UNITED STATES ATTITUDES AND POLICIES TOWARD CHINA
THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES
Patricia Neils, editor

READING THE MODERN CHINESE SHORT STORY
Theodore Huters, editor
difference from its opposite, shifts in the relative prominence of these aspects can effect fundamental, qualitative change. According to the dialectical materialism espoused by Chinese Marxists, change is necessarily the result of internal, not external, causes; external pressure may at most serve as catalyst to accelerate or to impede change from within. Despite the existence of numerous contradictions in complex human societies—differences in education and wealth, division of mental from manual workers, great gaps in experience of the world—the primary contradiction in a time of armed struggle is that between "ourselves" and the enemy, Mao insisted. Struggle between the two sides of the political contradiction must produce a resolution before which society's other contradictions cannot be addressed effectively. To Mao, this theory served primarily as a problem-solving approach; it allowed the production of a political agenda, mechanically forcing the political struggle to the position of highest urgency and allowing all social questions to be swept aside and ignored during wartime. Its insistence that one side of a contradiction is dominant and the other must be subordinant—and that the two sides can shift in strength—underlies the guerrilla warfare strategy for which Mao is rightly famous. To facilitate solving problems, one must focus on the differences of importance among the contradictions and between the sides of the essential one, amplifying these differences for the sake of clarity and to make one's analysis more immediately convincing. While one might argue that searching for contradictions in complex human phenomena may lead to self-evident or simplistic conclusions, Mao used and endorsed this approach throughout his period of dominance, forcing interpretations of reality to fit this scheme, making it sufficiently influential to become part of the mindset of millions of his followers. Probably those who were (and are) most conversant in the dialectical materialist method of approaching problems are those who joined the Communist cause as young people during the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s.

Although she may not have self-consciously utilized Mao's version of the Marxist dialectic to structure her story, undoubtedly Ru Zhijuan was strongly influenced by it. She was born in 1925 in Shanghai, the youngest of five children and the only girl among them. During her third year her mother died, and before long her father abandoned the children to the care of various relatives. Ru was raised by her grandmother, who made match boxes and worked as a menial to support them. When the old woman died, Ru, then thirteen, was sent to an
orphanage. Her education proceeded sporadically through her childhood, at the orphanage, and later at a girls' school; finally she became a primary school teacher. Soon afterward she published her first story in a local newspaper and joined the New Fourth Army, an anti-Japanese resistance force led by the Communist Party.

In the army, Ru became a "cultural worker." She gave performances, wrote skits, poems, and songs, and served as nurse for the wounded and guard for prisoners. She even played the leading role in an early operatic version of Baimao nú (The white-haired girl, a story of a landlord's cruel exploitation of a young peasant woman). Soon after one of her patriotic songs became popular, she joined the Communist Party in 1947. She became the civilian editor of a Shanghai literary periodical after victories on the battlefield brought the establishment of the People's Republic. Her creative efforts were devoted to the short story form, to little avail until Mao Dun, as minister of culture, the senior member of the literary establishment—himself a sensitive and capable writer—noticed "Lilies." By pronouncing the story "the most satisfactory and most moving among the tens of short stories I have read recently," Mao Dun immediately catapulted Ru Zhijuan to the front rank of writers. Her story came to be widely heralded as a model for emulation, and consequently she became the leading woman author of her generation.

Yet in 1958 Ru's husband was in serious political trouble: he had been targeted during the anti-Rightist campaign subsequent to the short-lived, ostensible liberalization campaign of 1956 called the "Baihua qifang" (Hundred flowers) movement. Ru's support from on high kept her safe until 1966 when Mao Dun himself was toppled from power by Mao Zedong's leftists, and Ru was sent to redeem herself through labor for her "bourgeois thinking." 4

The story's frame presents the dominant contradiction of the time, which overwhelms its protagonists: the life-and-death struggle between Chiang Kai-shek's well-equipped Nationalist Army and the largely peasant forces led by the Chinese Communist Party. As the story begins, there is a lull in the fighting; it is a period of temporary rest for both sides. Yet the Communist army has been ordered to attack—they must seize the initiative to become the dominant aspect of that crucial contradiction. While the characters are introduced and developed, the war forms only the background, to which regular references are made; the frame reasserts its dominance when, at nightfall, the battle commences. At the beginning of the story the characters know that bloody conflict is inevitable; the tension produced by preparation for this inevitability grows through the narrated day. Once the fighting begins, toward the story's end, its impact becomes ever more intense: first the narrator hears the roar of artillery and sees the bright glare of flares, then the lightly wounded arrive, and later the most grave casualties are carried in as the battle proceeds ultimately to hand-to-hand combat. Paralleling this movement is the increase of intimacy involved in the treatment of the wounded: first the narrator and other medical aides question those wounded soldiers who are still coherent, later they give this up, merely bathing those gravely injured men covered in dirt and blood, and finally they confront the emotional devastation of seeing a familiar face among the heroic dead. This shock evokes the intense calm of transcendence of personal feelings and of integration with the common cause, heralding the ending of the story.

The story is thus framed by the dominant contradiction of the time: the political conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists. This confrontation of forces, in the context of this story as during the historical period narrated, could only be resolved by military struggle. The preparations on the part of the Red Army and its partisans, described here in minute detail, constitute the small quantitative changes that lead, by Marxist logic, inevitably to the ultimate qualitative change in political power, "by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions," as Lenin phrased it. 5 By analogy with Mao's Marxist notion of revolutionary change, the actions of these characters, minor as they may be in the entire campaign or in the civil war as a whole, are charged with generalized political significance; their steadfast refusal to be swayed, deterred, or unnerved by the enemy—their psychological and ideological victory—becomes subsumed as the successful resolution of the conflict, with the Red forces inevitably gaining final domination over the reactionaries. The structure of the story carries the fundamental contradiction of the historical period from relative rest through a period of fierce intensification to a symbolic resolution of at least a temporary nature.

