

the job. They can't very well fire her for her husband's arrest."

"What's the difference? Besides, you got a not-guilty verdict."

His wife was strong willed and rather optimistic. 'Does she know that once branded a thought-criminal one would come under all sorts of restrictions?' Youde wondered.

"One way or another, I will know something about it come next month," his wife said with confidence.

August is the beginning of the new school year and teachers' contracts usually come out before that.

"Next month is only three days away."

"There are cases where people did not receive their contracts until the latter half of August. As long as it's in time for school opening in September."

The guard blew the whistle.

Ten minutes of visiting time had evaporated.

"Do look after yourself," Panto once again hoisted Ah-jing up to the opening.

"Papa, goodbye!" Ah-jing said spiritedly as she waved to Youde.

Pshiiit! The shutter of the opening slid shut with indifference.

104. America Amidst the Bitter Sea

Youde stepped back from the fence into the shade. Fu-lin, having just finished his visitation, came over to talk to Youde.

"Did your wife come to see you?"

"Yes. My daughter too. Did you see your wife too?"

"No, my wife was just here not too long ago. Today, Mrs. Chuang came to see me, all the way from Heng-ts'un. She really didn't have to."

Heng-ts'un is the southern most town of Taiwan.

"Is that so? I'm surprised." Youde was impressed.

Fu-lin said, "Chuang left a note before he was executed. How foolish of me, of course, it's before...ha, ha...," Fu-lin laughed at his own linguistic bungling. "In it, supposedly, he told his wife that he had done us wrong and asked her to do whatever she could to help us for his atonement. This is the second time Mrs. Chuang has come here. She brings a large care package when she comes. I told her not to bother anymore, but she still comes. I would imagine it's not easy supporting a family by herself."

"I see, what an unusual story. But, do you hate Mr. Chuang?"

"Not at all, not anymore. Actually, I feel so sorry for him. I talked about Mr. Chuang with hatred back in the Chia-yi jail, didn't I?"

"Not that I remember."

"Yes, I hated him then. But the hatred has long since gone, because I came to understand Mr. Chuang's predicament after witnessing and hearing so many different stories since then. On the contrary, if I had the chance, I would have told him not to blame himself to such an extent."

"Does his wife still run the charcoal business?"

"Yes, she does. Just today, she said the business is doing well. But it must be quite a job to have to toil covered from head to toe in black powder. I can see traces of black on the tip of her nose, on her earlobes, as if the black powder has penetrated into her skin.

She apologized too, saying the blackness doesn't come off even after repeated washings."

"It hasn't been a year since Mr. Chuang's passing. I guess she still doesn't feel like putting on makeup."

"When we get out, Po-sung and me, we will do something for the Chuangs in return for their kindness."

'To return the kindness' seemed to be another linguistic misrepresentation in this case. Youde chuckled to himself. Nevertheless, Fu-lin's sense of loyalty was evident.

When all ten people gathered again, the guard led them back to their rooms. On the way, Youde told Yang and Fu-lin about what his daughter had said. At "Mama, is it America over there?" Yang, Fu-lin and others in the group all burst out laughing, "Ha, ha, ha." Even the guard who did not seem to be paying attention, smiled and asked, "How old is she?"

Returning to the room, Yang immediately told of what Ah-jing had said.

"Ha, ha, ha," the room bubbled with light-hearted laughter. Even the ever serious Section Leader Hsiung laughed out loud. That people would get such a kick out of it was totally unexpected to Youde.

Little Wang, fanning a paper fan, his shoulders and pelvis gyrating, strutted across the room like a merry Pierrot the clown while sing-singing, "We are in America, in America. Ha, ha, ha."

The reason for the laughter came to Youde as he watched Little Wang's antic. Post war America was indeed the symbol of wealth and freedom. To think that these people who live in the bottomless pits devoid of freedom are really in America, heaven on earth, was

hilarious indeed.

Youde joined Little Wang in the sing-song, "It's America. We are in America."

They laughed until they dropped tears.

105. Walk with Mosula

Soon after August Youde and Mosula got together in their walks.

While the group was walking in the four-column formation, by switching with people walking in front of him one row at a time, Mosula managed to get close to Youde. In no time, they were walking side by side. Youde noticed immediately the peculiar gait of Mosula's and wasted no time asking, "I heard you were tortured severely."

"Huh, huh," Mosula chuckled and said, "It's a wonder that I didn't die."

Youde was concerned about the way he walked, so he asked, "Is your hip hurting?"

"My hip doesn't hurt anymore, but I no longer can walk in strides like I used to."

"Your legs seem fine."

"Not really. I had a lot of trouble there. They beat me at the shins where it hurts the most and broke both my shin bones, causing my legs to swell to twice their normal size."

Youde instinctively looked down at Mosula's legs.

"For three months, I was not able to walk at all. To go to the

toilet, I had to either crawl or have somebody help me. It took a good six months before I could truly walk. But you know the saying, 'The ground hardens with rain; the bones strengthen with breakage' is really true. My legs are stronger than ever."

Youde looked again at Mosula's bare legs beneath his short pants. Here and there, atop of his shins, were gumball-sized lumps, something Youde did not notice at first.

"I see some lumps ..."

"Yes. My shinbones not only broke but also sustained numerous cracks. Gradually, calcium congealed over the cracks and turned into growth-like things. I have at least ten of those on either shin. You see, I was clubbed by huge men wielding hoe handles."

Youde imagined the unimaginable beatings. The conversation ceased for a while.

"From whom did you hear about my torture?"

"When I was in the Military Court Prison, I heard it from Loo. But he didn't mention anything about your legs."

"That clown Loo! What did he say?"

"He said that you were strung up with your hands tied to your back, beaten and left strung up all night."

"Exactly."

"He said that at the end, pulled down by your own body weight, your arms were stretched out of joint, still tied backwards."

"That's correct too."

"Finally, you had your arms raised over your head as if shouting Banzai ... He was pretty irate about the inhumane treatment."

"Saying Banzai with arms raised backward, I see... Loo is pret-

ty good at describing, isn't he? But that wasn't all. The counselor climbed on my back as I was hanging. My shoulder joints, already about to be pulled out of their sockets, had to support the additional weight of a big man!"

"Can a human body really endure such strain?"

"Hard to believe, but it was true. My joints were completely ruined. It's been almost three years, but I can just raise my arms to eye-level, in front of course, ha, ha, ha."

Mosula smiled a lonely smile.

Again, silence took over. Silence in which the abused shoulder joints loomed large.

"But more than my shoulder joints, this is the worst," Mosula stuck out his wrists to show Youde. People walking in front of them also turned their heads to look. What Youde took to be rings of thick, black rubber bands on his wrists, turned out to be dead tissue left from being strung up.

Running his fingers over Mosula's painful looking wounds, Youde asked, "And this is more painful than the shoulder joints?"

People all around stopped talking in order to listen to Mosula's reply.

"Exactly. They handcuffed me from the back, then passed a rope through the handcuffs to string me up."

"I have always pictured them using a hemp rope ..."

