

xiaoshuo juan II [The People's Anthology, Fiction, Volume II]. Taipei: Yushan She, July 2004, pp. 136-159.

Born in Lungtan, Taoyuan County, in 1925, Chung Chao-cheng belongs to the generation of Taiwanese who grew up under the Japanese educational system; he also belongs to that first generation of writers who learned to speak Chinese after the war and threw themselves into literary creativity. His first work in Chinese was published in 1951 and, after completing his first full-length novel, *Lubinghua* [The Dull-Ice Lupine Flower] in 1960, he concentrated on that genre, becoming a pioneer novelist in the world of postwar Taiwan fiction. His major works include *Zhuoliu sanguqu* [Muddy Stream Trilogy] and *Taiwan-ren sanbuqu* [Taiwanese Trilogy].

The novel became Chung Chao-cheng's mission as a Taiwan author. His main concerns were the trauma of growing up under colonial rule and the historical ruminations on being a Taiwanese scarred by colonialism. His literary inspirations were the bitterness, humiliation, suffering, setbacks, and confusion experienced by individuals as they grow up. As a Taiwan writer who experienced a second colonization after the war, he was bound to reflect on current affairs and the suffering of the people, and as a novelist it was out of a sense of individual responsibility and self-awareness that he penned epics for the people.

He produced only eight collections of short stories, written between the 1950s and the 1980s, and they are so endlessly varied and innovative that it is difficult to apply a specific label to them. His early works, "Canzhao" [Evening Glow] and "Lunhui" [Samsara], are full of affection for the way people related to one another in the old society, and full of curiosity about the profundity and subtlety of life, with the lack of a clear sense of time and place, creating an awareness of the author's eternal hope in human relations; on the other hand, "Zhongyuan de goutu" [The Composition of the Painting of the Dead Spirits] was clearly influenced by modernist thinking. His pioneering character emerged in this work, for he was able to do what he could not easily do in his novels, which was to have the courage to embrace the challenges offered by new things and new ways of thinking. His literary mission and aspirations are evident in his novels; his artistic vision and talent emerge in his short stories. In thirty-seven volumes, *Zhong Zhaozheng quanji* [Complete Works of Chung Chao-cheng] was compiled and published by Chuang Tzu-jung and Ch'ien Hung-chün in 1999.

The Newspaper Carrier

Yang K'uei

Translated by Robert Backus

"Ah, Here's my chance!" I was being all but crushed under the weight of adversity when that thought broke from me in a wave of relief, as if someone had taken a great load off my back.

Let me explain. It had been about a month, more or less, since I had come to Tokyo. During that approximately one-month period, from early morning to late evening each day, I stood in every employment agency in the city, I marked off sections of the city from the center to the suburbs and combed the city by foot in search of employment, and yet so far had not been able to find a single establishment that would give me work. On top of that, the twenty yen I had brought with me had dwindled to six yen, twenty sen, and the ten yen I had left with my mother, who was taking care of my three siblings, would be running out now, after about a month's time.

Discouraged enough already, I was dismayed to see a news report of three million unemployed throughout the nation, when I noticed a placard behind the glass of the newsdealer's door advertising the job of newspaper carrier. I jumped for joy.

"Here it is, the first step on my road to success."

No wonder I was so happy; I had gone from hell to heaven. With pounding heart, I ran to the newsdealer's door and opened it.

"Hello . . ." I said politely, nodding my head. It was three in the afternoon, apparently just when the evening edition had come, for the room was filled with people busily whisking the consign-ment into folded newspapers. Alone, amid a crowd of workcoats and seated in a chair facing a desk, hair neatly parted and attired in a high-quality suit, was a man who passed a cigar from hand to mouth—evidently the proprietor—and snapped out a gruff "Whad-dya want?" together with a puff of smoke.

"Uh . . . your ad for a newspaper carrier. . . ." I began, pointing at the placard on the door.

"You mean you wanna try?" His voice was stern. I felt myself overborne; I could not get the words out.

"Uh . . . yessir, I'd like a chance to work."

"Okay. Go and read the rules. If you consent, come on over here." He pointed to a set of regulations on a big sheet of paper spread out on the back wall. As I read them—Article I, Article II, Article III—my eyes opened wide in surprise. Article IV required a deposit of ten yen. I could read no further; my eyes were swim-ming. The proprietor looked around after a while and saw me gaping. "Well, what about it? Do you consent?" he asked.

"Uh, yessir. I consent to every one, but I'm short about four yen for the deposit."

When the proprietor heard my answer he took some time to look me over from head to foot. "A fellow can't help but feel sorry for the way you're dressed, so I can't say no. But you gotta do something for me; work twice as hard as everyone else! Okay?"

"Yes, sir! I sure will. Thank you, sir."

I thanked him again, bowing deeply to the points of his shoes. Then I took out the five-yen bill that I had in reserve, buttoned carefully in my shirt pocket, along with one yen, twenty sen from my pants, and reverently offered them before the proprietor.

"I thank you very very much," I repeated once again. The proprietor slipped the money into a drawer.

"Come in and wait," he said. "You'll be taken care of by a man named Tanaka. Be sure you listen to what he tells you."

"Yessir." I bobbed my head respectfully and took a seat nearby. I felt happy from the bottom of my heart.

I wondered what Mr. Tanaka was like. Wouldn't it be nice, I

wondered, if he was that friendly-looking person over there in the student's uniform?

The lights were on, it was pitch-dark outside. The proprietor had locked up the desk drawers and was gone. No one was left in the deserted dealership. Evidently the proprietor's residence was else-where.

Before long someone in an employee's workcoat returned, then two others, and the whole building—which had for a while been silent—broke into a noisy tumult. I was concerned about that man Tanaka, so I grabbed one of them and asked, "Tanaka?" In-stead of responding, the man looked upstairs and shouted for Tanaka. "What is it? Who's calling?"

As he sprang down the stairs, he did not look like a very bad fel-low to me—and sure enough, he was wearing a student's uniform.

"Ah, Mr. Tanaka? I've just started here, and the proprietor told me to take instructions from you. I'm ready for work if you'll show me what to do."

When I asked him so earnestly with a polite nod of my head, he flushed crimson and looked aside.

"Oh, so you're a new man. We'll be working together." He was probably embarrassed because he had never been treated to such a polite introduction before.

"Come on upstairs," he said and clattered up the steep stair-way himself.

I followed him up. This was not an ordinary upstairs; it was a loft where you could not stand without your head hitting the roof.

I had been staying in a flophouse in Honjo. One evening a group of students on a study tour from some university went around observing the quarters where we slept, and you could hear their comments as they passed through, "What a terrible place! So many people sleeping in this small place!"

However, when it came to the upstairs of this news dealership, you had a place ten times worse than that flophouse. All the tatami floor-mats were missing covers and were worn down to the straw; you slept right on the straw. Besides that, it was as black as coal.

There were some people chatting in groups of two or three, but most were already buried in their quilts. From what I could see, the people were covered at the rate of three per quilt and lay packed tightly in successive rows starting from the opposite wall.

As I looked around the room in a daze I was surprised to hear somebody crying. It turned out to be a lad of about fourteen or fifteen, who was sniffing in a corner behind me. A man next to him seemed to be comforting him in a low voice, but I could not hear what he was saying. Since it was my first time here, I did not have the nerve to intrude on something like this; even so, I felt uneasy.

What exactly was the boy sniveling about now when I was so happy at finding a job?