Yet, the frame story serves only as the basis that imparts significance to the subordinate dialectical alternations that create the story's sentimental power. The narrator herself announces the first contradiction of secondary importance, a product of the dominant one: the contradiction between the People's Army and the narrator ("I"). Because
of the campaign against the reactionaries, there is the battle; because of the attack, even cultural workers inexperienced in war—writers included—are sent to help tend the wounded. The signalman represents, personifies, the People’s Army as he escorts the narrator to her new post, a first-aid station on the front line. Significantly, in this people’s war she as intellectual cannot keep up the pace set by this young peasant soldier. Although physically she is not his match, other, less essential, contradictions between the two characters soon surface: those of sex, age (she is older), experience with the world at large, and political sophistication.

Once “I” takes the initiative, she becomes the dominant side of these contradictions. She sits the signalman down, questions him about himself (“it was more like an interrogation”), teases him about his innocence, then retreats into her own reverie, drawing the reader away from any objective view of this character, to create with the reader a bond of sentimentiality on the basis of her subjective reflections. The primary contradiction of the story is set aside while the narrator is personalized, individualized through a monologue on her memories and speculations. The narrator retains “command” of the narrative discourse until she is delivered to the first-aid station, becoming then directly involved in the primary political contradiction. The resolution of her contradiction with the army is suggested by a growing bond of sympathy and affection extending from the narrator to the signalman, making concrete the ideal unity of intellectuals (or at least cultural workers) and the People’s Army.

The operative contradiction in this new scene at the first-aid station is that between the army’s needs and the support of the local people. The narrator and others are ordered to requisition quilts from the villagers; this scene is again personalized through the actions of the narrator and the signalman, whose assistance she enlists. Again minor (in the political sense) contradictions appear: first the signalman quails before a testy bride who refuses to give up her quilt, then the narrator likewise fails to win her cooperation. The narrator once more takes the initiative and wins the opposition over by appeal to higher authority: the political significance of this people’s war of liberation. Consequently, the bride hands over her quilt, and the signalman takes it from her despite acute embarrassment on both parts. The narrator teases the signalman to confirm her dominance (and to increase the sense of familiarity for the reader). Only then does the narrator—hence the reader—learn of the complex ideological factors involved in the confrontation. The quilt is the bride’s only dowry; it confirms the newness of her marriage and her adult status in the community. It confounds the signalman’s inexperience with women, given its sexual connotations, and it perplexes him with its intensely personal significance and value in the sexlessness and impersonality of battle. This segment of the narrative ends with the signalman released by the narrator to return to his normal duties, carrying messages in battle. Happily he shares rations with her, leaving her two cold buns; she notices the twigs stuck into his rifle barrel ostensibly as camouflage have been joined by a chrysanthemum blossom. The section thus concludes with two emblematic images of life, food and beauty (in the form of a flower), subverted by their association with cold and death.

The story’s final segment is the battle itself; its dominant contradiction overpowers all personal contradictions and values as its resolution, the outcome of the fighting, hangs in the balance. The narrator resolutely dominates the local women, cajoling, commanding, and leading them to bathe and dress wounds for the casualties as they are brought in from the front. The new bride resists most strongly, a consequence of her girlish modesty and squeamishness. And then the dying—probably already dead—body of the signalman is carried in. This young woman resolutely bathes his body and then sews up the tear in his uniform occasioned by her teasing over the quilt. The contradiction of values between “the masses” and “their army” is thus mended; personal hesitations have been overcome by the larger ideological necessity of the political struggle. The signalman had died saving a group of stretcher bearers from a grenade; his success and the personal victory won by the young woman over her traditional reserve close the story with the predictable—but unspecified—dominance of the People’s Army over the reactionary forces: the bride wraps the corpse in her bridal quilt, burying death in her only tangible symbol of chastity, of fecundity, of new life in a new world.

While the structure of the story involves the identification and resolution of contradictions that are essentially political in nature, “Lilies” is also studied with contradictory elements of less public significance. It is this use of contrastive pairs of rather more personally relevant images and emotions that enhances the story’s meaning. A few examples: the time is autumn, and yet the fields give the promise of verdant life to the narrator’s observation; the narrator is on her way into battle,
and yet she feels as if she were going to a fair. The signalman irritates her and attracts her at the same time. His rifle, a weapon of destruction, is nominally camouflaged but actually decorated by an autumn flower. Despite the location of the first-aid station in a school—a place that should be bustling with children—the place is desolate, decrepit. The peasants who ought to be “progressive” by Maoist logic are actually quite backward in their thinking. The signalman shares food (buns) with the narrator; these symbols of life are as cold and hard as death. Appropriately, the narrator rediscovers them as she views his corpse. The day narrated is of a joyous family festival, but a dreadful battle will occur; even the young woman’s groom is absent despite the family reunions normal on this Mid-Autumn Festival. The quilt is for love; it is used in war. It has intense personal value and yet it serves a public need; the quilt was intended for the privacy of the bedroom; instead it is utilized outside in public view in the first-aid station. It was meant to be shared with the new, vital husband; it enshrines a lifeless stranger instead. The battle takes place at night, a night that has effectively been transformed to day by the bright autumn moon and the enemy’s incessant aerial flares. The signalman is a virtual noncombatant; he died saving other noncombatants (stretcher bearers) from a grenade flung by an enemy soldier at the height of the conflict. If we read the flower in his rifle barrel right, he who would not kill others—who has rendered his weapon unusable—has died fighting; the bride who could only ridicule this awkward young soldier ultimately humbles herself before him in wifely servitude, washing his body, mending his clothes, wrapping him in her bedding. The bride has become more than mere physical lover to this dead signalman—she has become his comrade, to achieve total integration in the revolutionary struggle for which he has made the ultimate sacrifice.