"The germ-covered handcuff cut into right here, breaking the skin first then cutting into the flesh then reaching the bone."

"The kind of things they do!" Somebody's irate words could be heard.

Not even in the movies had Youde ever seen such inhumane

practices.

"Overnight, my two wrists were infected and festered, covered with blood and discharge. That's how I got my five-centimeter rings of hurt."

Silence again. How did he survive that?

"What's interesting," Mosula said unexpectedly – Youde said to himself, what's so interesting, nothing but inhumaneness! – "is that the human sense of pain seems to converge on the most painful spot. Like the pain from beating slackened and ceased when the shoulder joints started to hurt. Likewise, the pain in my shoulders was taken over by pain in my wrists. At that point, I didn't feel any other pain. Then I lost consciousness."

"It's really something that your body endured," Youde said with appreciation.

"Truly a Mosula," somebody was heard saying.

"When I came to the next morning, lying in the middle of the room, my body was on fire. Not until I saw the worried faces of my prison friends did I know I had survived."

"It's a miracle your wrists did not develop tetanus," Youde said.

"Fortunately, a prison friend had a magic potion for injuries like that. I used up all he had and it worked."

The person in front turned to ask a question, "There's an infirmary even on the island, isn't there?"

"It's in name only. They gave me some bandages. Other than that, they didn't do anything."

Changing the subject, Youde asked, "I heard you were put into a locker?"

"Ah, the concrete bunker. Did Loo tell you this too?"

"Ya. According to Loo ..." Youde verified what he heard from Loo with Mosula himself.

"Yes, you've got it right, by and large. The only thing different was that later on we got pickles with rice instead of just salt."

"And you survived that miraculously too."

"Yep. Somebody did die right in the bunker, a very able man, a member of the Self Governing Committee at Taiwan University. They recorded it as a suicide."

"Were you in the same bunker?"

"No. These bunkers were constructed by the Japanese military during the war and there are many of them all along the coastline. They used these bunkers as solitary rooms, one per bunker.

"I heard that the mosquitoes were horrendous," Youde said.

"Ya. Not an inch of skin left un-bitten."

"I'll bet. But it was fortunate there were none carrying malaria."

"As it happened, about a week after I came out of the bunker, my father came to the island to visit me without any prior notice."

"How were you able to meet with him?"

"Huh, huh," Mosula chuckled again as he went on, "my father said he dreamt of me dying, so he went to the temples to pray to Goddess Matsu, whereupon he received a revelation – he must go to the island to save his son's life. After seeking desperately in Taitung and Taipei, he finally was able to secure a visitation permit in Taipei. But when he arrived at the island, he was refused the visitation. Not one to give up, for three days and three nights, he settled down in the front lobby of the prison office and persevered.

Finally, he was permitted the ten-minute meeting with me."

Youde conjured up Mosula's father in his mind – a doting father without parallel. He remembered well the happy father's crumbling face and broken smile when Mosula was accepted by the Tainan Normal School.

Preoccupied, Youde missed the guard's order to turn to the right and bumped right into the person in front. The group continued on in a different direction while again listening to Mosula's story.

"However, there was a condition. The counselor called me in and warned me not to breathe a word about being strung up or being in the bunker. And there were to be two guards supervising the visit between the father and the son.

They made me put on long pants and a long sleeved shirt, a black shirt with sleeves long enough to cover my palms. They even made me put on a hat that covered my brow. Even then, because there were still wounds that were not concealed, they chose for the visitation to take place at dusk, in a dim room without any lighting.

As I entered the room, and as soon as he saw me, my father immediately embraced me and wept out loud."

Mosula's voice faltered somewhat, then continued, "My father took off my hat and caressed the scars. He rolled up my sleeves and examined wounds on my arms and wrists. The injuries on my wrists were still raw with discharge, a year after the torture. Tracing the wounds with his fingers, one by one, he berated, 'Damn you, damn you' and cried. Furthermore, my father rolled up my pants legs and despite the guard's objection caressed the lumps on

my shins and again cursed 'damn you, damn you.' Then, he finally noticed, in the dim light, the red dots all over my body and my face. Alarmed, he asked, 'Is it a contagious disease?' When I answered, 'No, don't worry. It's not a contagious disease. It's from the mosquito bites,' he was beside himself with fury. He slammed his fists on the table and jumped up. Now my father was always fearless when he got angry. He shouted, 'I will sue you!' And the visit ended there."

Youde could remember that Mosula's father was the talk of the town for fighting with a Japanese policeman during the Japanese colonial occupation. Like father like son.

"During the visit, I said almost nothing, so the counselor couldn't exactly punish me. Perhaps because they were intimidated by my father's outburst, they became quite restrained towards me from that point on. It's been a year and ten months since."

"Has your father been back here to see you?"

"He came this past second Sunday. He has turned into an unsteady old man, though he is barely fifty years old."

"Your father, did he actually sue?" somebody asked.

"You must be kidding. Where is he going to sue? There isn't such a place," another person answered for Mosula.

Youde said, "But your father's courage is really something else. Maybe your father did save your life."

Mosula nodded. "Because I haven't been tortured since. But, though we can't legally sue, there's a way to send in a plea. My father sent in a plea letter to the Military Court. A year later, right after you, Youde, were sent to the East Pen-Yuan Temple, I was called back to the Military Court where they ascertained my

wounds. By the time you were sent back to the Military Court, I was already here. I don't imagine I will be sent to the island again."

The walk was about to end. Youde eagerly asked, "But why were you singled out for such abuse?"

"I was not alone by all means. Quite a few people were strung up like me and there was always somebody in the bunkers. But judging from me being nicknamed Mosula, maybe I did get the roughest treatment. You know how I could never beg for mercy?"

"But there must be some reason."

"The ostensible reason they gave was that I was involved in a POW rebellion at Nan-jih Island. But they know perfectly well that it was not possible. In the end, it was my stubbornness that got their goat, I think. They used me to set an example for the other prisoners, but also to satisfy their sadistic needs. They were laughing, all the time they were beating me."

"But you were not at all stubborn as a child. I know it well."

"Ya. Maybe it started after I entered Tainan Normal School and began studying side by side with the Japanese. Then you start to notice all the discriminations. I was already a known eccentric while at Tainan Normal. Looking back, the six years of grade school were the happiest."

"That is truly so."

Youde and Mosula walked side by side accompanied by happy childhood memories.

The whistle sounded. The walk was over.

"Next time, you must tell me about your story," Mosula slapped Youde's shoulder.

The four-column formation noisily kicked off the dirt from their shoes at the building's entrance and returned to their rooms.

As they reached Room 15, Mosula stopped and said, "Let's see. It's been two or three months since you received your verdict, hasn't it?"

"It's been more than three months."

"In that case, Yu-kun will probably be executed pretty soon."

They parted with a wave.

106. A Parting Note

It was a short time after the start of the afternoon nap and the building had quieted down. Youde was about to lie down when Yang, who was waiting for servant Comrade Cheng at the front of the room, gestured with his hand for Youde to come over. Youde rose right away and went over. Looking through the iron bars, he saw four men approaching slowly, each shouldering a large blanket roll.

