exclaimed. “All power is bad! And to use one’s personal influence to tread one’s fellow men underfoot is a crime!”

“Just a minute,” protested Mao. “You talk about ‘all power.’ Just what power are you referring to?”

I explained, “First, in the primitive world, power was won only by physical strength which enables the owner to kill wild animals for food and to fight successfully other members of the tribe. Then there’s the power of the soldiers, of armed forces. Then there’s money power and of course, political power.”

“So you say there are four kinds of power that are bad?” asked Mao.

“Power in itself is neither good nor bad,” I explained, “it all depends upon the way it is used. To force people to do things against their will is a crime. Power is like a knife, which in itself is neither good nor bad, but if it is used to kill a person, it has made possible a crime.”

“Do you mean that political power is like a knife?” asked Mao. “Surely you don’t mean to say that since a knife may be used to kill, it should not have been made? Knives can also be used to make fine sculptures and carvings. In the same way, political power can be employed to organize and develop a country.”

“You cannot compare politics with artistic creations,” I protested. “If you analyze history, both Chinese and foreign, you will find that there are no politics in which the partisans do not seek to kill their opponents. Even the best of politicians tend to kill or to harm the people, and I cannot accept that as something good.”

“I think political power is better than money power,” said Mao. “The money power of the capitalist is nothing more than the accumulated blood and sweat of the workers. A person may be completely unprincipled, a thoroughly bad fellow, with no culture or education; yet if he has wealth, he will be a respected and honored member of the community. He can openly commit acts of wickedness, but if he has wealth, people will fawn upon him and kow-tow before him, telling him what a fine fellow he is! It’s exactly like you said, ‘Money is Justice!’ Money is the father and the grandfather of the mean of spirit! Why, if you and I had been wearing fine clothes when we went to call on Mr. Chang, wouldn’t the gatekeeper have met us with

a smile of welcome? If we had given him some money as a tip, would he not have kow-towed before us? They are all mean of spirit! They all worship the god of money!"

"You say that political power is better than money power," I said. "I cannot agree with that. Money power is bad, but political power is even worse! You must remember one important fact: political power includes within itself both money power and military power. The person who has political power also has the other two! Money power is one force for evil, but political power is several forces for evil all combined. When an uneducated individual without conscience succeeds in obtaining political power, he may rise to the very highest position in the country. He may come to be called king, or emperor, or president, and then he can have others killed or punished to his heart's desire. However, he may say that he loves the people, that he is working for their good. He is the keystone of the country and the people's guiding star.

"It is for this reason that in Chinese history, there have been many scholars, pure of spirit and of exceptionally fine character, who have refused offers of posts as government officials. Some scholars have been invited by their Emperor three or four times to take important positions, but they have refused because they were unwilling to kow-tow to a person without education or culture. These scholars did not feel that political power added to the intrinsic value of an individual. They knew that political power was the crystallization of several potentially evil forces and that more often than not the Emperor himself was no more than a very successful bandit. These men who voluntarily renounced power were called superior beings or superior intellectuals.

"During the Chin Dynasty," I continued, "Huang-fu Mi wrote a book which he called 'Biography of the Superior Intellectuals' and in it he lists nearly a hundred old-time scholars who had refused to kow-tow to their so-called social superiors, and who preferred to maintain their own self-respect rather than to accept privileges and lucrative positions. That book was written two thousand years ago, and who knows how many thousands, or perhaps millions, have chosen this same path since then."

To this rather long interpretation, Mao replied, "Is it your theory that political power is a combination of evil powers? That's all very

well. It's very interesting but it's much too deep for most people to understand and appreciate. You seem to be far above us common folks; you seem, in fact, to be speaking from the sky, and unless you speak in a voice of thunder, the people on earth will not be able to hear you. I speak from a somewhat lower level. I agree that the mean-spirited power-worshiper is hateful but what does it all boil down to? It seems to me the situation is like this: if you have money, or if you are a high official, all these people will greet you with smiling faces and will kow-tow to you; if, however, you do not have money, or if you are not an official, they just don't recognize you. That's what happened to us with the gatekeeper and it's typical!"