It goes without saying that the intended readers of this story, the subscribers to the limited-circulation literary periodicals to which it was first submitted, their friends, and coworkers—in other words, relatively well educated, largely urban, primarily professional people—would have been to some degree familiar with the world view of dialectical materialism. Study of the writings of Mao, Liu Shaoqi, and major foreign Marxist thinkers would have made them conversant with the idea that change is generated by differences within a phenomenon, and with the notion of contradictions. All would have remembered with perfect clarity the resolution of the contradiction on which this story is based, the success of the Communist forces in various battles and then in the civil war that established the People’s Republic. Large numbers of them had participated in one way or another, for the rest, scores of war stories had recorded that conflict. Yet most such stories repeated standard formulas: the soldiers, workers, and peasants on “our” side are heroic; the enemy is despicable, even ugly to look at, and is doomed to failure.6 Ru Zhijuan’s short piece is remarkable for the finesse with which it circumvents these clichés to present a topic worn trite by repetition, the unity of the masses and their army, in an emotionally powerful manner.

Ru’s success lies in the story’s ability to place in the foreground the particular effects of the civil war on three individuals. She does this through implicit reference both to the historical political situation in 1946, the story’s temporal setting, and to her contemporary situation, the events of 1958 confronting her intended readers. By embedding current references in her fictional past, Ru Zhijuan engaged her original readers in a vital emotional discourse concerning the meaning of both their past and their future.

Let us examine again the story’s protagonists. In 1942 at the famous—and fateful—Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, Mao Zedong had called for characters that were easy to comprehend by the unsophisticated masses, characters that were “typical, closer to the ideal” to meet the current political needs. That proposition was discussed, debated, and always officially endorsed for the ensuing thirty-five years. Viewed in isolation, certainly the signalman fits this prescription very well. He is physically and politically pure, guileless and honest, hard working and selfless. Initially he appears slow-witted (although this characteristic fits reasonably well with urban conceptions of country people) and unheroic, a far better follower than leader. His unhesitating self-sacrifice demonstrates, however, the quiet strength, the resourcefulness, the unflinching heroism of the common man, the iron will of the masses. The signalman’s final conscious act transforms the character from comic bumpkin to ideal hero.

The signalman’s final action effects such a dramatic change in his character that the story’s other protagonists are fundamentally altered thereby. The young bride might, in isolation, be considered a potential “middle character” (zhongjian renwu) because her initial traditional thinking is transformed to wholehearted devotion to the revolutionary cause through the action of the story. The signalman’s death provokes
her to cast off all maidenly reserve, all concern for gossip about her physical intimacy with this strange man, all revulsion over the sight of blood and death. She simultaneously and openly acknowledges her indebtedness to the young man, atones for the embarrassment she caused him, and proclaims her new-found political faith: through her attentions, her skill in needlework, and her most precious material possession, symbol of conjugal harmony and fecundity, she gives everything she has to give to the young signalman and, through him, to the revolutionary cause. Her development from “typical” peasant girl to ardent patriot is at least as profound in effect as the elevation in stature of the signalman: both approach the revolutionary ideal of 1946, still inspiring in 1958. And yet other stories are replete with such characters; the success of “Lilies” hinges on its discursive format and on the narrator, the most essential—and most frequently misunderstood—character.

While Chinese critics have praised the story for its realistic bride and signalman characters, it is the narrator who is similar in essential ways to its implied reader and probably to its real readers as well. The narrator presents the story in first-person voice; the discourse assumes a “reader” who is essentially in agreement with the narrator on all political and social issues and who at least can sympathize with—if not share—her personal experience. This sentimental closeness is effected by a technique already very familiar to modern Chinese readers. Like the more famous woman writer Ding Ling (1905–1986) before her, Ru Zhijuan in “Lilies” created a first-person narrator sharing certain biographical details with the author.7 In the opening lines of the story, the narrator identifies herself as a member of the army, assigned to the cultural work corps, specifically a writer, and a woman. In every autobiographical statement Ru Zhijuan confirms these details of her own past. Given the assumption common among China’s readers that all first-person narrators (females in particular) relate the real experiences of their authors, on several occasions Ru has had to explain that her protagonists are not real individuals, that they are purely fictitious. Assuming otherwise has contributed to the general critical acceptance of the veracity of the story’s details. This habit of reading has created a sentimental closeness between reader and author exaggerated even beyond what is intrinsic to the story itself, and that has contributed greatly to the story’s perceived emotional power.

In this tale of people’s war of liberation, the narrator starts as a marginal character, distanced from the other characters by values and experience, as well as by sex and age. She interacts with the others and serves as the dominant aspect of the contradictions she forms with them. But ultimately she is merely the external catalyst that hastens change; the real changes in the story occur among and within the “masses.” That is, the masses and their army win the battle (presumably); the signalman saves his fellows in response to his own devotion to the common cause; the bride’s inherent faith in and love for the People’s Army are awakened by his death. The narrator has delivered speeches on political morality to both (reported but not recorded in the story), thus contributing to the maturation of their “correct” values. But ultimately her function as mediator between masses and army is obviated by their unity in the fateful struggle. The narrator’s initial role in the essential events of the story is thus rendered marginal to the behavioral models the other protagonists become.