Yang called to one of them in a hushed voice, "Hey, Li!"

The person was startled. He looked toward the room. Then recognizing Yang, he smiled and waved back. He also greeted Youde with a nod. To his surprise, the person behind Li waved at Youde. Upon closer examination, the man turned out to be no other than Li Chiang whom Youde knew through Loo during bath time back in the Military Court Prison. Now properly attired, he looked like a different person from the half-naked man Youde used to know.

Youde realized that the four had just arrived at the facility after receiving their verdicts. He also remembered that Li's case was part and parcel with Yu-kun's case.

Yang muttered, "The man I greeted is Li Teng-ke. He lived next door to me when I was in the West Area. His case was also related to Chang Yu-kun's."

The fact that these four people, who should have been charged with Article 4 for hiding Yu-kun, were here signified to Youde that Yu-kun's case had been decided and Yu-kun was no longer of this world. For a moment, Youde mistook the silent, blanket-carrying figures for messengers of death.

Yu-kun is at last executed. The place of execution must be no other than the An-kang execution yard of this very facility. But the sound of gunshots cannot reach here. Youde realized.

'When?' 'Together with whom?' Youde's mind raced with questions, even wondering unnecessarily about who would come to fetch Yu-kun's body.

The four men passed by and disappeared. Youde laid down again but stayed awake until two o'clock, the time for the study session.

Youde searched for the four men as he passed by the rooms to head toward the open yard. He knew that it was unlikely that the four would be placed in the same room. Rather, they most likely would be split among two or three rooms. Halfway there, Youde spotted Li Chiang behind the bars watching the passersby. Li waved to Youde and acted like he had something to say. But with the Counselor following close behind, Youde was not able to break away from his group, so he gave a small nod and walked by. Li

looked visibly disappointed.

The day's discussion topic was 'Communist atrocities.' The topics of the study sessions usually fell into three, large categories: one, Sun Yat-sen and the Three People's Principles, two, Chiang Kai-shek's achievements and his virtuousness and three, Communist atrocities.

Youde thought indignantly: By all reasoning, instead of studying Communist atrocities, we should engage in a critique of Communism itself. How else can we be brainwashed? Yet we are not allowed to read any books on Communist ideology, so a critique of Communism is out. That leaves nothing but Communist atrocities to take up where Communism is concerned. But how absurd to ask native Taiwanese, who lived the daily reality of KMT atrocities, to discuss Communist atrocities of which they have no first hand experience – except for a few people who fell victim to the spy judge? How about KMT atrocities? There are five thousand victims here at An-kang alone at this very moment, each with his own story of heartbreaking misfortune. And if we were to gather all the victims since the February 28th Incident there would be enough to fill a large compendium. Or do they not think the tortures that Mosula endured an atrocity? Can they possibly say to the parents of the executed that executions are not atrocities?

As it is, how effective can this kind of propaganda be unless they point out that Communist atrocities are far worse than KMT atrocities?

Factual or not, the collection of Communist atrocities presented in the study sessions were voluminous. Each person was required to present cases of Communist atrocities, as speaker after

speaker droned on with heresay cases, the listeners listened to the same, stale stories over and over again.

It came Youde's turn to speak. Having used a case from the book on a previous occasion, today he related from memory what Big Shan-tung had told him during his stay in the Chia-yi's prison. But Yu-kun's execution hung heavily on his mind. To Youde, the atrocities at hand were a hack closer and more real than those committed by the other side.

On his journey back to his room, Youde pointedly stayed in the back of the pack. Li Chiang lives in Room No.13, Youde's mental note said. Conveniently, Counselor Fu had overtaken the team and was walking briskly ahead of them as if in a hurry to take care of some business.

When he got to Room 13, Youde casually approached it. As Youde expected, Li was waiting at the iron bars. He quickly handed Youde a small piece of folded paper and said, "Yu-kun's parting note to you. My uncle asked me to give it to you."

Passing notes was quite common among prisoners. But a reed counselee could not do it quite as openly, lest somebody should inform on him.

Holding Yu-kun's folded parting note in his palm, Youde remembered that Li's uncle had been imprisoned in the West Area and surmised that the uncle was among the four new arrivals whom Yang greeted the other day and the one to whom Yu-kun had entrusted his parting note to Youde.

As soon as he got back to his room, Youde hid the folded paper between pages of a notebook. He was pulled strongly by the impulse to open it right away, yet on the other hand, he also

wanted to just let it lie. Not so much out of fear of informers but as much because the piece of paper was the last communication from a now deceased friend and he wanted to read it without intrusion, savoring it word by word. Youde knew it meant little to get to it sooner.

Youde decided to patiently wait until bed time to open the note.

107. A Phantom

Lights out was at nine o'clock but the hallway lights were left on to shed enough light for the guards to observe the inmates' movements. A nightlight was also left atop the partition between the bathing area and the toilet. As a result, since his space was right next to the toilet, Youde was able to make out the words by the nightlight.

Youde leaned against the wall and took out the folded piece of paper from the notebook. The folded object, half the size of a calling card, was made of crude paper and turned out to be glued on the sides and ends to form an envelope.

As Youde cut open the envelope and spread it open, a thin, white piece of paper fell onto his lap. Youde unfolded the white paper and read it under the dim light. It had only three lines; it was not addressed to anyone in particular and it was unsigned – no doubt a precautionary measure. But the handwriting was unmistakably that of Yu-kun.

Youde focused on the first line and made out the characters

one by one.

"I am sorry. I wept, moved by your friendship."

The second line and the third line said, "I am ashamed that the blood of the Chinese Han people runs in my body."

Words were few. But they shot through Youde like a bolt of electric current, for these were cries of shame – shame for one's country, for one's people and of one's self. How could Yu-kun mouth such words who used to regard himself a Han Chinese who once sang the praises of the Han people? What drove him to this?

Youde found more writings on the wrapper also, written in such tiny characters that they called to mind a cheat sheet in school exams. They were hard to decipher. Youde curled up his fingers into a tube and made out the characters through it, one character at a time. The hand tube acted like a magnifying lens making the characters readable -- a trick Youde learned as a boy- scout together with Mosula.

"Case of Yeh Cheng-sung and Chang Yu-kun."

The names of the two leaders were on the top of the page. It continued:

"6 Death sentence

2 Life term"

Little Wang, squinting, was observing Youde with curiosity. 'A harmless fellow', Youde decided and ignored Little Wang. He continued to read on:

"6 Ten years

5 Seven years

2 Five years

1 One year

3 Not guilty"

In all, twenty-two people were convicted in this one case. Six death sentences out of one single case was on the high end. The names of the four other men after excluding Yeh Cheng-sung and Chang Yu-kun were not recorded, but no doubt they were the ones who had sought cover at Yeh's place at one time or another.

Who were the sixteen others? Prison lore has it that Cheng-sung did not implicate anybody. That means all sixteen were implicated by Yu-kun, among them the Li family who hid him and Loo the clown who gave him money.