So in the end I imagined that the boy was crying because he was young, and that he was probably missing a parent or somebody. And with that I was content.

While I was muddling around like this the clock struck eight and a bell started ringing. I was taken by surprise again.

"It's time to go to bed," Tanaka instructed me. "We begin early tomorrow. The paper comes between two and three so we all have to be up by then."

I noticed that the heads of the people side by side at the opposite wall had increased row by row until the room was full. Tanaka brought out a quilt, and I lay down under it with him and one other man named Satō. We were packed so tightly we could not move. This was not a case of having even a fraction of an inch in between, as when you pack ceramic ware in a box; rather, it is far more correct to call it "packed in like sushi."

In the country I was used to having plenty of room to sleep. The house in the country was poor, but I had the habit of cleaning things up all the time. Fleas were something I could not stand, you see.

But this newspaper dealership was a veritable nest of fleas. They attacked all at once over your legs, over your hip, over your thighs, over your chest; and the itching was unbearable. The flop-house in Honjo was no less a nest of fleas either, but at least we

were not packed in as tightly as this, so that I could get up from time to time and pick the fleas off.

When it came to this loft, it was packed like sushi, where you could neither scratch nor move, so all I could do was steel my nerves and bear it. Even so, when I considered that I had gotten a job at last, a thing like this . . . well, it was nothing.

I was excited by the thought that I would work twice as hard as everyone else and study twice as hard. This excitement and the flea attacks kept me awake, and the clock struck nine, then ten, and I was still unable to fall asleep.

I ran out of things to think about, so I counted heads. I counted twenty-nine people including myself. By the count I made in the daylight the next day, this room had twelve tatami mats on the floor, which gave a ratio of about two and a half people per mat.

Eventually I had to urinate. Unfortunately, I lay squeezed between Tanaka and Satō, so that I had a hard time sitting up. You see, I did not want to wake them by moving the quilt when they were both sleeping so soundly, and if I tried to slip out headfirst, the head in the next row was waiting for me about an inch away from my own.

I skewed myself to one side, raised myself on my hands, and carefully (it must have taken me five minutes) tried to work myself out. But still I bumped Satō and he turned over. Fortunately he did not wake up.

So I did get up. But it was another hard job for me to get to the stairway. Since we were no more than an inch apart at the head, there was no place for me to step; however, the men's feet took up less area than their bodies, so I had some space on the side. But since all the feet were under quilts, I had no idea whatsoever where the feet were and where the spaces were. I would grope ahead to find a place to step and then take a step forward and, in this fashion, I finally got as far as the stairway; but on the way there I stepped on somebody's feet and he jumped up in surprise.

When I came back after urinating, I experienced another big difficulty. The difficulty I had in making it back to my bed was no different from when I was going, but when I made it back there I saw that Satō, who had turned in his sleep because I had bumped

him slightly when I was getting up, had now completely occupied my space.

We had only just met and I could not tell what his disposition was like, so I hesitated to rouse him and, for a while, could do nothing but sit there and wait. Then little by little, gently enough so as not to wake him, I nudged Satō over; it took a good half hour but I finally gained enough room to squeeze my hips in, and so I immediately seated myself between the heads of the two sleeping men, stuck my feet under the quilt, and even sweating in the cold December night, I was at last able to recover my spot.

I was still wide awake when the clock struck twelve and had not slept a wink.

I awoke to someone roughly shaking my shoulder and found the room in an uproar, like a battlefield. The bell that had announced bedtime at eight o'clock the night before was clanging furiously. When it stopped, the clock downstairs struck two. I had not slept even two hours, it seemed. My head was heavy with drowsiness.

The men put the bedding away and clattered down the stairs. I followed them down, rubbing my heavy eyelids.

Downstairs some of the men had begun folding newspapers, some were wiping their faces with wet towels, and others were cleaning their teeth with their fingers. There were no washbasins, there was no tooth powder. Of course, I did not have such luxuries on hand either. I did not even have a towel, so I splashed cold water from the faucet on my face and wiped my face with my sleeve. Then I hurried up beside Tanaka, who was folding papers, and began my lesson in newspaper folding with some papers that Tanaka shared with me. The first ten or so were slow because of my inexperience, but after that I was able to fold them right along with everybody else without falling much behind.

"*Swish swish slap! Swish swish slap!*" I brightened as I picked up the rhythm of the work, and my sleepy, heavy head cleared.

The people who finished early disappeared in ones and twos as they went out to make their deliveries. Tanaka and I were third to depart.

Outside, the snow that had fallen in the last two or three days had piled up knee-deep and had not yet melted completely, so with the glow it was not very dark although the hour was still before three in the morning.

A cold wind whistled past my ears and stabbed me in the face. I had come out wearing a knit sweater over a lined kimono and three shirts (which were all the clothing I owned), and my teeth chattered in the cold. What caused me the most suffering, though, was that puddles of ice water had formed under the melting snow and the soles of my slip-on *tabi* were almost all holes because I had been walking continuously all month, so, inasmuch as I was practically walking barefoot on ice, I did indeed suffer. I had not gone many steps before my feet froze solid.

Even so, when I considered that month-long trek fruitlessly hunting for a job, or my mother who must be at her wits' end by now taking care of my three siblings, or the three million unemployed throughout the nation, my own sufferings were nothing in comparison. I whipped up my spirits, took heart, and walked. I stepped firmly, with all the strength I could muster in my legs.

Ahead of me Tanaka also stepped firmly with all the strength he had in his legs and, walking with a comical gait, each time he put a newspaper through a door he told me the customer's name.

Thus we proceeded from street to street, through lane and side street, until we had delivered all of our two hundred and fifty-odd newspapers, by which time the sky had brightened.

We hurried to get back. Our stomachs were empty and nipped us with the pangs of hunger. I had lost my six yen, twenty sen the night before, all taken by the proprietor as a deposit, and in the end got nothing to eat; also in the morning and noon of the day before, in fact for the last several days, as I looked at my money diminishing, I had become so discouraged that I had not been able to eat my fill even once.

When I thought that there would be a breakfast of rice with fragrant miso soup waiting for me on my return and that I would soon be eating my fill, my mouth watered just as if it were there served before me.

This time for sure I would eat my fill in peace. The thought

was invigorating as if I had forgotten all at once the cold of my feet, the shivering of my body, and the pangs of my stomach.

However, Tanaka did not take me toward the dealership but entered a side street a little before we got there and stopped in front of a café on the corner. I was mystified and had not the slightest idea what was going on, for I had assumed that I would be fed at the dealership. But now Tanaka had brought me to a café. On top of that, I was now penniless.

"Tanaka," I called after him as he stood with his hand outstretched ready to open the door. "Tanaka, I don't have any money. The six yen, twenty sen that I had yesterday, I handed it all over to the proprietor as a deposit."

Tanaka let his hand fall at the door and stood for a while looking at me blankly; then, as if he had made up his mind, he spoke: "Well, let's go in. I'll pay for you." He put his hand back on the door and gave it a good tug to pull it open, then motioned me to go in.

My high spirits all at once were gone . . .

When at last I expected to eat my fill in peace, this had to happen. I was unhappy.

But now that I was working like this I should be able to pay him back. So I thought it over and forced myself to cheer up, and at last I managed to cram in half a stomachful.

"Hey . . . Is that all you want? It's okay. Eat up!"