The sentimentality of the narrator is effected by the particularity of the discourse: it is individual and subjective. From the story’s first page, all narrated events are mediated by the narrator’s emotional response to them. Not only is the discourse shaped negatively by failure to mention certain facts in order to foreground others; each image is ascribed specific significance. Fact: during the military campaign along the coast, even cultural workers (including writers), normally noncombatant members of the army, were enlisted to help. Interpretation: “probably all because I was a woman,” the narrator is sent to a first-aid station. Concerning the signalman, the reader is told directly about his broad shoulders, although it is through the narrator’s probing that we learn about his marital status. The reader is informed about the signalman’s background largely through the narrator’s daydreams, combinations of her own childhood memories and her current speculations about him, which may or may not be accurate about the character himself. And yet such details simultaneously affirm the signalman’s “typicality” and make the narrator’s feelings clearer and more familiar to the reader. Later the narrator relates what she heard and thinks about the bride’s motivations. In these and in many other instances throughout the story, the narrator’s rationalizations and emotional responses are presented in discursive form to the reader; paradoxically, they serve as a barrier between the reader and the “real” world of the action. The distancing serves to indicate the ideological isolation of the intellectual narrator—despite her rural background—from the masses she
is to join, to work with, to serve as a conscientious Communist leader. The level of unity she achieves with her comrades is purely subjective: she shares experience with the signalman in reverie; memories of childhood put her in emotional contact with the women who give her mooncakes to celebrate the Autumn Moon Festival on the day of the battle.

Embedded in this detail is another figurative distancing, another significant paradox: the Mid-Autumn Festival is a time for family reunions, for young people to nurture romantic feelings, for aesthetic appreciation of the brightness of the harvest moon—itself a symbol of completeness, of closure in human affairs. Yet in each of these senses, the moon appears ironically: no family described here is complete, the bride cannot be together with her new mate, and death prevents her from developing even platonic tender feelings for the signalman; the campaign is not over, in fact the moon's light makes the Communist forces all the more visible—and vulnerable. Finally, and most essentially, while the full moon may symbolize a unity between the masses and their army, it decidedly does not predict a unity of intellectuals and masses. The narrator stands separate even at the end of the tale, isolated, observing, marginal, her act of mediation providing the "objective" perspective that creates, for Chinese readers, the story's remarkable verisimilitude.

Now, to return to the particular significance of the story for its original readers. The "lilies" on the bride's quilt are "hundred harmonies flowers," baie hua. Without the "harmony," the title suggests the "Hundred Flowers" campaign of 1957–58, the political movement ostensibly begun in the spirit of openness to solicit new ideas from intellectuals on how to solve the state's economic and social problems. By the time this story was written, however, in March 1958, it had turned into an antiregime witch hunt that sent scores of intellectuals to factories, to the countryside, to labor camps to work—as it turned out—for the twenty years remaining of Maoist rule in order that they might "reform themselves through labor." As she wrote, Ru Zhijuan's husband was in deep political trouble. At that time her days were spent earring a living, caring for her children, endeavoring ignominiously and unsuccessfully to help her husband. Her nights were her only occasions for mental escape, retreat into the vivid memories of her relatively glorious wartime experiences, of people she met, and of the brief, intense relationships those meetings produced. Unlike the narrator in this story, Ru was a city girl working among China's farmers. This story was a product of her memories of the past and her current concerns, "and yet [the story] has no direct relation to my worries," Ru once commented.8 This disclaimer was made in 1980, a safe remove in time and political climate from 1958 when intellectuals like herself were under suspicion for harboring backward ideas, a time when they desperately needed recognition for their positive role in the revolution, in victory, for their success in working with China's working people even if never able "to become one with the masses" as Mao had enjoined intellectuals to do. The bride overcomes the barriers of sex, age, tradition; in the final lines of its discourse the marginalized "Lilies" narrator also disappears by giving up her personalized, subjective perspective for direct, "objective" narrative. By ceasing to mediate the heroic/tragic events of the battle, by submerging her subjectivity, the story's intellectual narrator may have provided the politically similarly marginal readers with the hope for escape from their state of enforced otherness to a new political level, to a new time of acceptance, unity, and harmony with China's masses. At the story's appearance in 1958, the emotional power of such a message among real intellectuals could hardly be overestimated. Ru Zhijuan's 1980 comment is unconvincing; consciously or unconsciously, she crafted a story that confirms the political understanding of the implied (and intended) reader and rewards that understanding with the victory of personal integration in united political action with China's masses. The joy, the harmony, the life implicit in the "lilies" of its title project meaning that extends well beyond the story's surface narrative; its technique suggests that this sense of integration may be generalizable to China's intellectuals as well.

Notes

1. A major source for critical readings of Ru Zhijuan's stories as well as biographical and bibliographical detail is Sun Luxi and Wang Fengbo, eds., Ru Zhijuan yanjiu zhuanshi (A collection of studies on Ru Zhijuan) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin, 1982). The most influential reading of "Lilies," the encouragement that gave Ru a great sendoff on a glorious writing career, was by Mao Dun, in "Tan zuojinde dui pian jiaoxue" (Discussing recent short stories), Renmin wenxue 1958:6; reprinted in Sun and Wang, Ru Zhijuan, pp. 247–51. See also Gong Zhong, Xu Runrun, and Wang Yisheng, eds., Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi xinbian (New edition of an outline history of contemporary Chinese literature) (Shanghai: Zhongwenke, 1980; a limited circulation textbook), p. 77; Gong Zhong, Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi xinbian (New edition of an outline history of contemporary Chinese literature) (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu, 1985), pp. 255–58; Ma Fengzao, "Suzuo renwu xingxiang yao xunqiuxian" (In portraying
7

THE FUNCTION OF INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCE IN ZHU XINING’S “DAYBREAK”

Cyril Birch

It is a truism that a literary text, any text, is generated from earlier texts. In illustration of this principle, Robert Scholes cites a poem by W. S. Merwin:

Elegy
Who would I show it to

As Scholes says, this is “one of the shortest poetic texts in the English language,” yet it exerts a powerful effect on the reader provided the latter is properly equipped. Without title the poem would of course be meaningless. Via the title, the poet prescribes the qualifications the reader needs: a knowledge of the generic tradition of the elegy, a recollection however vague of “Lycidas,” “Adonais,” and other monuments, to reveal the immensity of the awful gap that Merwin’s self-doubt opens up. “Now you are dead” (or “should you die”) “who would be left to share my grief, and what would be the point of my setting it down on paper?” Read against the background of traditional eloquence in the expression of bereavement, Merwin’s “Elegy” develops a great power of irony.