Through Wen-bang, Youde was also acquainted with the other leader of the case, Yeh Cheng-sung, the pampered son of a wealthy doctor in Chia-yi. Wen-bang and Yeh were two peas in a pod, sharing similar family backgrounds, of like personality and contemporaries at the College of Law and Commerce by way of Chia-yi Middle School. Youde remembered Yeh as a handsome standout whom Yu-kun used to call Tsuruta Koichi, Number one Tsuruta, insinuating that Yeh was more handsome than the famous heart-throb Tsuruta Koji, Number two Tsuruta. In life, Yeh was gentle, intelligent and fair-minded; a fine, young man no one could find fault with. He was elected the president of the student government at the college, as well as the president of the Collegiate Friendship Association.

Then, as a matter of course, he went into hiding after the April 6th student crackdown. Now again, as a matter of course, he was executed by a firing squad. For this was the plot of the destiny that God had written for the Taiwanese elite.

Suppressing his angry tears, Youde put away the paper and

lay down. As he did so, Yu-kun appeared in the back of his closed eyelids.

The phantom spoke to Youde, "I am sorry, to make you suffer so."

"It's O.K. Too bad I wasn't any help to you."

Tears ran down from the corners of Youde's eyes. Little Wang rolled himself over with a thud, perhaps for fear of seeing what he shouldn't have.

The phantom talked again, "I really wept, moved by your friendship. By God's arrangement, I was able to see you on the day you went to court, but I didn't have the face to meet you. Yet I couldn't bear not to call your name because I knew intuitively that it was our last chance. But I was not able to say anything when you turned around and shouted, 'I don't hate you.' Even now, I can still hear those words clearly. I wept that evening. Not only that evening, I wept every time I thought of what you said. Those words were most precious to me. Thank you."

The phantom continued, "I heard quite a few things about you from the Bull. He also said to me, 'I wish I, too, had a friend like Tsai Youde.'"

When he opened his eyes once more, Youde found Little Wang had rolled back to face this side again and was stealing a glance at him.

Little Wang hurriedly closed his eyes.

Youde wiped off the traces of tears, gently tapped Little Wang on the stomach and said with a smile, "It's nothing. It's all in the past. Let's sleep."

Little Wang grinned and rolled onto his other side. Soon,

Youde could hear Little Wang's easy breathing.

108. On the Train

Youde lay awake silently mouthing the last two lines from Yu-kun's parting note: "I am ashamed that the blood of Chinese Han people runs in my body."

The words brought back to Youde a vivid, contrary memory. The event took place after Taiwan's Restoration, soon after Youde and Yu-kun had entered college.

College students from Putzu, some ten plus, customarily arranged to go home together by train during school recess. The railroad was operating then, albeit with shabby, unrepaired cars that had escaped direct hits during the war. The third class train that the students rode – the only one to give a student discount -- used to take anywhere from six to ten hours to travel the two hundred kilometers between Taipei and Chia-yi. From there, they switched to the narrow-gauge light rail to travel for another hour to arrive at the white train station of Putzu.

But the long journey was not at all a hardship to the home-bound students. They swapped news about campus life. They sang. They talked about girls, books, studies, about their dreams for the future and they laughed. The time passed rather joyously.

On one of these trips, a group of fellow passengers on the train began to openly criticize the government. From the government incompetence to the craven corruptions of the bureaucrats, they cited example after example, their voices growing ever more agitat-

ed and they cursed the mainlanders as 'Pigs' on every turn.

Criticisms like this were already commonplace barely six months after the Restoration, which the Taiwanese welcomed with enthusiasm. Martial law was not yet in place, therefore, one did not risk immediate arrest for criticizing the government then.

Now the group's conversation was about the army. The loud voice of a man who was wearing only a tank shirt on that winter day said, "Look at that Chink army. Isn't it exactly like what's in the Japanese cartoons? I didn't believe it back then, but it turned out to be true. Can you believe they actually march carrying paper umbrellas on their backs?"

Another voice said, "I wonder what they are going to do with the umbrella when attacking?"

"What opportunity did they have for attacking? They retreated all the way!"

"The soldiers are mostly illiterate too."

"It turned out to be true too that they made pairs of soldiers shoulder a bamboo pole with kettles and pots and pans dangling from each end."

"And what do you think of the way they do their leg garters? They don't know to fold it back in the middle!"

"At first, some people said they wrap lead plates in the garters for training purposes, for extra weight you know, and that accounted for the clumsy look. Supposedly, they would take out the lead plates in battle so the soldiers would be able to soar with a lightened load. I thought it was pretty clever."

"Don't be stupid!"

Suddenly, Yu-kun stood up and approached the group of ban-

tering passengers.

"Hey, brothers, I am a Taiwanese too, but I frankly think your views are wrong."

All eyes on the train turned to Yu-kun.

"China is different from Japan. It is not a militaristic nation. In Japan, the military was given every advantage. People could be starving but the military had plenty. People could be in rags but the military was always in sharp uniforms. The Japanese military was able to allocate resources at will. But our country, China, is different. It is not militaristic. That is why the military had to endure inadequate supplies. In my view, the errant party is really the people of China who sent them into battle without sufficient equipment. Yet, with their pitiful equipment, they did battle with the Japanese for eight years. An achievement if you ask me. Despite victorious assault after assault by the Japanese, the Chinese fought back and persevered and finally brought the Japanese army to their knees so that Japan surrendered. Isn't that so? Which one, tell me which one do you think is greater? The well equipped Japanese army or the Chinese army who fought carrying their pots and pans?"

The car was at once silent. One person started to clap, then many followed with loud hands.

"We the Han people," Yu-kun was on a roll, "are one of the most superior peoples in the world, no less so than the Yamatos, the Anglo-Saxons, the Germans. We have five thousand years of glorious history and culture. At a time when our ancestors were already enjoying a highly developed civilization, the ancestors of today's self-appointed 'cultured' people were still mired in bar-

barism. No natural calamities nor external invasions were able to vanquish the Han people. It has survived and grown in strength. One quarter of the world's population is Han. Just wait and see. The twenty-first century will be the century of the Han people. And think! In our bodies pulses the blood of the Han people. We must never forget and should always be proud of it."

Again, applause.

Yu-kun returned to his seat. Youde and his friends greeted him with applause too.

This was eight years before his execution.

109. To Repay Enmity with Virtue

After two days hiatus due to rain, the topic of the study session that followed was 'President Chiang's spirit of brotherly love.'

Books about Chiang's great accomplishments were ubiquitous, yet stories about his 'spirit of brotherly love' were rarely seen for some reason. One could hardly make a speech out of Chiang visiting a remote village with Madame Chiang in tow and patting the school children on their heads. Consequently, the talk that day centered on his policy towards post-war Japan: To repay enmity with virtue.