Tanaka was a kinder, more considerate man than I had expected. That is what he said to me by way of encouragement when he saw that I had put down my chopsticks without eating even half of what he had eaten in spite of the fact that I had such a large body. But I felt sorry for Tanaka and could not bring myself to eat any more. I was still hungry, but I said, "No, thank you," and looked away from him. You see, I felt sorry for him and could not bear the shame that came over me when I looked at him.

Evidently fellow workers all ate at this place. Several people had come and were eating, and others had eaten and were on the way out, and still others kept coming one after another. When I looked at them I saw a lot whom I thought I had seen before.

After Tanaka had paid the bill, I followed him out. He had eaten twelve sen worth and I eight sen. Outside, I went to thank

him again, but on noticing his demeanor (not a bit of pride in it, but restless embarrassment from a dislike of being thanked), I fell silent. He walked along in silence too.

Back at the newspaper dealership, upstairs I found that seven or eight of the early people had returned. Some were on their way to school, some were reading, and others were chatting; two or three had gotten the quilts out again and were buried under them.

When I saw people going to school I was filled with a desire to go to school myself without waiting any longer. However, I was dejected to think of what my meals would cost me until I received my wages—I doubted that I could depend on Tanaka to pay for me indefinitely. I learned that Tanaka was in school too; since he would have a lot of expenses, it was a question how much I could expect him to pay.

As I sat against the wall troubled like this and watched passers-by out the window, Tanaka, who had gotten ready for school, held out a fifty-sen coin between his fingers and said, "Hey, I'm lending you this. Keep it and get something to eat. I'd be worried if you didn't."

I could not refuse it, but I did not have the courage to put my hand out right away either. I stared at it.

"Uh, okay?" I stammered.

"It's okay. Keep it." He dropped the coin in my lap and hurriedly clattered down the stairs.

I quickly picked it up and, grasping it firmly, turned to look out the window again. I was so moved by Tanaka's sympathy that tears welled up in my eyes.

If I could manage to make a living, I had to do something to thank him.

I was thinking about things like that when I heard somebody sniffing again, and turned around in surprise. I saw that it was the boy of about fourteen or fifteen who had been crying the night before.

He had reluctantly made up a bundle and went down the stairs still sniveling as before.

He must be missing his parents or something. So I assumed as I had done the night before and turned away without further thought to look out the window. A moment later I saw him walking

down the road farther and farther, growing smaller and smaller, and looking back time and again.

Something about him made me feel sadder than I can say.

And so I followed Tanaka again for the delivery of the evening edition on this day and, starting with the morning edition the next day, I carried the papers myself and delivered them. Tanaka followed me and corrected me each time I made a mistake.

This day was extremely cold. The water on the streets had frozen into stinging ice, which hit me exceptionally hard with my bottomless *tabi*. My hands, since I could not keep them tucked in front all the time as I had done the day before, froze and hardened. It was downright misery inserting newspapers through slits in outside doors.

Even so, I managed to get the delivery done less than half an hour late.

"You've got a good head on your shoulders! All you had to do was walk the route behind me twice and you hardly made a mistake with any of the two hundred and fifty addresses."

When Tanaka praised me like that on our way back, it was enough to turn my head. I had done pretty well at that, I thought, even though I said so myself. It was only at two or three places that he had corrected me where I had gotten a bit lost going around a crossroads.

It was Sunday that day, so Tanaka's school was out. When breakfast was over, he told me he was going out to solicit new readers and invited me to come along, so I went out with him. The two of us had become good friends and we walked around talking together. I was glad to have made such a good friend as Tanaka.

I asked him about school, and then said, "I'd like to go to some school myself soon."

"You would? That's great!" he said. "We'll help each other do our best."

And so Tanaka went with even less food to pay for me at the café and to lend me the price of a new pair of *tabi*.

"So you've remembered all the places on your route, have you?" the proprietor asked me when I had returned from delivering the morning edition on my third day of work.

"Yessir! Remembered them all," I answered, full of good cheer and buoyant with a certain pride.

"Okay. Then starting today you will go out and solicit new subscribers," he ordered. "Tanaka can do the delivery for the time being. But in case anything goes wrong, you'll have to do the delivery, so don't forget the route."

Although I did feel a touch of sadness that I would not be able to walk with Tanaka, I could not expect them to consider only my own convenience, and so I was resolved to do whatever they asked of me.

"Yes sir!" I answered decisively. Anyway, I could be with Tanaka in the morning and evening. Moreover, even if they gave me delivery, it was not possible for both of us to keep walking the route, so I did not mind being put to other work. As long as I could eat and send something to my mother I was happy. Besides, in the case of soliciting new subscribers, my time was free at night, so there was no reason why I could not go to school.

Thus, starting that day I did not go out on delivery but made the rounds soliciting new readers instead. I went out at eight in the morning, stopped to eat at a café on the way at noon, and arrived back at the dealership around six in the evening. But I barely had six new subscribers signed up.

The next day it was eight, the day after that ten, and after that between seven and ten each time.

"You always have poor results," the proprietor said. Every time I returned from soliciting I had to put up with his glare as he berated me for the poor results, and ten days after I started working he told me more fiercely than ever, "Sign up around fifteen. It's no good if you can't get fifteen."

Fifteen subscriptions! That was twice what I was getting now. As it was, I was working as hard as I could with no rest. How on earth could I sign up twice as many! I began to worry.

The next day I started out before dawn. But soliciting was different from delivering; you had to meet people. So, as it turned out, it did me no good to go out so early. "Good evening . . ." I would say as I opened every door I could find until late at night like a door-to-door salesman and made my appeal, but I did not have much to show for it. Besides, on cold nights in this season, most places closed up at around nine o'clock, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Even so, it was barely eleven that I brought back this day—four less than fifteen. But anything beyond this I simply could not achieve, try as I might.

When I came back on this day all tired out, it was already ten minutes to ten by the clock. My fellow workers in delivery, who went to bed at eight, had already had a spell of sleep and the proprietor was asleep too. I waited until next morning to make my report to the proprietor.

"Eleven?" he said with a glare. "You still . . . have to make greater efforts. This is no good!"

Actually on this day I expected to be praised, yet here I stood, met with a glare, and that frightened me. I had nothing to say. How was I any better off than a slave?

There was nothing I could do but withdraw humbly with a "Yes sir, yes sir." Of course, I went straight out to solicit subscriptions again. This day was perfectly wretched. I was so sad I wanted to cry. I returned to the dealership the same as before, around ten o'clock, and had just six subscriptions. Even with eleven, I had gotten hit with a volley of "More effort, more effort." So how could I report with six? (Later I heard that in such cases fellow workers would gain time by making up ghost subscribers. But they had to pay the subscription price out of their own pockets for all the ghost subscribers they made up, so that some of them even had half their wages taken for ghost subscriptions. Of course, the proprietor had no reason to oppose ghost subscriptions.)

The next day I timidly appeared before the proprietor, and when he heard me report six subscribers, he changed color in a towering rage. With his face bright red, he pounded the desk.

"Six subscribers? Where the hell have you been loafing around? Didn't I take you in out of sympathy despite the fact that you

didn't have enough money to make the deposit? Have you forgotten that you promised you'd work twice as hard as anyone else? Go ahead and quit! Your kind are no good for anything! Get out of here!" Here I was being yelled at on the excuse that I had not made the full deposit.

I stood still and took it, as I again thought of my mother supporting three other children at home, the three million unemployed, and how I had tramped around for a month without finding a job.