An important part of the modernity of Chinese writers in this century has been the precise nature—often, but not always, ironic—of the dialogue they have conducted with older texts, the texts of the tradition. This dialogue emerges most clearly in certain works that draw material from traditional sources, which have, in other words, particularly strong intertextual references. One thinks of works like Guo Moruo’s historical plays, as early as Zhuo Wenjun (1923), which borrows a positive romantic symbol from an old tradition in order to promote the new message of feminine emancipation. Or there are more
LILIES

Ru Zhijuan

THE DAY of the Mid-Autumn Festival, 1946.

This was the date set for our troops to stage a night offensive on the coast. On orders from the regimental commander, several of us comrades in the writer’s section of the cultural work corps were sent to various regiments engaged in combat to lend a hand. The commander scratched his head over me for half a day—probably all because I was a woman—before he finally called in a signal corpsman to see me to a first-aid station at the front.

If it has to be a first-aid station, then it’ll be a first-aid station—just as long as they don’t lock me up in some strongbox! I threw my knapsack on my back and set out with the signalman.

There had been a light rain that morning. Even though it had cleared up now, the road was still very slick. The tall crops in the fields along both sides of the road had been washed by the rain to an emerald hue, a wet green with the glow of pearls and the sparkle of gems. The air was filled with their fresh, moist fragrance. If it weren’t for the chilling intermittent artillery fire from the enemy blasting away blindly, I really could have thought we were on our way to a fair!

The signalman took off with long strides and went straight on ahead of me. From the beginning he made a point of keeping ten yards or more between us. My feet were killing me, and with the road being slippery I couldn’t catch up with him no matter how hard I tried. I thought of asking him to wait for me, but I was afraid that he’d laugh at me for being timid and scared; yet if I didn’t get him to slow up I really was afraid that I’d never locate that first-aid station by myself. I began to get mad at him. Well, strange to tell, it seemed like he had eyes in the back of his head—all by himself he stopped at the side of the road. But he kept on looking ahead and never even glanced at me. He waited until I had just about trudged up to him and then he galloped off ahead alone. In a flash he’d left me ten or more yards behind again. Since I surely didn’t have the strength to catch up with him, I had to be content to struggle along slowly in the rear by myself. It did help that he didn’t let me get too far behind, even though he wouldn’t let me get any closer; he maintained those few yards of distance between us. If I walked fast, he’d leap forward with great strides; if I walked slowly, he’d dally along ahead of me. Funny thing was, even though I’d never seen him turn around to look at me, I couldn’t help getting interested in this signalman myself.

I hadn’t paid any attention to him at regimental headquarters and now, from the back, all I could see was that he was tall and thin, not husky at all, but to judge from his strong solid shoulders, he was a sturdy kid. He wore a brown uniform well faded from washing and leggings wrapped up over his knees. He had a couple of sparse twigs stuck into his gun barrel—you could call it camouflage, but it looked a lot more like decoration.

I still hadn’t caught up to him and already my feet had swelled up and hurt like they were being burned. I suggested to him that we should rest a while and then sat myself down on a rock that marked a field boundary. He sat down on another rock some distance away, laid the rifle across his legs, with his back turned to me just as if I wasn’t even there. To judge from past experience, I knew that this was also just because I was a woman. Whenever women comrades serve with the troops, they always have problems like this. Irritated and ready to put up some resistance, I walked over and sat down facing him. Now I could see his round face, young and innocent. He couldn’t have been more than eighteen. Seeing me sit down this close, he immediately began to fidget, just like there was a time bomb buried beside him. He was so ill at ease that to turn his face away would have been wrong, but it wouldn’t do not to turn away. He wanted to stand up but he was too embarrassed for that, too. Even though it nearly killed me to keep from laughing, I offhandedly asked him where he was from. He didn’t say a word, his face flushing as red as a Great Lord Guan on an altar. He mumbled for a while, and then he said that he was from Mount Tianmu. ¹ So he was from the same area that I was!

¹ A new Fourth Army Base.
"What'd you do for a living when you were at home?"
"Hauled bamboo for people."

A long look at those broad shoulders of his brought before my eyes a vision of a sea of bamboo like a green mist and in the middle of that sea a narrow stone path, twisting and turning up the mountain. A kid with broad shoulders, using pieces of old blue cloth for padding, was carrying several stalks of green bamboo, their long tips dragging along behind him, scraping the stone steps, as he climbed. . . . This was the life at home that I knew so well! All at once I felt so much closer to this boy from my home area. I questioned him again:

"How old are you?"
"Nineteen."

"How long since you joined the revolution?"
"A year."

"How'd you come to join?" By this time I'd begun to feel that this was no conversation; it was more like an interrogation. But I still couldn't keep myself from asking.

"When the main army withdrew north I went with them."

"Any of your family still at home?"
"Ma, dad, little brother, little sister, and an aunt who lives with us."

"You aren't married yet, are you?"