During the eight years of the Sino-Japanese war, the Japanese military spread the war to all corners of China, costing China tens and thousands of lives and imposing untold sufferings on the entire people. They also committed numerous deliberate atrocities. Nevertheless, at the war's conclusion, President Chiang raised high

the banner of Confucian teachings – to repay enmity with virtue -- and admonished the Chinese people from taking revenge on the Japanese military or otherwise. Furthermore, he transported the one million Japanese army members ahead of others back to Japan. Compared to the constant American refrain, 'Remember Pearl Harbor,' and its vengeful actions during the Tokyo war tribunal, Chiang's actions were indeed an expression of his spirit of brotherly love, deserving of praise and being remembered in perpetuity. In fact, the Japanese, too, are grateful for this benevolence as evidenced by the yearly visit to Taiwan by their parliamentary representatives to pay respect to President Chiang.

The day's study session turned into a series of speeches on 'To repay enmity with virtue,' all of such similar content that they could be more aptly termed recitals. When it was Youde's turn to speak, he stood up and repeated the familiar refrains but then added a personal anecdote. It was about what a Japanese business executive had said to him as they shared the smoking area on the propeller plane traveling from Tokyo's Haneda airport to Taipei on Youde's trip home from America. The Japanese executive, who claimed to count many members of the Parliaments of both Japan and Taiwan among his friends, had said he thought President Chiang was a rare, great leader of modern history and that he was deeply grateful for the generous treatment of the Japanese after the war. He also said that the people who owed their early repatriation to Chiang had contributed greatly to Japan's post-war construction. Unlike the Japanese, who were retained by the Soviet Union, he thought the Japanese soldiers in China were fortunate indeed. He said he would never forget Chiang's charity. Youde

added that he believed the man's words were sincere and his feelings of gratitude genuine and evident.

The anecdote pleased Counselor Fu evidently because he clapped when Youde was finished.

Nevertheless, Youde sat down with a heavy heart. Yu-kun and Yeh Cheng-sung's executions clung to his mind. Just several days ago, this very President Chiang had signed the orders for their execution. The slogan 'to repay enmity with virtue' had disappeared to nowhere. In its stead was Chiang's personal directive that said 'Do not let one guilty escape even if a hundred are mistakenly killed.' Why?

Letting pass the praises his comrades were piling on Chiang's spirit of brotherly love, Youde reasoned:

The soldiers of the foreign army did not pose any threat to his regime. On the contrary, it was probably more dangerous to let them stay around. Hence, Chiang was able to carry out the policy of 'to repay enmity with virtue.' However, to his fellow compatriots who could pose real threats to his power, he showed no mercy.

As far as the Taiwanese were concerned, what Chiang did was exactly the opposite of 'to repay enmity with virtue.' Rather, it was a case of 'To repay favor with retribution.'

Youde recalled the day when Chiang first visited Taiwan soon after the war was over. On that day, Yu-kun had clung to a tree branch and over and over, in his already hoarse voice, shouted 'Long live President Chiang!' It was on that occasion that Youde met Yeh Cheng-sung through Wen-bang's introduction. Yeh and Wen-bang too, both astride the same tree branch, were shouting 'Long live President Chiang!' at the top of their lungs. One by one,

Chiang had sent these patriots to the execution yard, these young men who had once admired him and welcomed him with such fervor. And for what? For actions that no other democratic country would consider crimes! The explanation could only be that Chiang was taking revenge on Taiwan for his loss on the mainland.

Youde also remembered a photo-story in a 'Life' magazine he picked up immediately prior to his return. The reporter, who inexplicably was allowed a visit to Green Island, had taken a few photographs of the prisoners on the island. The caption read: By American criteria, not one of these people needs to be incarcerated.

Suddenly, the class conductor announced the conclusion of the day's session. The counselees stood up, folded their stools and straggled back to one of the buildings in this five-thousand capacity prison.

Youde mused: Suppose the Life magazine reporter were to come here, he would probably report this: By American standards, not one of these five thousand prisoners needs to be here.

After all, the five thousand here are supposed to be less guilty than the ones on Green Island.

Youde further contemplated: I have no doubt an American president would release them all. Does one really need to drag in the Confucian teaching of 'to repay enmity with virtue?' Isn't the constitution of the Republic of China a sufficient basis for freedom? After all, it is fundamentally a democratic constitution, based as it is on Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles, which in turn originated from Lincoln's 'The government of the people, by the people and for the people.'

However, similar constitutions in practice resulted in two gov-

ernments as different as heaven and earth. Taiwan's government shelved the constitution and secured a dictatorship with myriads of special laws in order to carry out its rule of terror.

Be that as it may, the evaluation of Chiang's merits and demerits can only await the research of future historians. Surprisingly enough, the Little Lu of fourth grade education might have bluntly provided a most democratic conclusion: "Let those who want to worship him worship him. Let the ones who want to spit on him or urinate on him, spit and urinate on him."

110. A Father's Heartbreak

It was a rare occasion that four people from the same hometown of Putzu were able to walk side by side in a row: Youde, Mosula, Li Chiang and Li's uncle. As Youde had guessed, Li's uncle was the person who greeted Yang upon arriving. The uncle's name was Li Teng-ke.

Youde assumed this was their first encounter, but it turned out Li's uncle already knew Youde and Youde's wife Panto, too, because he was the village mayor where Panto used to teach school before marrying. The uncle said he had even attended Youde's wedding reception as a guest on the bride's side and had sized up the bridegroom then. Youde and Li shook hands like old friends.

"I never thought I would see you here," Mayor Li said with a sigh and went on to praise Panto's teaching, recalling how he had made sure that his own daughter was assigned to Panto's class. But such idle conversation had to take a backseat today for who

knew when they would be together again like this. The guard usually picked ten rooms arbitrarily out of fifty to let out at a time. Youde told Mayor Li that he and Panto had two children now and that she had come to visit him just the other day, then quickly switched to ask about Yu-kun.

"How did you feel when Yu-kun was taken out for execution?"

"Nothing in particular," Mayor Li was obviously reluctant to talk about Yu-kun. But he spoke of Yeh Cheng-sung at great length. After heaping praises on Yeh he added, "In the West Area, the person everybody feels for the most is Yeh's father."

"Is that right?"

"His father must be crushed. He must be sobbing day and night."

Many parents of the executed collapsed in their sorrow. Why did Yeh's father merit special mention? Youde waited for Mayor Li to continue.

"You see, it's his father who got him out of hiding."

"What! Oh, no." Many sighed with lament.

"Cheng-sung and Yu-kun were hiding in the safe house in the mountains, or to be accurate, I should say Yu-kun moved in on Cheng-sung after leaving my place. There were five of them, all executed now, sharing that house with the expenses all paid for by Yeh's father, who as you know, is a wealthy doctor and a landowner. The safe house was almost perfect. If they had lived there quietly I bet nothing would have happened. But, because of Yu-kun, it began to unravel. One day, Yu-kun went into Chia-yi and did not return. So the rest of the fugitives took precautions and scattered to other hiding places. Sure enough, the secret agents soon

ambushed the safe house based on Yu-kun's confession.

"Why did Yu-kun go to Chia-yi?" Youde asked.

"To gather intelligence or, should we say, to find out what was going on in the world. From time to time, he would come out to the city to read the newspapers."

"Didn't they have a radio?"