"But I visited as many as five hundred houses a day from street to street without missing a single one. The ones that didn't want a subscription didn't want one, the ones that did had already bought one, and I went over the whole section you gave me with a fine-tooth comb." That is how I wanted to answer him and should have answered him, but I did not have the nerve to say all that. And, in fact, that answer would have meant unemployment. So I could only beg him: "Please let me have another chance. I'll work harder, much harder tomorrow." However, I had no idea what to work harder at. This was proved as soon as I had the results of that day's soliciting.

From then on, the number of subscriptions I secured each day was three or four, never more than six at most. This was definitely not due to any perverse laziness on my part, for in the assigned sector everyone who was going to buy a subscription was already a subscriber and the three or four subscriptions that I picked up each day mostly came only from people who had just moved in.

"Well, I sympathize with you and I've calculated what you've earned, so take it and get out. We go strictly by the rules around here, and the rule is that anyone who at anytime has been on the job less than a month doesn't get paid. Here is something special for you. So don't tell anyone, just take it and go wherever you like. I'm sorry for you, but there's nothing I can do with a guy who's as worthless as you!"

I had been on the job twenty days. The proprietor summoned me and rebuked me in that strong language. He then shoved four yen, twenty-five sen in front of me, together with an account of my earnings as recorded below, and with that he turned back to his desk as if he had forgotten my existence. I was stunned to read:

New subscriptions @ 5 sen
Total new subscriptions 85
Total earnings 4 yen, 25 sen

If I was thrown out now, what was I to do? I wondered in surprise. In particular, when I saw that "4 yen, 25 sen," I was so astonished that I could not open my mouth to utter a word. I had walked all around from about six in the morning to nine at night; I had done it for a whole twenty days, and all I had gotten for it was four yen twenty-five sen!

Considering that I had been paid, it was no use saying anything, I thought. It could not be helped. However, a mere four yen, twenty-five sen was probably a mistake.

"Couldn't this amount be a mistake?" I asked tentatively; at which the proprietor suddenly turned on me with an expression on his face full of rage.

"Whaddya mean mistake! Huh? Where's the mistake?" he pressed.

"A whole twenty days.

"What about twenty days . . . A year, ten years, it's all the same! Where's a guy who doesn't work gonna get money from anyhow, the sky?"

"But I didn't even take a rest . . ."

"What? No rest? Rather the opposite, if you ask me. No work! I could think of nothing more to say. I resigned myself.

Even this, added to the deposit I had made of six yen, twenty sen, would make ten yen, twenty-five sen; so if I returned the eight yen I borrowed from Tanaka in the last twenty days, I would still have two yen, twenty-five sen left, so there was no use quarreling about it, I thought. I had nothing more to say! I would get the deposit back and go.

"That's that. All right, let me have the deposit back, please."

He gave a scornful laugh as if he despised me for a fool.

"The deposit? Do you remember you read the regulations and agreed to every one of them, except that you said you didn't have enough for the deposit? Have you forgotten? Or have you forgotten the regulations? If you have, read them over again!"

I was taken by surprise again. At that time my whole attention

was taken up by the fact that I did not have enough for the deposit, and I did not read them to the end. What was I in for now? With my heart pounding I read the regulations over again. I skipped the first three articles and began with Article Four. It stated clearly: "Only those in continuous service for four months or more shall have their deposit returned."

My heart sank, and I felt as if angry surges of blood were rampaging through my body. As he glared at me, the proprietor still smiled sarcastically.

"What about it? Do you still say I should return the deposit? Go on, get out of here! If you keep hanging around you won't get a sen! You must know, now that you've read them, that Article Seven says: 'Anyone who has less than a month's continuous service shall not be paid.'"

My attention had been sidetracked by Article Four and I had failed to read the rest once again. When I turned to look at it, sure enough there it was, word for word just as he had recited it.

I had gotten special treatment all right!

Tears welled up in my eyes as I stumbled out of there. On the glass of the outside door I noticed the placard was posted again, provokingly plain: "Newspaper carrier wanted."

As soon as I left there I took the streetcar as far as the school Tanaka attended and told him what had happened. "I'll give you something like three yen of what I owe you now, and the rest I'll try to pay back later. Let me keep up to one yen, twenty sen for current expenses," I asked; but he declared he would not have me repay him a single sen.

"I never thought it would turn out like this for you. I don't know if you saw the boy over there—he was fourteen or fifteen—the day you came in, but he was caught by the same bait as you. He was no good at all at soliciting subscriptions, and in six days was robbed of his ten-yen deposit and left without a sen.

"A really nasty guy!" I said with a show of resolve. We had to think of some means of resistance to stop it now! After all, we were starving unemployed and were being taken hook, line, and sinker by faith in that placard with a tractive force stronger than a devil's fish line.

I parted from Tanaka, deeply impressed by his character. I

was also belatedly surprised by such a vivid demonstration of two extreme human types.

On the one hand was Tanaka, who had even cut back his own rations to pay for my meals and my new pair of *tabi* and, when he heard I was fired, pushed back the money that I tried to repay him, saying it was all right, he didn't need it; while on the other was the proprietor of a newspaper dealership with a bestial heart under human guise, who seized my money and threw it away when I was bad off enough from being unemployed, and would not scruple even at killing someone if it helped to fatten his purse.

When I thought of this brute of a man at the newspaper dealership, I became so nervous that I even thought of fleeing back home in the country. But the tickets for the train and ship would have come to as much as thirty-five yen, a huge sum that I could not possibly afford even at the cost of my head. I walked avoiding other people on the streets, until I reached Ueno Park, where I sat down on a bench, and I felt so discouraged that I fervently wept—oh how I wept!

Before long I gained a certain amount of encouragement from thinking about Tanaka, so that eventually I even felt it would be hard to part from him. As I lost myself in this reverie, I thought of my mother, whom I had left at home and who must now be enduring the assaults of hunger with her three other children clasped in her arms; and again I felt such a pang of despair, as if my living heart were being wrenched from my bosom.

At the same time I trembled as if I had just discovered that my home village had not changed significantly. It was no different from when it threatened us relentlessly like the proprietor of the newspaper dealership, tried to suck our blood, wring out our flesh, and even gnaw our bones until it knocked us down into these very depths.

Otherwise there would have been no need for me to tramp around these parts as I had been doing, and even now I would be enjoying a quiet farmer's life with my mother and siblings.

Up to my father's generation my family had been landowners, with about two *tan* [1 *tan* equals less than 1/4 acre] of paddy and five *tan* of dry fields. Accordingly we never suffered anything like hard times.

However, several years ago XX Sugar Production in my village took vigorous actions to buy up land to establish a plantation. Of course, for a while at the beginning nobody was going to respond to their offers, for the farmers valued their tilled land as highly as their own lives.

But it was something they had decided to do. The company could not be expected to back off in a cloud of indecision. And so in two or three days a notice convening an assembly of household heads was circulated through the district and neighborhood household groups to every door in the village, without exception, by the police. And on top of that was the added injunction: "Have your signature seal with you."

I was fifteen at the time and a fifth-year student in the public school. The event took place about five or six years ago, but it impressed me so deeply that I can recall distinctly what it was like even now. The village was assaulted by a deep fear.

At that time my father was head of a district household group, and in the tense atmosphere before the notice went out, grandfathers and grandmothers in his jurisdiction came to my house in continuous succession to ask nervously with teary faces and in trembling tones: "What should we do? . . ." "What's going to happen?" "What's it all about? . . ." It was such a strain at this point that three times I discovered my father secretly weeping.