"..." He blushed furiously, becoming even more embarrassed; with the fingers of both hands he kept counting the holes in the leather belt around his waist. After a little while he lowered his head, gave a shy smile and shook his head. I also wanted to ask him whether he was engaged, but when I saw the state he was in I could only swallow the words in my mouth.

The two of us sat there at a loss for something to do for a little longer before he raised his head and began looking up at the sky. Then he turned and gave me a glance as if he wanted me to get moving.

As I stood up to leave I noticed him take off his hat on the sly and mop his head with a towel. This must have been my fault—the guy hadn't sweated a drop on the road and here he was scared into a head full of sweat just because I was talking to him. I was to blame for all of it.

It was already two o'clock in the afternoon when we got to the first-aid station, only a mile from the front. It had been set up in an elementary school, six rooms of varying sizes arranged more or less in a triangle. The open-air space in the middle was covered with weeds.

Obviously there had been no classes at the school for some time. By the time we arrived there were already several medics in the station getting gauze and cotton balls ready; everywhere there were doors held up by piles of bricks to serve as cots for the wounded.

Not long after we got there a local cadre came, his eyes bloodshot from fatigue; he had a stiff piece of paper stuck in the front of his battered felt cap pulled low over his eyes to shield them from the sun. He arrived huffing and puffing, his rifle slung over one shoulder and a steelyard hanging over the other; in his left hand he clutched a basket of eggs and in his right he carried a big cooking wok which clattered as he walked along. He put everything down and apologized to us, complaining at the same time, panting and gulping down water all the while. On top of all this, he also fished a rice cake out of his tunic and began to munch on it. I saw him do all these things at great speed, but I didn't catch everything he said. He appeared to be saying something about quilts and that he wanted us to go borrow some. So I asked the medics about it. It turned out that we had to borrow them from the masses because the regiment headquarters hadn't sent any blankets down yet, but after they've lost blood, wounded men get cold very easily. Even if all we could get were a dozen or two wadded cotton quilt linings, that'd still be all right. I had just then been worrying that there'd be nothing for me to do, so I volunteered to undertake this mission. But since I was afraid I wouldn't finish in time, I went ahead and asked that guy from my home area if he'd help me by making requisitions from a few houses before he left. He hesitated for a minute and then came along with me.

First we went to a nearby village. Once there, we split up to requisition separately; he went one way and I went the other. Before long I had written out three receipts and had borrowed two linings and a quilt. My arms were full and I couldn't have been happier about it. I was just about to take them to the station and come back for more when I saw the signalman walking back toward me, empty-handed.

"What's up—didn't you borrow any?" It seemed to me that because of the high level of understanding among the masses here and their political awareness, it was hard to imagine that he couldn't borrow some quilts. I was amazed, and I asked him about it.

"You go borrow them, lady comrade! . . . These masses are dyed-in-the-wool 'feudal'! . . ."

"Which house? I'll go with you." I figured that it must surely be
because he didn’t say it right that he blew his chance. It didn’t matter so much if he didn’t get a quilt, but if he made a bad impression on the masses, that was something serious. When I told him to take me there to see about it, he stubbornly hung his head; just like he was nailed down he refused to take a step. I went up close to him and in a low voice I told him all about making a bad impression on the masses. He heard me out, and then he cheerfully took me along.

There wasn’t a sound from the main room of the old house when we stepped into the courtyard. A blue cotton door curtain with a red valance hung down over one door and a congratulatory couplet written on fresh sheets of red paper was pasted up on both sides of the door frame. All we could do was stand outside and call “Sister, sister-in-law,” I called a couple of times without any answer, but there was some movement inside. After a little while the door curtain raised and there stood a young bride. She was very pretty, with a straight nose, curving eyebrows, and fluffy bangs on her forehead. Her clothes were made of homespun cotton, but every piece was brand new. As soon as I saw that her hair was wound tightly up into a married woman’s bun, I apologized as politely as I could, explaining how the thought of her couldn’t take offense at this comrade who just now came by because he doesn’t speak very well, so on. All the while she was listening, she kept turning her face back inside and grinning, biting her lip. I finished talking, but she still didn’t make a sound. She kept her head down and bit her lip just as if she were so full of grins that she couldn’t hold them all in. I was caught at a loss by this turn of events—what more could I say? I could see the signalman standing off to one side not blinking his eyes as he watched me—just as if he were watching the regiment commander demonstrate some drill. All I could do was thicken my skin and get right down to the matter of borrowing a quilt. So I said my piece about how the troops of the Communist Party were fighting on behalf of the masses. This time she didn’t grin, but kept glancing back into the house as she listened. When I got done she looked at me, then looked at the signalman, as if she were weighing carefully what I had just said. After a long time she turned and went inside to get the quilt.

The signalman took this opportunity to say to me in no uncertain terms: “That’s what I was just telling her, but she wouldn’t lend it to me. Don’t you think it’s funny...?” I flashed him a glare so that he wouldn’t say any more, but I was too late. The young bride was already standing there in the doorway with the quilt in her arms. From the minute she brought it out it was perfectly clear to me just why she’d been reluctant to lend it. It was none other than a fancy quilt with both new lining and new cover; its brocaded cover was made of synthetic satin covered with white “hundred harmonies” lily blossoms on a maroon background. She offered the quilt directly to me as if deliberately trying to aggravate the signalman, saying, “Here, take it.”

Since my arms were already piled full of quilts I motioned to him to take it from her. Who’d have thought that he’d turn his head and pretend he hadn’t seen it? All I could do was tell him to do it directly. At this, he finally made a face, and with his eyes on the ground went up, got the quilt and, flustered, spun around and left. Unexpectedly, before he got even one step out the gate, there was the sound of a loud “rip.” His uniform had caught on the gate hook and a flap of cloth now hung from his shoulder, leaving a considerable hole. With a big grin the bride hurried after needle and thread to sew it up for him, but the signalman was in no way going to let her do it, and he left with the quilt under his arm.