"Supposedly they did. But it was on the fritz that day. Like they say, when you are out of luck bad things pile on top of each other to make a tragedy. Of course, even after getting the news from the radio, they still wanted to read the papers. So they used to go into town in peasant disguises and buy an ordinary item, then wrap the item with the newspapers to avoid suspicion."

Youde appreciated the fugitives' desire for news.

"Some people say Yu-kun didn't go out there to gather information that day, but rather, because he craved the food. Wasn't he captured while eating noodles at the city's Eastside Market? Some say even worse things about him."

Mayor Li grinned.

"What else do they say?"

"Some say he went out for women."

"Ha, ha, ha." Other people in the group laughed.

It was no wonder, since sex happened to also be the most urgent problem among the listeners. But Youde thought the rap on Yu-kun was most likely slanderous.

Mayor Li went on, "Anyway, Cheng-sung escaped to his second hiding place by himself while the secret agents searched for him in vain. That's when they used Cheng-sung's father. The secret agents promised the father if he persuaded his son to give

himself up, the son would evade the death penalty and be sentenced to less than ten years instead. Otherwise, they warned, the son would sooner or later face the firing squad and he, the father himself could get ten years under Article 4 for aiding a bandit. After repeated assurances, the father agreed to contact Cheng-sung. The way they went about it was kind of theatrical though. Since going straight to his son would be like admitting to the crime of either 'Aiding the Bandit' or 'Failure to Report the Whereabouts of a Known Fugitive,' the secret agents had the father feign ignorance and went around with a megaphone calling 'Ah-Sung, come on out. The authorities have promised to reduce your sentence! Sometimes, the father shouted the message atop the agent's jeep, sometimes on foot by himself. Eventually, Cheng-sung gave himself up in the Security Defense Headquarters accompanied by his father. I heard that the father was completely fooled by the agents' promises, right up to the time he received the words of his son's execution. If you ask me, Cheng-sung's father, a product of the Japanese educational system, was no match for the special agents when it came to acting. We felt so sorry for the father. I imagine he probably fainted when he received the news of his son's execution."

A moment of silence prevailed. One imagined an old, white haired doctor howling with heartbreak.

After the marching formation turned right, Youde again asked Mayor Li, "But did you receive a ten year sentence?"

"Yes, he did too," he said, pointing to his nephew Li Chiang.

"The two of us got ten years. The other two who arrived here with us the other day got seven and five respectively. Fortunately, my father got 'not-guilty' so he was able to go home recently."

"So your father too was arrested."

"Yes, imagine a man over seventy thrown in jail without mercy. Not guilty though his verdict was, he was in jail for a whole year. His health is O.K now, but I heard that many old people become ill as soon as they get home so I am kind of worried about him. It was for hiding the bastard Yu-kun that my entire family suffered this calamity. Do you see why I felt like punching him in the nose?"

Li Chiang cut in, "My uncle ran into Yu-kun a lot at bath time."

"Then you must also know Lin Jin-so, the Bull?" Youde asked.

"Of course I do. I often ran into him during baths too. The day he was taken out for execution, it was terrific, wasn't it? Oh, ya, Lin always used to praise you saying you were a hopelessly nice guy. He said to give you his regards when I saw you."

Youde came close to tears thinking of Lin the Bull.

"Thank you for everything," Youde bowed his head and thanked the Mayor. It was meant for relaying Lin's sentiments, but more for passing Yu-kun's parting note. Given the location, both men knew better than openly discuss the passing of the note.

"For that thing, thank you," Youde said once more realizing it was nice of the Mayor to do the detested Yu-kun a favor at all.

"That," Mayor Li smiled a wicked smile and putting his mouth to Youde's ear said, "I didn't do it for that fellow's sake. I just wanted to do a favor for the nice-guy bridegroom of that wedding day."

III. Individual Conversation

Days passed in quick succession in more or less the same routine and soon it was October 2, exactly a year to the day Youde lost his freedom.

In the one year he spent in America, Youde traveled widely at an almost frantic pace: first going from Seattle to Washington D.C. and New York, then touring the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida and from there to Mexico. Doubling back to Virginia, he was off to Michigan, Indiana and Canada, again back to New York then on to Los Angeles and San Francisco before returning to Taiwan via Tokyo. His was a life of wide-open horizons and wide ranging new friendships. The year was easily the equivalent of five years of normal living.

In contrast, Youde spent the past year in a cramped, closed world of small prison cells. And this year too felt like five years. He had met and got to know many people and the experience of this small world was by no means less interesting than the year abroad, notwithstanding the two diametrically opposed worlds - one of freedom and one of terror.

After breakfast when Youde was indulging in mournful melancholy, Servant Cheng called on Youde, "Tsai Youde, get ready for individual conversation."

Youde got up and got himself ready.

The guard opened the door. Youde followed Cheng out.

"There appears to be good news," Servant Cheng whispered.

Cheng led Youde toward Counselor's office instead of the Conversation Room.

Counselor Fu was at his desk, scanning through some documents. When Youde bowed, Fu smiled agreeably and ordered Youde to sit in the chair opposite the desk.

Cheng set a cup of cold tea in front of Youde.

It had been a long, long time since he was served tea by someone else. I am being treated like a human being, Youde realized and thanked Cheng profusely.

To Youde's further surprise, Fu extended a pack of cigarettes in his hand and offered him one. Cigarettes were without a doubt a sign of favorable treatment. Youde hesitated a moment but firmly declined Fu's favor. That's because back in the Chia-yi police station, Youde had sworn to never taste tobacco again until he regained his freedom. A strange pledge maybe, but Youde had considered it a test of his resolve.

Counselor Fu said while browsing through Youde's file, "Your record is not bad. But where is the photograph you presented as counter-evidence? Do you have it with you?"

Youde thought he detected a chuckle from Fu whose smiles were always fleeting at best.

"Yes, I have it right here." Youde took out the photograph from his shirt pocket and handed it to Fu. Youde had dropped the photograph in the pocket hoping to find just such a chance during his face-to-face with Fu.

"I see, you are well prepared," Counselor Fu laughed, "Where was it taken?"

"In America."

"I can see that. Where in America?"

"It was taken during the International Folk Fair, on the campus

of the University of Michigan, in front of the Chinese booth."

The picture showed Youde giving a speech in front of a blue-sky/white-sun flag of the Republic of China.

"I was hoping that you would see that I was pro-KMT and anti-Communist."

Fu again grinned imperceptibly.

Youde thought to himself:

Maybe he is thinking, 'it's transparent what you are trying to do!' For sure, the picture was a pose, but it was also true that I had refused to join in picture-taking under the five-star flags raised high by the pro-mainland students. And although the investigators had refused to believe me, it was also a fact that I never once expressed sympathy for Communism in spite of counting numerous Communists among my friends. At the same time, however, it was also true that I had wished from the bottom of my heart for the early demise of this corrupt regime and that it would disappear forever from the face of the earth.

Some people might argue that if that was how you felt, you should work for its betterment within the system. Alas, it's an assertion only people ignorant of the 'white terror' under the dictatorship could make. They don't know that a mere call for reform could promptly invite the fate of first having a 'red cap' or a 'black cap' placed on your head and subsequently being eliminated. Evidence the Taiwanese elite who died in the aftermath of the February 28th Incident. They spoke neither of Communism nor of Taiwan's independence, they merely spoke of reforms.