In such an atmosphere, on the day after the notice circulated, the meeting opened at 1:00 p.m. at the Mazu Temple in the center of the village. A preliminary announcement had made the rounds that anybody who failed to attend would be severely punished, and so every household head was in attendance. There must have been as many as four or five hundred people. The fairly roomy temple was packed full. Since school was closed that afternoon, I hid in a corner to see what was going on; for my father's tear-stained face, which I had discovered so often, weighed on my mind more than I could bear.

A bell rang to introduce a portbellied baldpate, who mounted a table and in a pretentious manner spoke as follows:

My company has recently decided to establish a plantation for the benefit of this village on a tract north of this village.

And so we are prepared to negotiate the purchase of your land, but although we published a map a few days ago and posted a notice requiring those who possess land in that area to appear at the company office with their signature seals, so far no one has appeared. Despite the fact that we went so far as to inconvenience the raw material committee by going from house to house of the owners, it appears that everybody is participating in a "conspiracy," for not a single person has agreed to sell. While this fact is evidence of "collusion," the company does not want to interpret it as such. Therefore, we have asked you all to this meeting, and in order that everybody can come to an agreement henceforth, we have chosen to ask both the police and the village head to say a few words. And so, when the matter is settled, you are all required to affix your seal to this paper. The company is prepared to pay better than the going price.

The speaker cleared his throat to signify the end of this oration, which the teacher regularly in charge of us fifth-year students, Chen Xundao, interpreted; and he laid such particular stress on the terms "collusion" and "conspiracy" that he even startled the villagers, who were so surprised they all turned to look at each other.

The next speaker was Police Officer Bu Jingye, in charge of the village substation. He stepped up on the table with a baleful stare that swept over his audience in a single motion, and then barked:

As Mr. Yamamura has just said, the company's present plan respects the good of the village from top to bottom. We ought to give grateful thanks for this plan the company has devised. Just think! You are going to sell land to the company now . . . and at a higher price too. And the company will establish a model plantation in this village. Then this village will gradually continue to develop in the future. We can only consider it an honor that the company has chosen this village . . . Nevertheless, I hear things like some of you are up to a "conspiracy." Such "unpatriotic people" will be shown absolutely no mercy . . .

His interpreter was Parolman Lin. Like Chen Xundao he laid stress on "conspiracy," "unpatriotic people," and "be shown no

mercy," so that everybody turned to look at one another again. For in their collective memory, the sanguinary event ending in the suppression of the conspiracies of Yu Qingfeng and Lin Shaomao remained all too fresh at hand.

The village head, who, with the gentleness of advanced years, stood up last and spoke in a soothing tone.

"Anyway, as the police desire, I believe we all had better joyfully accept the company's goodwill." That was all, and then he called out people's names. At this the audience turned restless.

The ones who were called first had panic written all over their faces, fearing they were marked as ringleaders of a conspiracy, and went out trembling.

Even when they were told, "You can go home!" they stood gaping. Only at the sharp command "Go home!" did they come to their senses and run off.

I heard there were even absurdities—like when Wang Zhenyu ran home and by the time he got there had looked back a hundred and fifty times, evidently worrying that he might have misheard or that he might be summoned again.

About eighty people were called out like this and sent home. And now it was time for the people who were left behind to be surprised. My father was one of those. They stood in a cluster, shuffling with uneasiness. They stretched their necks, pricked up their ears. Would they also be called? Most fidgeted in expectation . . . Would their names be called?

Then the village head instructed: "Everybody, produce your seals. Those whose names are called now will come forward with their seals and affix them. Then they may go home." And the name he called first was my father's.

When I heard my father's name "Yang Ming," I started to worry . . . What was going to happen? I swallowed hard and stood up, involuntarily clenching my fists.

My father calmly stepped out. When he came before the village head, he declared flatly, in a tone like the stroke of a hammer on a cracked bell: "I cannot sell, therefore I have not brought my seal."

"What? Aren't you a district head? For a district head, who should be a model for all to emulate, to become the ringleader of a

conspiracy, that is outrageous!" said Officer Bu menacingly, who was standing next to Father and edged toward him.

Father stood silent.

"Take him away! Damned Chink!" With a slap to my father's face, he gave the order, and five or six men sprang from behind, where they had been assembled for some time. After the first two <dragged>¹ my father off, the others who remained retired to the back of the room.

The villagers, who had seen this, were really scared now. Many of them affixed their seals as the village head had ordered and went home without looking back. By the time everyone was gone, five men had rejected the offer with the same determination as my father, and they were all hauled off to the substation as my father had been. I heard later that as soon as I saw my father being taken away, I ran straight home and informed my mother of what had happened.

Mother fainted when she heard my report.

Fortunately, a kind neighbor ran over immediately to help, and so there was no immediate threat to her life. But she cried almost all the time and fainted all of three times during the six days until my father, thin and unrecognizable, came home.

My father, who came home six days later, had suffered extraordinary changes himself. His evenly rounded face was now contorted, with one cheek terribly swollen, his eyes protruding, and his forehead covered with bumps. His clothes had been shredded to rags. When I was changing them I saw his body and was so astonished that I shouted out loud, "Oh Dad! You look like a deer!" In fact, welts like the spots of a deer had appeared all over my father's body.

My father underwent a complete change after that: In sullen taciturnity he never opened his mouth again. He used to eat three bowls of rice a day, but now could not finish even one; and fifty days after he took to his bed, he passed away.

Around the same time, my mother took to her bed and I had

the care of my three siblings—one, three, and four years old. Was I ever stuck! It was all right, though, because an uncle and aunt would come over as soon as they could spare some time and take care of us. But if it were not for that, it seemed as if our family might well have gone completely to ruin.

Thus, the six hundred yen my father slammed on the table when he came home from the substation (according to rumor, the going price was about two thousand yen, but the company had deemed six hundred to be a good price) all but vanished with my father's illness, then my mother's illness, and finally, my father's funeral; and when my mother's condition had improved a little, we had to sell our ox and farming implements in order to eat.

By the time I had set a goal for myself and had come to Tokyo, we had sold everything—the ox, the implements, the grounds around the house—and had only a little more than seventy yen left.

"Study hard, won't you!" my mother encouraged me tearfully as she saw me off at the door—a sight I can still see as if it were before my eyes.

This wretched state did not befall my family alone.

All five of the men who were hauled to the substation with my father suffered the same fate, and the people who had affixed their seals in silence lost their plow land. The best they could do was work twelve hours a day for about forty sen on the order of three to five days a month as laborers on the sugar company's plantation. Every one of them had no choice but to eat on the money from the sale of their land; and as that money disappeared, far from the promised "development of the village" declared by the leading men of the village, the reality became the "dispersal of the village."

As I sat engrossed in such reminiscences, the sun had set, plunging the wood of Ueno into darkness, and in Yamashita the lights blinked in a lively radiance. Pierced through with the cold, I could not stay there any longer. I was hungry, for I had not eaten lunch. I stretched with a wide yawn and went down the hill, where I entered a little eatery on a back street and had a meal. With the hope of arousing some animation in my failing spirits, I stuffed myself with rice and had a couple of cups of *shōchū* liquor besides.

¹ Angle brackets enclose a lacuna in the printed Japanese text, which must reflect a corresponding gap in the source of the printed text. The missing matter is supplied by a Chinese translation evidently of a different Japanese text.