Not far outside her gate somebody told us that the young woman we had been talking to was a bride of only three days and that the quilt was her only dowry. I was sorry to hear this; the signalman, too, frowned and was silent, just looking at the quilt in his hands. I thought that he must be feeling the same way, having heard this tale. That’s why he began to mutter to me as we walked along.

“We just didn’t understand how things were. It’s just not right that we should borrow somebody’s wedding quilt...” I couldn’t resist teasing him a little so I pretended to be serious and said to him,

“Right. Probably when she was still a girl she got up early and worked late doing extra odd jobs just to save up enough money for this quilt; maybe it is something she lost a lot of sleep over, this brocade quilt. And yet some people have to go and complain that she’s ‘feudal.’...”

He stopped dead in his tracks when he heard this. He stood there struck dumb for a while, and then he said,

“Well... then I’ll take it back to her!”

“We just now borrowed it from her; if we take it back she’ll wonder why.” Seeing how sincere and awkward he was, I wanted to laugh, but I really liked him for it. I couldn’t tell why, but I had come to love this simple young fellow-countryman of mine from the bottom of my heart.

He listened to what I said, and it seemed to make sense to him. He
thought it over a while; then as if coming to a decision he said,

“Well, that’s that. If we use it we’ll give it a good wash.” His mind made up, he grabbed up all the quilts that I was carrying, piled them up one after another on his shoulders and took off with great strides.

After we got back to the first-aid station, I told him he could go back to regiment headquarters. His spirits immediately cheered up; he gave me a salute and ran off. But he thought of something before he’d taken many steps. He fished around in his satchel and came up with two plain steamed buns. He held them up to me and then reached out and put them on a rock beside the road.

“There’s dinner for you!” he said and then he left, his feet not even touching the ground. As I walked over to pick up those dry, hard buns, I noticed that he’d stuck a wild chrysanthemum in the barrel of his gun; I don’t know when. Along with the twigs it wagged back and forth beside his ear.

Even though he was some distance away, I could still see the flap of cloth hanging down from his shoulder, fluttering in the breeze. I really regretted not having sewn it up for him before he left; now at the very least he’d have a bare shoulder all night long.

There weren’t many people available to work at the first-aid station. The local cadre had mobilized a few women to help us boil water, cook, and do other odds and ends. The new bride had come with them, and she was just like before: her lips clamped together in a steady grin. She’d glance at me out of the corner of her eye, but from time to time she craned her neck this way and that just as if she were looking for something. Finally, she asked me, “Where’d that young comrade go?” I told her that he was not assigned here and that now he’d gone off to the front. She smiled with embarrassment and said, “I guess I was kind of hard on him when he tried to borrow the quilt just now.” Having said that, she clamped her lips tight and grinned again, but she got to work neatly spreading the dozen or so quilts and wadded cotton liners we’d borrowed over the doors and tables (two of the little school tables pushed together made up a cot). I watched her spread her own new quilt with the white lily blossoms over a door set up as a cot outside under the eaves.

After it got dark, a big full moon rolled up over the horizon. Our general offensive hadn’t started yet. Since the enemy were always afraid of the night, they had set big bonfires on the ground and were firing their artillery blindly, shooting up flares one after the other. It was as if they had lighted any number of gas lanterns there in the moonlight to make everything on the ground naked and exposed. It would be even harder for our attack in this “daylight night”—we’d have to pay a big price! I even came to detest that beautiful bright moon.

The local cadre came back again with a reward of several homemade dried vegetable moon cakes for us. Sure enough, today was the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Ah, the Mid-Autumn Festival! In my home area, every family would be setting out a tea table in front of their gate by now, with an offering of incense, candles, and several plates of melon, fruit, and moon cakes on it. The children would be anxiously hoping that the incense would burn down fast so that they could all the sooner divide up the things that had been offered to the moon goddess. They would be jumping around beside the tea table, singing:

When the moon is at its peak,
Beat the gong for sweets to eat...

Or they might be singing:

Dear Lady in the moon
Takes a shine to you, a shine to me...

Thinking of this made me remember that young fellow from my home area, the kid that hauled bamboo. Maybe a few years ago he had sung this song, too! ... I took a bite of that wonderful home-made moon cake and thought about how that home-town kid was probably right now lying on his belly in our defense works, or maybe in the regimental command post, or he might even be in those twisting, turning communications trenches! ...

After a while our artillery opened up and the sky was sliced across by several red signal flares. The attack had begun. Before long the wounded began to be brought in a few at a time and the air in the first-aid station began to get tense.

I took a notebook and went to register their names and units. I’d ask the ones with minor wounds, but for the seriously wounded I’d have to pull open their I.D. or check the insignia on their uniforms. When I pulled out the I.D. of one badly wounded soldier, the words “Signal Corpsman” gave me an unexpected shudder and my heart leaped. Only when I calmed down did I see the name of a certain battalion written on his I.D. Ah! No, my home-town boy was a signalman from
regimental headquarters. But for no clear reason, I wanted to ask somebody whether casualties ever get overlooked on the battlefield. Besides carrying messages in battle, what does a signalman do? I didn’t know why I wanted to ask such irrelevant questions.

For half an hour or so after the battle started, everything went smoothly. The wounded men gave us bits of news, all about how we’d broken through the first line of barricades and the second line of barbed wire, had occupied the enemy’s front line fortifications, and now were fighting in the streets. But by this time the news stopped coming, and the wounded who came in later wouldn’t say more than simply, “We’re still fighting,” or “We’re fighting in the streets and alleys.” From the mud all over them, from the look of total weariness on their faces, and from the stretchers that seemed to have been dug up out of the mud, we all knew perfectly well just what kind of a battle was going on in front of us.