Those who can openly speak of reforms to their government should realize how fortunate they are to be living in such a country

and thank God for it.

"Can I have this?" Fu asked.

"Yes," Youde made his answer terse.

Fu put the photograph away in Youde's folder and shifted his position in the chair. Then in a business-like tone of voice he started to ask questions:

"What are the superior points of the Three People's Principles?"

"Why does Communism not fit China's circumstances?"

"Do you think the retaking of the mainland will be successful?"

"Why is President Chiang revered as the savior of the Chinese people?"

Youde was able to answer all of them, although some answers were patently embarrassing to say the least.

Fu asked, looking somewhat amused, "Would you swear that what you just said was truthful?"

The only possible answer was yes.

"Yes, I do."

"Then, stand up and swear to it."

Youde stood up, facing the twin portraits of Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen on the wall, raised his right hand, and swore that his earlier answers were all from the bottom of his heart.

Fu made Youde write the pledge: "I, Tsai Youde, swear to believe in the Three People's Principles, to support President Chiang and, to the best of my ability, shall work for the sacred war against Communism and Russia."

After putting away the pledge in the file, Fu again opened his

mouth.

"The truth is we may select a few comrades with superior records and let them go home. I can't guarantee that you will meet the conditions. And I also don't know when that's going to be. But I thought it would be good to take care of the procedures first."

Youde doubted his ears. This sudden good news, his heart raced.

"In that eventuality, you need a guarantor, do you have anybody in mind? It's best to find somebody in Taipei."

"Yes, would my brother do?"

Fu nodded and made Youde write down his brother's name, occupation, job history and address.

Fu warned Youde in all seriousness, "You must not tell anybody about this, because we sure don't need to stir up any unnecessary disturbance. Besides, it's not like it's been decided. We'll let you know when things are decided, so I would like you to go on as before until that time."

"Yes, I understand. Please do what you can for me."

Youde rose and bowed deeply.

"One more thing, it's about after leaving here. You must not tell people about what you've heard or seen in here. Let me assure you that there are a hundred harms and not a single benefit in telling others. Actually, it's equivalent to engaging in behavior beneficial to the enemy, punishable according to Article 7 of the Law of Sedition. Can you promise me not to talk about it?"

"Yes."

"And I want you to keep in close touch and help us."

Asking me to be a spy! Youde's happy heart was overcast with

dark shadows.

"How about it?" Fu asked again.

"Yes."

"All right. I wish you good luck."

Counselor Fu stood up, extended his hand and shook hands with Youde. The 'individual conversation' was over.

On the way back to the room, Servant Cheng kindly whispered to Youde, "Really, don't tell anybody, not your cellmates, not your walking companions. If they know that you are about to get out, they will ask you to relay a lot of stuff they can't put in their letters and that can become troublesome. Don't forget, there's an inspection of your belongings at exit time."

After thanking Cheng, Youde stood still for a bit and rubbed his face vigorously with both his hands before approaching Room No.2 to join the group with an innocent face.

112. Parting with Mosula

Many days continued during which Youde had to hide his feelings.

Each day, one or two comrades would return from their individual conversations, none showed any unusual expressions except Yu. Yu had his conversation with Fu immediately ahead of Youde and had since seemed fidgety. He sometimes even broke into grins unknowingly.

Youde felt most terrible during walking because he wanted to, or rather he knew he must, let at least Mosula know about the pos-

sible, pending release. Yet, Servant Cheng's admonition was never far from his thoughts either. Youde walked with Li Chiang many more times, but never did run into Mayor Li again.

One day Mosula again brought up the matter of Yu-kun and his cohorts. The regular prisoners, unlike the re-ed counselees, tended to have better access to prison intelligence, though the information was not always accurate. Like the time when the prison was briefly thrown into turmoil by news of the impending landing of the Chinese army.

"Do you know which song they sang to see Yu-kun and his friends off to be executed?" Mosula asked.

"I don't know."

"I heard it was 'Moon's Desert.' Supposedly, Yeh Cheng-sung learned this song from his father when he was a child. It was sung over and over."

"Toward the remote, moon's desert, the camel trudged ..."

Mosula and Youde gently mouthed the song as they walked.

Some moments later, Youde asked, "I wonder if they sang Yu-kun's favorite song?"

"Which song was that?"

"... In the moonlight, longing for your image, I walk and walk," Youde sang the last half of the song.

"No, I don't think they sang Yu-kun's song because, of the two, Cheng-sung was far more popular. He did not implicate a single person."

"Well, how about if we belatedly sing one for Yu-kun?"

The two of them softly sang as they walked, deeply immersed in their reveries.

A few days later in their walk, when Youde was still unable to break the news of his own possible probation to Mosula, Mosula relayed a piece of intelligence.

"This re-education center may be dismantled."

"....."

"I heard they are making preparations to dismantle it. I guess it will mean our parting"

"Do you know if they let people go home from here?"

"It's possible. That's entirely possible because Pan-chiao is super over-capacity. Just wait and keep hoping. You were always a lucky guy."

Others walking close by seemed to have perked up their ears. Youde changed the subject.

"I was told that my birthday fell on Taoist's Heaven Amnesty Day, a most propitious day that comes only once in several years. It is said that people born on that day are forgiven by God even if they have committed wanton wrongs."

"Ha, ha, ha. That's why you are so lucky!"

"But, I am here, am I not? It might not be working after all."

"Don't be greedy. Look at Cheng-sung, Yu-kun, Chou Shen-yuan, Wen-bang and others. You could have ..."

Mosula stopped. Maybe he thought he had gone a bit too far. Then, moments later, he dropped his voice and went on, "When Yu-kun was captured, it was February I remember. You were so fortunate to be in America. Otherwise, you would have been arrested along with the Li family. And in your case, I doubt if you could have escaped torture. You see, six months before, because of several deaths due to torture one after another, they changed the policy

to allow no torture unless there was solid evidence. Only after then, you sauntered back to Taiwan. Of course, the fact that you did return knowing full well of Yu-kun's capture played in your favor, else I don't think you would be let go with just re-education. And you really did well, to be the only high school teacher picked to go to America! It just seems that everything went well for you."

"I also had a photograph as counter-evidence," Youde confided to Mosula about the picture.

"I guess it wasn't a waste of time to show that piece of counter-evidence in court. I am glad you don't have to be saddled with the false accusations in silence. In any case, the time to part seems to have arrived."

"I am so happy to have run into you here and we have been pretty lucky to be able to walk together often."

"I will be lonely though after you are gone," Mosula uttered, a fainthearted sentiment totally unbecoming his nickname Mosula.

"Whenever I am able to walk with you, I always get this calm and peaceful feeling that carries me through the day. It's like we have been on a school trip. Do you remember the time we went to Tainan at the semester's end? We stayed in an inn called 'Honest House' and a bunch of us slept on the floor of a large room? I think of those days. And as long as you are here, I can go back to those days. It's strange, isn't it?"