Then I headed for the flophouse in Honjo, which had served me so often in the past. The proprietor spotted me as soon as I set foot inside.

"Hey! Is that you, Taiwan? It's been a while, huh? Where've you been all this time?"

I could not tell him that I had gotten a job as a newspaper carrier, had my deposit taken, was overworked, and then fired, and so I said, "Just . . . just at a friend's."

"A friend's . . . hmm. You're pretty funny, aren't you?" he said doubtfully. "I bet you lifted a radio or something and did time as a guest of the government. Huh? *Hoo, ha, ha, ha,*" he laughed.

"A radio?" I said uncomprehendingly. "What's a radio?"

When I asked him that, the old man was amused and said jocularly, "You don't know what a radio is? *Hoo, ha, ha, ha,* Yep, country people sure are out of it." At the same time he looked quite sorry for me and said, "Okay, go on up. You sure look all tired out. Go up and get some rest."

As I was going up he said, "Well, Mr. Yang, did you do this?" and made a show of putting his hand stealthily into the front fold of his kimono. Clearly he seemed to think I had gotten into trouble with the police. Although I did not know what a radio was then, at that hand gesture I understood very well that he was asking me whether I had picked any pockets. I did not have the energy to get angry though, but my face turned red and I denied it point-blank with a touch of panic in my voice: "No sir! I wouldn't do anything like that!" The old man looked regretful as if he could not believe me even then; however, he did not seem willing to ask outright, for his face brightened immediately and he was all smiles.

In fact, I probably looked as if I had just come out of a jail cell.

I had taken off my *tabi* and had started to go up when he called, "Oh yeah! There's something I forgot. A registered letter came for you! Since I had no idea where you'd gone, I kept it . . . Wait there . . ." and with that he went further back into the house.

I wondered where a registered letter for me could have come from.

After a while the old man reappeared with a piece of registered mail in his hand. I was taken aback when I looked at it. It was from my mother!

What on earth could she be sending me a registered letter about? I could not stand the suspense.

I opened it with trembling hands, and what should appear inside but a money order for one hundred twenty yen! Once more I was surprised—so much so that I could not believe my eyes. With my heart pounding, I worked through mother's difficult handwriting word by word. I was shocked almost to the point of madness. Unconsciously I was shedding tears in front of the old man.

"Is anything wrong?" the old man stared at me with an enigmatic expression. It must have been because in all his years he had never seen anybody cry upon receiving money. I had heard what he said but could make no reply.

When I got into my sleeping place I slipped into the futon—and how I cried! The sense of the letter was pretty much as follows:

I received your letter, in which you said Tokyo was in a recession and you could not find work right away. I worry more than I can say when I think that you probably don't have the money you took with you anymore. It is like having my heart torn from my breast to think of you with no friends, hard up without being able to find work, all alone so far away. It has been this way ever since the plantation got started and there's nothing we can do about it. You must not have any thought of giving up and coming back here. I have sold the house for one hundred fifty yen, therefore I am sending you one hundred twenty yen. Make do with this and find work quickly, study hard so you will be a success, and then come home. My health can't hold out much longer, so I've kept back thirty yen because I would hate to be dependent on anyone in such a case. Alan and Atie have finally died. I hadn't wanted to let you know, but I figured you'd find out anyway, so now I've decided to tell you. Your mother prays for nothing but your success, therefore no matter what happens, don't come home until you are a success . . .

Since this is my one and only wish, take care to keep it in mind. If you come home a success, take charge of the only brother you have left, whom I have entrusted to Uncle's care, and take care of him. Make sure to take care of your health. Goodbye . . .

It read exactly like a last will and testament. I was anxious. She could be dead by now. Such thoughts stuck indelibly in my mind.

"Nonsense! How could that be?" I said aloud, tossing in bed and shaking my head as I struggled to deny the ominous thought. But there was nothing I could do.

Thus, I could not sleep a wink all night, but I never felt a thing from the fleas' assaults either.

My head was filled with thoughts of my mother.

Inasmuch as she had written me such a letter herself, things must be awfully bad. I looked at the date on it and saw that she had mailed this letter before I had begun to deliver newspapers; and so it had been more than twenty days. When I reflected that I had not received a single letter during that time—well, I started to feel more and more uneasy.

And I also reached a firm decision to go home. Once I went home, would I ever be able to come back? I could not be sure. Even so, (after seeing my mother's letter) I could not sit still.

I would clear the debt that I owed Tanaka before going home. Then I would take the opportunity to thank him for all the help he had given me, and leave him with a few parting words . . .

With these thoughts I waited eagerly for the first streetcar in the morning, and never got a moment's sleep.

As I let the cold morning air blow on my face from the streetcar window, my mind, which was numb with sleepiness and excitement, quickly came alive. This might be the last time I would see Tokyo. That thought made me forget even the proprietor of the newspaper dealership and left me with a regret I could hardly bear. Yearning for home had kept me awake all night, and now the remembrance of my mother and little brother, whom I had been wanting so much to see, was shut out by the misery of that village in its poverty and disintegration, so that I suddenly felt the desire to return home come upon me with terrific force.

It was true that these mood swings were influenced to some degree by the attraction of my close friend, Tanaka, whom I was on

my way to visit. His sympathetic, intellectual honesty with its aversion to flattery—that was the type of human being I idealized.

I got off at the tram stop, and by the time I had crossed the two side streets and reached the café where we used to eat together, he had finished his paper route and was on his way back. We met by chance.

His usual taciturn self, he was even gloomier this morning. However, there was nothing in his gloom that could strike one as disagreeable; rather it made him approachable. He was walking slowly toward me in silence, apparently deep in thought, his head slightly bent forward.

"Tanaka!"

"Hey! You're early! Where did you stay last night?"

"The flophouse in Honjo, where I stayed before."

"You did? I never managed to hear where you were going yesterday . . . You're early, aren't you?"

His "You're early!" sounded as if he were asking me whether I needed his help. So I brought up the subject right away although I could hardly mention it, for the idea of parting saddened me and I was oppressed by a growing sense of loneliness.

"The fact is when I went to the flophouse yesterday there was money waiting for me that had been sent from home . . ." As I was thus getting to the point he interrupted me.

"Money? . . . Didn't I say you could take your time? You don't have any idea when you can get a job, do you? You'd better keep it."

"No, no . . . I was sent quite a lot. Later on we can go to the post office."

This said, I was about to get to the point: "Actually I've come to thank you for everything." But it was hard to say the words, and I blushed.

"Thanks for everything?" he said with a wry smile of annoyance. "If it's the usual flattery, count me out."

"No, no! Actually, a letter came from my mother along with the money. It seems she's in very bad health, so I thought I'd take a trip home . . ."

He looked up at me and asked unhappily, "Did she tell you to come home?"

"No, no . . . She said not to come home . . . study hard and don't come home until I'm a success . . ."

"Well then, she can't be that bad off."

"No, no . . . It seems she's in a pretty bad way. Besides, there's been no news since. I'm terribly worried . . ."

"Oh! Wait a minute," he said. "There is a letter. One came yesterday after you left. It must be from home. I'll go get it for you. Wait in the café." He ran off in the direction of the newspaper dealership.

I immediately entered the café and waited. I felt somewhat better after hearing I had a letter from home. But when I thought of what it might say, I was impatient for Tanaka to come back.

The woman who ran the café irritated me with her "What can I do for you?"