"The expression *shih li hsiao jen*, mean-spirited power-worshiper, is very ancient and is the accepted antithesis of the other expression *tao yi chun tze*, high-minded sage. This would seem to imply that all the *hsiao jen*, the mean-spirited, are worshipers of power, which is disdained by the sages. This was accepted by Chinese scholars as long ago as three or four thousand years back. Confucius said, 'For the sage, moral development always comes before thoughts of food or material possessions,' and Mencius commented, 'With moral sufficiency money has no attractions'; Tung Chung-shu, in the Han Dynasty, wrote similarly, 'One's aim must always be the following of high principles of living, never the search after material gain.' Humanity's standard of conduct should be based on these teachings, but the power of money and politics has been too much of a disrupting influence," I argued.

To which Mao answered, "That sounds very good, but it is often very difficult to stick to such high principles in real life. When people are starving to death, they are not going to meditate on their moral development. As for myself, I prefer what Kuang Chung said, 'After one is satisfactorily clothed and has eaten his fill, then should one give thought to the ceremonies.' That is just the opposite of what Confucius said, 'First follow the doctrine, then consider the material needs of the body.'"

I countered with, "You know the old saying, 'If the moral doctrine is one foot high, then the devil will be ten feet high.' The moral progress of humanity is very slow, but material progress is very rapid. This saying can be interpreted to mean that for every ten per cent

of material progress, there will only be one per cent of moral progress. Great headway has been made with airplanes and military equipment. Guns and cannons grow ever larger so that more people can be killed, which of itself proves what meager progress has been made in the advance of morality. The Chinese sages always emphasized moral rectitude, but it will always be a difficult task to persuade people to act against their lower instincts."

Mao replied impatiently, "All this talk of doctrine and morality is very fine and good in principle, but it won't stop people from starving to death!"

"But if you leave out doctrine and morality," I insisted, "and insure only that everyone will have plenty to eat, then the people will just grow physically to be like so many fat pigs. I think that would be just as bad as to be lions or tigers."

We walked along the Yuankiang road for several days, talking in this fashion most of the time. One evening we stopped at an inn to have our supper and then decided to remain there over night. Since there were no other travelers, the owner, a very pretty young woman of about twenty, came over to our table to talk with us. "Where do you two gentlemen come from?" she asked.

When Mao told her we came from the Yiyang district, she commented, "You don't have much of a Yiyang accent."

"We are from Siangtan and Siangsiang," Mao added.

"Oh my," she said, surprised, "those districts are a very long way from here!"

When Mao told her they were about a thousand *li*, or four hundred kilometers from there, she wanted to know where we were going. She couldn't believe us when we told her we had no fixed destination, that we were just traveling across Hunan Province with no destination in mind; so I told her that we were beggars, which was the reason for our not having any purpose.

She was astonished to hear this and she laughed heartily, showing her fine white teeth. "You're beggars? You can't be! You look so refined! Are you really beggars?" she asked incredulously.

"We are not trying to deceive you," I replied. "We have walked all the way from Changsha to this inn, always as beggars."

She still could not believe it. She was completely bewildered. "But

why don't you believe us?" asked Mao.

"Simply because neither of you looks a bit like a beggar!" she insisted vehemently.

"Do beggars have special looks?" I asked. "How do you find us different?"

She looked at us carefully a moment then said, "I can see that both of you are great men!"

"What is a great man?" I asked. "Can you, by chance, read faces?"

She nodded her head, "Yes, I know a little about physiognomy and the art of word conversion in foretelling the future. My grandfather taught me. He was a poet who published a collection of works called, 'The Shepherd Songs of the Peach Orchard.' My father also was a great scholar, but both of them died within the space of three years, leaving my mother and me alone in the world. Since we could not make ends meet, we finally opened this little inn."