There weren’t enough stretchers; quite a few of the severely wounded who couldn’t just then be sent to a hospital in the rear were left here. I had no way to relieve any of their suffering; all I could do was get the women to wipe their faces and wash their hands, feed the ones who could eat a little, and change clothes on the ones who had a clean uniform in their knapsacks. For some all we could do was open their clothing and wash off some of the filth and blood on them.

Needless to say, this kind of work was nothing to me, but the village women were both embarrassed and afraid. They just couldn’t do it. They’d race each other to tend the stove, especially that new bride. I had to speak to her about it for a long time before she agreed to help, blushing. But all she’d consent to do was serve as my aide.

The roar of the artillery in front of us had already died down. It felt like it was nearly daylight, but in fact it was only midnight. Outside the moon was very bright, even higher in the sky than usual. Out in front a seriously wounded soldier had been brought in. All of the cots inside were full, so I had them lay this casualty down on the door outside under the eaves. The stretcher bearers lifted him onto the door, but they stayed crowded around the cot, not wanting to leave. One of the older stretcher bearers must have taken me for a doctor; he grabbed hold of my arm and said, “Doc, no matter what, you’ve got to think of some way to save this comrade! If you save him, I’ll . . . all of us stretcher bearers will give you an inscribed banner! . . .” As he spoke, I discovered that several of the other stretcher bearers were staring at me with wide eyes just as if I could heal the wounded man with a nod of my head. I wanted to explain it to them but just then I noticed the new bride standing beside the cot with a pan of water in her hands. She gasped. I quickly pushed my way through to have a look. I saw there a round face, young and innocent; the skin that had been tanned a dark brown now had turned an ashen gray. His eyes were closed peacefully, and at the shoulder of his uniform was a large hole, a flap of cloth still hanging from it.

“He did it all for us . . . ,” the stretcher bearers said, trying to take the blame. “There were ten or so of us crowded into a little alley just getting ready to move forward. This comrade was walking along behind us. Who’d have thought that some bastard reactionary would lob a grenade down on us from a roof somewhere? The grenade was rolling around in between us spitting smoke, and just then this comrade yelled to us to get down fast, and he threw himself on the thing. . . .”

The new bride gasped again. Forcing back my tears, I said a few words to the stretcher bearers and sent them away. When I turned around, I saw that the young woman had quietly moved an oil lamp over and had opened up his uniform. Her shyness and embarrassment of just now had totally disappeared; she was solemnly and reverently washing him clean. That tall, young signalman just lay there not making a sound. . . . With a jerk, I came back to my senses; I jumped up, and clattered off as fast as I could go to find the doctor. When the doctor and I got back with a hypodermic and medicines, the new bride was sitting there by his side leaning over him.

She had her head down and stitch by stitch was mending the hole in the shoulder of his uniform. The doctor listened for the signalman’s heartbeat, then quietly stood up and said, “There is no need to sew it up.” I went over and touched him; sure enough, his hand was as cold as ice. The young woman seemed to see nothing, to hear nothing of any of this; she just kept on making fine, tight stitches, mending the hole. I really couldn’t bear to watch her, and I whispered to her, “Don’t sew any more.” She gave me a peculiar glance, then put her head down again and went on stitching. I wanted to pull her away; I wanted to push away this oppressive atmosphere; I wanted to see him sit up, see him grin his embarrassed grin. But I unintentionally bumped into something beside me, and when I felt it with my hand, it was the food he had given me, those two hard, dry, steamed buns. . . .

The medic had people bring over a coffin, and they began to fold up the quilt that had been over him before putting him in it. The young
bride turned pale and snatched the quilt away from them, glaring at them fiercely. Quickly, she spread half of the quilt evenly and smoothly in the bottom of the coffin and then drew the other half over him. The medic was at a loss and said, **"That quilt . . . was borrowed from the masses."**

**"It's mine—"** she yelled, her voice full of anger, and she wrenched her face away. In the moonlight I could see her eyes glisten; I could also see the quilt, its white lilies on a maroon background, those flowers that symbolize purity and devotion, now laid over the face of this ordinary young man who had hauled bamboo.

**DAYBREAK**

*Zhu Xining*

"YOU'RE in luck, Young Three," Black Eight said to me. "There's going to be a big court trial the first day you're on the job. Good chance to learn."

"Surely, Squire Eight. I'm all green, and you must teach me."

"Don't mention it. It's just so-so being in the service of the Yamen. Once green, twice weaned." Pulling his pipe out of his hairy lips, Black Eight tapped it against the paddle-like cane resting against my chest. "As soon as you learn how to use this gadget, you'll have found your meal-ticket for a lifetime."

The way he acted and spoke showed he was a born mentor of the young.

"Have patience with me and I'll obey your instructions, sir." Fawning words, and I had been using them over and over again. I smoothed the skirt of my uniform. I was at a loss where to put my hands, as though piling up all that flattery had turned me into an imbecile.

The main hall blazed with light like a shrine where some secret rite was going to be performed. My fellow bailiffs must have been all present in the two galleries. It was really cold. The uniforms bulged over the fur-lined and cotton-padded coats underneath, still the wearers stamped and stamped trying to get some warmth. A passer-by might think they were engaged in some strange drill. Perhaps not even three comforters wrapped tightly around could protect one against the bone-piercing wind coming out of the long, funnel-like corridors. There was nothing to be envied about a man out in such rawness, and Black Eight said it was a meal-ticket for a lifetime!

Dad had spent five stone of wheat to get me this position. The night

---