Before long Tanaka came running back out of breath. Every nerve in my body was concentrated on the letter he brought. I was anxious from the moment he opened the door and I realized the letter was not in my mother's handwriting. My heart beat fast. Without waiting for him to come all the way in, I got up and hurriedly extended my hand to receive the letter. The signature was not my mother's, it was my uncle's. My face clouded over. My breast throbbed and my hand shook. It was clearly as I had expected. My mother was dead. She had died half a month ago . . . and it was by her own hand that the breath of her life had been stopped.

To my only son, on whom I rest my hopes . . .

It is too terribly painful for me to go on living, and not good for you either. My body is more than half dead already . . . My only wish is that you succeed well enough so that you can do something to benefit the villagers, who are suffering the same as we are. The misery of the villagers is unspeakable. Eight people have drowned themselves in the pond outside the village since you left for Tokyo. In the case of Uncle Atian, the whole family went together and drowned—Uncle, Aunt, and their three young ones. Therefore, when you come home, come home with the intention

of rescuing the villagers. Don't come home at all until you have confidence in yourself. I don't know what you should do except do your best to help the villagers.

I left a note for Uncle not to notify you of my death right away so that you wouldn't do anything like come straight home and waste the money because of my death. Take care of yourself.

Mother

This was my mother's last will and testament. My mother was a strong-willed woman. She was not a faultfinder who grumbled over every little thing, but where her beliefs were involved she was always firm and businesslike once she had made a decision. One example of this was that, when my elder brother was ostracized by the villagers for bullying people, she insisted on severing her relation with him and drove him out of the house. The hardship she endured after I came to Tokyo was evident beyond a doubt; but even so, she never considered depending on him—her eldest son and my elder brother—for help. Thus, in the end she lost both my younger brother and my younger sister, and her last remaining child she entrusted to Uncle before committing suicide. That was the caliber of woman she was.

From this point of view it might be said that my mother did not have what passes for feminine qualities in the world. But I understood her feelings very well. I liked them and also respected them.

As I think about it now, if there had been an opportunity for my mother to read . . . she would have distinguished herself like Grandmother Zetkin,² and even when my father had been arrested for refusing to sell his land, she would not have done anything like faint but would have taken some action. But after just now reading this testament of hers, I was very sad—so much so that the urge to go home overwhelmed me for a time.

Your mother hanged herself toward dawn on the -th day of the -th month. I intended to inform you immediately by telegram, but discovered the testament from your mothers

² Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) was a prominent Social Democratic activist and one of the founding members in 1919 of the German Communist Party.

hand and understood her feelings, and therefore postponed informing you until now, as your mother wished. In a testament addressed to me, your mother describes you as her only son worthy of her hopes. Your elder brother has turned out the way he is, and your younger brother is still too young for us to know how he will turn out.

Therefore, as your mother said, if you were aware of her death too soon and ruined your future by coming home, her death would become meaningless. I am taking good care of your younger brother, so don't worry but study hard so as not to go contrary to your mother's expectation. Any notion of returning home, get that out of your head. For your mother is no longer of this world.

Uncle

I would never see my mother's face again. She was no longer of this world. That thought helped me to definitively make up my mind: I had better work as hard as my mother wished. And I decided not to go home until I could do something to benefit the miserable village.

Thus, as I read the letter I grew excited and my heartbeat quickened. Meanwhile Tanaka was regarding me steadily, and when he saw me fold the letter and put it in my pocket, he anxiously asked, "What did it say?"

"My mother is dead."

"Has she died!" he said with a look of boundless emotion.

"When will you go home?"

"I'm not going home."

".....?"

"Because it's been half a month since she died. Besides, my mother said not to come home."

"Half a month . . . Does it take that long . . . from Taiwan?"

"No, my mother asked Uncle not to let me know immediately."

"Boy! That's some mother!" Tanaka exclaimed.

We ate while we talked, but I was so excited I could not swallow the food. I waited until Tanaka had eaten and then paid the bill. We went to the post office together, and I cashed the money order. Then, over Tanaka's objections, I returned the money I had

borrowed from him, after which I jotted down my address for him and went back alone to the flophouse in Honjo.

I was so utterly worn out that I lay down as soon as I entered the building; and stupefied though I was, I found myself wondering how I could do something to benefit the miserable villagers. But no bright idea occurred to me.

I would save money and share it with the villagers, I thought; but now that I had tried delivering newspapers, now that I had walked a fool's errand for over a month only to be still unemployed, I could not even be confident of earning my own clothing, food, and shelter, let alone putting money away. Fatigue came over me all at once, interrupting these thoughts, and before I knew what was happening, I fell asleep as if the weariness of the past two months had overcome me all at once.

From time to time the racket around me raised my consciousness to a dim awareness, like something borne from out of the depths to shallow water, but I could not open my eyes and would only drop back into deep slumber.

"Yang! Yang!"

When I heard this call, again I lay in a state of consciousness as if on the edge of shoal water; I had a vague sense of somebody calling me, but could not open I my eyes and I was sinking back into a deep sleep.

"Yang!"

This time, after another call, something shaking my foot gave me a start and I managed at last to open my eyes. But I was still not completely awake. Returning from the dim state of awareness to ordinary consciousness felt like standing amid an enveloping mist and watching it lift. When I returned to consciousness I found Tanaka sitting beside me waiting for me to awaken. I hurriedly kicked off the bedding and sat up. I gaped around the room. The old man who ran the place stood at the door smiling. When he saw me in my confusion he said, "You look like you've taken a sleeping drug, huh. How many hours do you think you've slept?"

I was embarrassed. "I guess it's evening, huh?"

"No. It's just past noon. *Ha, ha, ha*. However, the date has changed," he said, laughing.

I had gone to bed after twelve on the day before, and now it

was about 1:00 p.m., he told me. I had slept a full twenty-four hours. I even surprised myself.

When the old man went away, I turned to Tanaka. He appeared to be quite tense.

"I'm sorry," I said apologetically. "I guess you had a long wait."

"Not at all," he replied, and then continued excitedly, "Actually, I'm here because something important has happened. Another man got hooked yesterday by the same placard that brought you in. I have agonized all this time since you were kicked out, trying to think of a way to fight back; but I could think of nothing. Then the other man came in, which started me worrying, and I had him meet me secretly last night to warn him. But all he said was 'Oh, is that the way it is? A dirty trick, all right . . .' nodding his head in time with my words, and wasn't a bit surprised."

"I was peeved. 'So you've found a different job,' I shot back. 'That's fine. Because if you haven't, you're going to be in for some cruel treatment when you lose your deposit and get kicked out without a penny to your name . . .'

"But he was as calm as ever; he put out his hand and gripped mine. 'Thanks,' he said. 'But can you stay silent when you see a fellow worker being ill treated that way?'

"That irked me, and I replied, 'Look, it's only because I can't stay silent that I'm warning you now. I don't know what else I can do. I've been agonizing over this, but I don't have the slightest notion what to do.'

"He was very happy to hear this. 'What can you do? If that's the question, I know the answer. The only thing is, are you guys willing to help?'

"And so with that incentive, I pledged my cooperation. 'I expect that we twenty-eight fellow workers will be in agreement on this matter,' I told him, 'for we all hate the proprietor like poison.'

"He then told me some things I had never considered before. Here's the gist of what he said:

The best means for us to fight against a bad employer like him, he said, was solidarity. That is, we should all get together and 'strite,' (or something like that—I forget what the word

was). He says workers are treated with contempt because each one acts alone, separately. But we would deal with the proprietor together, all with a single purpose, and in case we were not heard, we'd take united action. If we did that, we could beat any of those guys hollow, no matter how bad they are.