"So you are still unmarried?" I asked the young lady from a scholarly family. "I wonder if you would loan me your grandfather's collection of poems to look at? You must be a learned person also?"

"Oh, I studied for seven or eight years with my father and I was just beginning to learn to write poetry when he died," she answered. "My grandfather's collection, 'The Shepherd Songs of the Peach Orchard,' are stored away in a coffer. I'll be glad to find them for you tomorrow."

"If you know how to read faces, please will you read ours?" asked Mao.

She hesitated a moment before replying, "Yes, if you like. But you must promise not to be angry if I say something wrong."

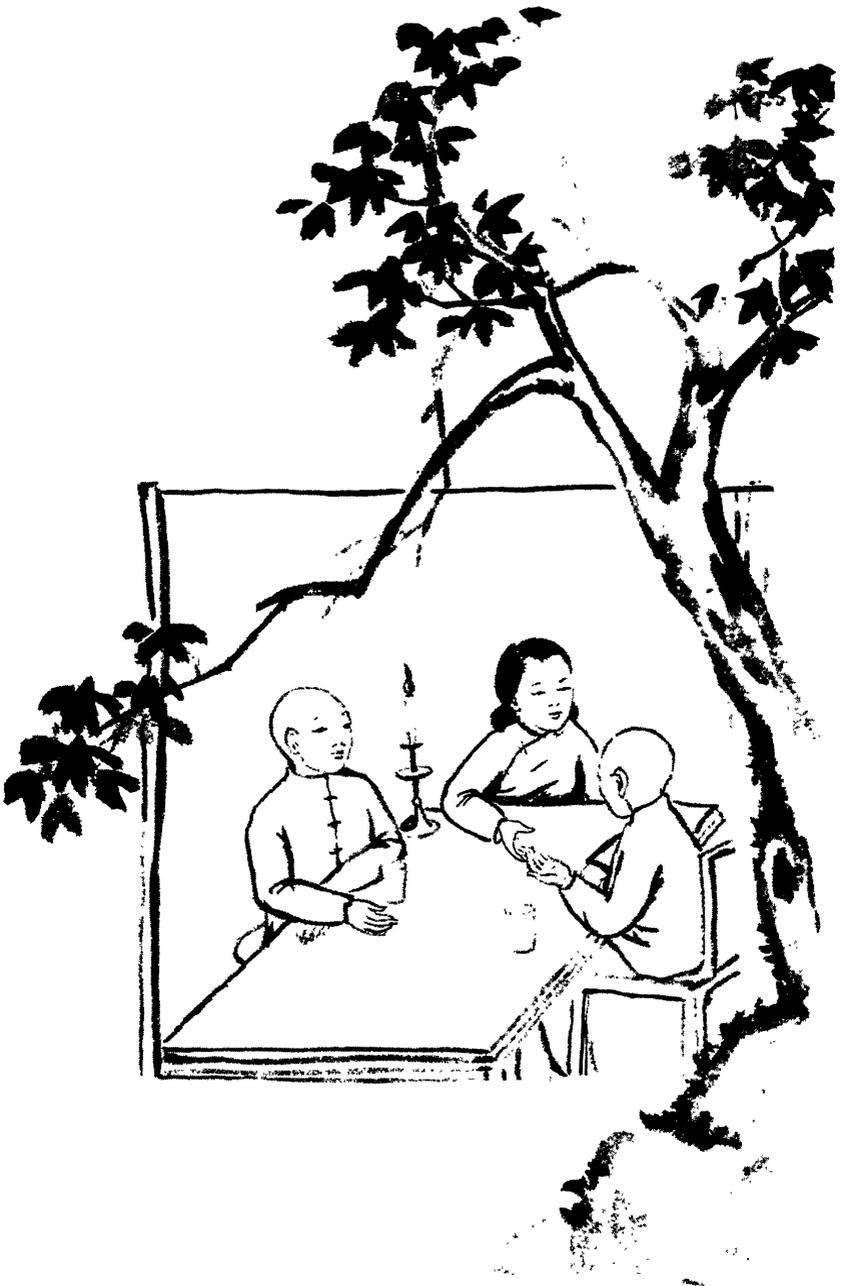
When she said this, her mother must have heard her, because she called out to her from the back room, "Yü-ying, stop that nonsense. Aren't you afraid of offending our guests? Talk about something else!"

But Mao protested, "No, no, we don't mind at all. Please speak quite frankly; just tell us everything that occurs to you. We will certainly not be angry!"

"Well, first, I must ask you both to tell me your family names," she said.

Mao replied for both of us, "Mine is Mao and my friend's is Siao."

"Oh, Mr. Mao," she cried, "your name is not good! Hung Hsiu-



ch'uan was called Ch'ang Mao. Yüan Shih-k'ai is called Mao Hou-tzu. (*Yuan* and *hou* have the same meaning: monkey.) It's really a pity that your name should also be Mao!"

Mao squirmed and asked, "What's my name got to do with my physiognomy? You look at my face and then you criticize my name!"

She answered quietly, "Your name is a very important aspect. Your physiognomy indicates that you can become a great officer, a prime minister, or a great bandit chief. With your name, you can probably become a person like Ch'ang Mao or Mao Hou-tzu. You are very audacious and have great ambition, but you have no sentiment at all! You could kill ten thousand or even a hundred thousand people without turning a single hair! But you are very patient. If you have not been killed by your enemies when you are thirty-five, you can consider yourself safe by the time you reach fifty, and you will be lucky day by day. Around fifty-five, you will be even more fortunate. You will have at least six wives, but not many children. I see that you and your family do not get along well together. You will never live in your home town, and I see that you will have no fixed home."

Mao and I both listened to her somewhat amusedly and without paying a great deal of attention to the things she said. Mao was not the least bit annoyed because we treated the whole thing as a big joke. When she had finished with Mao, he suggested, "Now, how about Mr. Siao?"

She turned to look at me and said, "Mr. Siao, your physiognomy is entirely different from your friend's. You make me think of Taoism, and somehow you have the air of a sage. You really look as if you had descended from the sky—more like a spirit than a human being! You are really very sentimental. I could well compare Mr. Mao to a cup of very strong brandy and you to a cup of pure, clear water. I see that you will travel far during your lifetime, and the farther you go. . . ."

I interrupted her to ask, "Shall I have six wives, too?"

"No," she replied, "I see that you will marry twice but that you will have only a 'half' son, because a spirit wants neither family nor son. . . ."

After she finished, she again asked us about being beggars, and we

told her frankly and honestly what we were doing and why. She was extremely interested in our ideas and she told us that if it were not for her old mother, she also would like to make a similar experiment by living like a beggar.

Next morning after breakfast, we wanted to leave, but she begged us to stay another day. When we tried to pay her for our room and board, she refused to take any of our money. When we asked, she told us her name was Miss Hu Yü-ying, and I said, "When Mr. Mao becomes Prime Minister at some future date, or a big bad bandit chief, he will write to you and invite you to become his adviser!"

She laughed loudly at my joke and replied, "But he is a person without sentiments! At that time he will have completely forgotten me; he will not even remember a bit of my shadow!"

Although I kept her address for many years, I never wrote to her. But her beautiful face, her kindness, and her refined character still remain very clear in my memory after all these years.

After we left the beautiful Yü-ying, we walked on about three hours before we saw that we were approaching Yuankiang City. We saw water everywhere around the city and this puzzled us until the owner of an inn explained that this was the *Hsi Shui*, the west water, which appeared every summer. The source of the Yangtze River is in a very mountainous country, and when the snow and ice melt in the summer, an enormous volume of water is released and flows downstream from the west. This water very quickly fills the streets of the city and after four or five days, it gets so high that all road communication with the outside world is cut off, because the land in this area is very low.

We soon realized that we could not possibly live as beggars under such conditions; so, our adventure having been brought to a sudden close by these circumstances, we decided to take a river steamer back to Changsha.