Tanaka told it all, including the man's hopes. "Look, Yang, he wants to meet you. When I told him about you, he said, 'So are there Taiwanese who have been through that? I'd sure like to meet him. Introduce us as soon as possible.'"

How happy I was to hear of their plan to crush the diabolical brute that had sunk its teeth into us, sucked dry our life blood, and cast us away. Furthermore, when I heard that the man wanted to meet me, I was even more curious to hurry and meet him.

I thought that if he knew how to show a miserable newspaper carrier and the unemployed the means to fight back against a diabolical brute of a proprietor, he might have some advice for the people in my home village, who were subject to the ruthless conduct of the sugar company and an unjust village headman.

I was very happy when Tanaka told me that the man (Itō, I thought his name was) wanted to meet me in particular.

When I was living in my home village, I had thought that all Japanese were bad, and I detested them. But when I came here, as I saw it, it did not appear that all Japanese were bad. The proprietor of the place where I was staying was a kind man, and Tanaka was more than a brother—indeed, when I think of my present elder brother (a policeman), next of kin are out of the question; even comparing Tanaka to them would be doing Tanaka an injustice.

Thus, we see that, as there are good and bad Taiwanese, so it seems there are good and bad Japanese as well.

I immediately left the flophouse with Tanaka to go and meet Itō. We entered Asakusa Park and, as we walked all the way back, a man who had been sitting in the shade of some trees stepped straight up to me and said, "Good afternoon, Yang," as he gripped my hand firmly.

"Good afternoon," I said mechanically, but I was mystified. I had never seen the man before. But I immediately suspected from the expression on Tanaka's face, when I turned to look at him, that

it must be the Itō we had talked about. At once I was able to speak my mind freely.

"I lived in Taiwan myself for a while. Do you like Japanese?" he asked me point-blank.

I did not know what to reply. For I had not met many Japanese in Taiwan that I thought I could like, <although now I did like the proprietor of the flophouse and Tanaka. Itō himself, who posed such a question, I was able to like right from the first impression>.

After a moment's thought I replied, "In Taiwan, I thought every Japanese was bad, but Tanaka is a very nice person."

"That's right. Most Japanese workers are good people like Tanaka. They oppose the oppression and ill-treatment visited upon the Taiwanese. The ones who bring suffering to the Taiwanese—yes, these are the diabolical brutes, like that old boss of yours who seized your deposit and then sent you packing. It's mostly men of that type and these devil-brutes' henchmen that go to Taiwan. But the Taiwanese are not the only ones to suffer at the hands of these devil-brutes; our Japanese poor people suffer too (as do the workers of Japan). In short, in today's world the people who have money and oppress them in order to get what they want more easily."

Each of his words found a response in my brain. I could understand them very well. It made no difference that the head of my home village was Taiwanese; clearly he stuck with those others and brought suffering to the villagers.

I told him all about the village and what had happened there. He listened with the greatest attention, and then said, his face flushed with excitement, "Come! Let's take each other by the hand! It's the same kind of people that make you Taiwanese and us Japanese both suffer."

With Itō's help, three days after this meeting I was able to find work at a toy factory in Asakusa; and I made good use of my spare time <to work regularly with the people in the Council of Japanese Labor Unions. I got experience in supporting walkouts and participating in conferences, and even lectured at meetings on the sufferings of us Taiwanese>.

And so a strike was started several months later at the newspaper dealership that had fired me. My heart leaped when I saw

that ruddy-faced buck, the proprietor of the dealership, incline a pallid forehead before the solidarity of the carriers. I steeled myself against an urge to change that usual laugh of his into a whimper with a fist in his face. But the carriers' demands, to which he was forced to agree, were far more meaningful than simply assuaging my resentment.

Think of it!

The placard "Carrier Wanted," posted to bait the unemployed, was torn down!

Accommodation in the dormitory was fixed at an area of two tatami mats per sleeper with one quilt, a neighboring building was leased for a new dormitory, and the tatami mats were resurfaced!

The unfair rules were ripped off the wall!

Methods for exterminating the fleas were devised!

The rate for soliciting new subscribers was raised to ten sen per subscription.

What do you think of the workers now?

These last months were an education! And the way I did it was faithful to my mother's will. As I stood filled with this conviction on the deck of the liner Hōrai-maru, the sea was splendidly distended on the surface, but I was looking hard at spring in Taiwan, where a pinprick would let me see an outpouring of bloody pus stinking to high heaven.

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Yang K'uei (1906–1985), originally named Yang Gui, was born in Tainan Tamuchiang, present day Hsinhua. At the age of ten, he witnessed the pitiful Jiabonian Incident massacre of the resistance army. In 1924, after refusing to wed the girl adopted by his parents for his marriage, he withdrew from Tainan High School to sail east to Japan, embarking on studies in humanities and the arts at the night school of Nihon University. To pay for tuition and daily expenses, he worked as a newspaper carrier and a cement laborer by day. This was during the founding of the Japanese Communist Party and at the height of Marxist thought, which saw the rise of the farmer and labor movements and

proletariat literature. He wrote his first work, "Shinbun haitatsufu" [The Newspaper Carrier; Chinese, Songbaofu], under these circumstances and experiences, which, along with his upbringing, influenced his creative style throughout his life. Yang K'uei was arrested in 1927 while attending a meeting of Koreans; upon his release, he returned to Taiwan to respond to the call of the Taiwan Peasants' League Movement. He and his wife, Yeh T'ao, both assumed important roles in the Taiwan Peasants' League Movement.

In 1934 his representative work, "The Newspaper Carrier" was finally selected in its unabridged form for second place in Tokyo's *Bungaku hyōron* [Literary Review] (there was no award for first place), after having undergone censorship. Literary creation and activism thus became another movement in which he actively engaged. In 1935 he disassociated himself from the flagship publication *Taiwan bungei* [Taiwan Literature and Art] of the Taiwan Literary Arts Alliance, and created Taiwan's New Literature Society and its publication, *Taiwan shinbungaku* [New Taiwan Literature]. After the war, he actively immersed himself in the creation of New Taiwan Literature, editing *Heping ribao* [Peace Daily News] and founding the *Taiwan wenzue congkan* [Taiwan Literature Series], translating Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, and others into Japanese for publication. He is considered a key figure in the development of postwar Taiwan literature. In 1949 he was sentenced to twelve years in prison because of the Peace Promulgation Incident; this interrupted his creation of literary works and activities after the war. In addition to "The Newspaper Carrier," other important novels and works include "Gachō no yome-in" [Mother Goose Gets Married; Chinese, E-mama chujia], "Mu-i son" [Village without a Doctor; Chinese, Wú yì chūn], "Doro ningyō" [Mud Doll; Chinese, Ni wawa], "Mebayuru" [Budding; Chinese, Mengya]. The National Cultural Heritage Preservation and Research Center has published *Yang Kuei quanji* [The Complete Works of Yang K'uei] in fourteen volumes.

Stemming from what Yang K'uei has characterized as the spirit of a "humanistic socialism," coupled with the lessons and experiences of a social activist, his work embodies the essence of new Taiwanese protest literature, serving as a just and candid voice for the oppressed, the enslaved, and the exploited. Literary creations are an extension of his social activism, appropriately illustrating that his literary outlook can be realized as literary activism.

Essays