Shoulder to shoulder, they walked in silence. Youde screwed up his resolve and asked, "Do you have any words you would like me to give to your father?"

"No. Nothing. Don't worry about something like that. Thank you anyway."

The walk ended. As they parted to return to their rooms, Youde and Mosula clasped each others' hands with more strength than ever before.

For some reason, the walking schedule changed after that day and they never saw each other again.

113. Release from Prison

It was on Wednesday, November 2, when the afternoon nap-time was about to begin, that the guard showed up suddenly at Room No.2 and called for Yu and Youde.

"Gather your belongings and come out here," the guard ordered.

Youde's belongings had expanded beyond the large square scarf: clothing, bedding, books, notebooks, toiletries and the multi-purpose mug. But as Youde had already gone through them, it took only two minutes for him to gather them all up and sling the blanket roll over his shoulder.

Other comrades from the room, taken by surprise, seemed lost for words. Only Little Wang leaned forward to look at Youde in the face and asked, "Are you going home?"

"I don't know," Youde could only answer.

Hurried on by the guard, Youde left the room without shaking hands or saying goodbye to anyone.

"Ah ..." somebody uttered, half envy, half self-pity.

Room No.2 became boisterous as soon as the two men left. Voices from the room followed the two as they walked down the

corridor. The room across started to stir as well when its inmates noticed the two men walking by lugging their belongings.

Servant Cheng accompanied them to the iron gate.

"Thank you for your troubles," Youde shook Cheng's hand, whose eyes showed obvious envy.

At the front office, Youde opened up his blanket roll to have the contents inspected. The inspection turned out to be less stringent than he expected. No matter, Youde had taken special care of Yu-kun's parting note ahead of time.

Unspent money in the account was returned to Youde. It totaled about three hundred \$NT. That made Youde's expenses for the year to be less than two hundred \$NT. A very frugal year indeed, Youde mused.

Two plain-clothes men – it was obvious that they were military personnel by their carriage – approached and took charge of Yu and Youde.

"You are going home!" One said with a smile.

The civilian clothes fit uneasily on them. Youde thought they were probably Panchang(squad leaders) from the Military Court.

When they got out of the front gate, they found two pedicabs waiting. Yu and Youde, each paired with a plainclothesman, stepped onto separate pedicabs. The pedicab drivers looked at them with curiosity. These pedicabs were probably hired from Taipei for the round trip, Youde observed.

Slowly leaving behind the military prison, the pedicabs crossed the suspension bridge and entered the town of Hsin-tien. This was the first time since the arrest for Youde to be entering a town without handcuffs. Youde was elated as if on a sightseeing

tour.

"How long has it been?" the plain-clothed Panchang asked. He also took out a pack of cigarettes and offered them to Youde as he himself took one.

"A year and one month," Youde replied but held tight the tempted hand. I've waited for over a year, another few hours isn't going to hurt me now. But admittedly, the cigarette offer was the greatest temptation ever.

"Not bad, not bad," Panchang nodded with understanding. He then added, "I've rarely heard anybody let out after only a year and one month of re-education."

The duration of one year and one month included the whole length of time since he was first summoned for investigation. The actual time spent at An-kang Re-Education Branch was three months and the time served since the verdict was six months. Youde did not see any need to correct it for Panchang.

A long while later, Panchang said, "A man who says he is your brother has been waiting in front of the office since we left to pick you up."

Youde asked him where they were going. They were headed for the Military Court on Ching-tao East Road, of course.

As they approached Taipei, the traffic got busier and the pedicabs moved with maddening deliberateness.

People on the outside world busied themselves in the hustle bustle and paid no attention to this small procession. Are they as unconcerned about the executed ones or the ones still in prison? Youde wondered?

At long last the pedicabs arrived at the Military Court

Building.

For Youde, this was the third time to enter this front gate.

Yu's and Youde's brothers were waiting in front of the office. They must have waited like that for a few hours, for they were conversing with ease. As Youde had expected, Yu's brother, wearing a Sun Yat-sen suit, looked like a government bureaucrat.

Youde's brother walked over and lent his hand as Youde got off the pedicab. He asked the driver for the fare, took out his wallet and paid it despite Panchang's empty gesture to stop him. Panchang piled on friendly smiles and told them to step inside for the release processing.

Youde's brother said, "In any case, it ended well. I got the notice only last night."

Counselor Fu was there as they stepped into the office. Fu asked Youde's brother to sign and thumb press some documents, then asked Youde to do the same. He then led Yu and Youde into a room in the back to meet a man who appeared to be his superior – a sharp looking man in military uniform. The man looked at Yu and Youde through the top of his lenses and said, "You must become good citizens and never enter here again."

He then asked Fu, "Have you told them?"

"Yes," Fu answered, standing ram-rod straight.

"All right then."

Yu and Youde copied Fu's action, bowed to the man, then left the room. Whereupon Fu immediately said to them, "Don't forget what I told you in our individual conversations."

"Yes."

"If you do something untoward, I'll be in trouble too."

He meant that they should never tell anybody about what they've heard or seen during their imprisonment.

They thanked Counselor Fu at the door as they shook hands and parted. More than ever, Youde felt lucky to have Fu as his re-education counselor.

Walking out of the gate, they found the same pedicab drivers still waiting. Once more Youde climbed into the pedicab, this time sharing it with his brother.

They waved goodbye to the Yu brothers, though Youde was never able to get close to Yu while inside.

The pedicab rolled toward his brother's home on Hsu-chow Road. Youde's brother reached over and took Youde's hands from his knees.

"You've been through a lot. But let's be thankful that you returned home whole and healthy."

"Thank you. Is mother in good health?"

"Yes. She's lost some weight but is in good spirits. I phoned her last night to let her know right away."

There was no phone at Youde's house, so the telephone messages were relayed through his uncle's.

Soon, they arrived at his brother's Japanese style house.

Youde's sister-in-law scrambled out of the house. Upon seeing Youde's prisoner-like appearance, her eyes brimmed with tears. Obeying mother's instructions to the letter, the sister-in-law burned some silver-paper (a money offering to God) at the doorway, then lit some incense and handed them to Youde and made him offer thanks. Next, she sat Youde down by the hallway facing the garden and made him eat a bowl of plain noodle soup. This was

another ancient custom.

Stepping up to the tatami room, Youde's eyes went straight to the wall clock. It was half past four. His sister-in-law prepared a bath for him right away and laid out a new set of underwear. On the kitchen counter, he saw an assortment of dinner dishes awaiting him. Youde was grateful for his sister-in-law's trouble.

Oh, the joy of soaking in hot water again after thirteen months! It was beyond words. As soon as he got out of the bath, the sister-in-law urged him to go get a haircut. In the old days people getting out of prison were required to shave their heads. Nowadays a cut and a shampoo would do.

Youde got on a bicycle to head for the barbershop. The ride was more than a bit rusty.

It was dusk when he came out of the barbershop.

His sister-in-law's hearty dinner was waiting.

Youde's family traditionally rarely touched alcohol, maybe an occasional beer just to be a good sport. In this, the Confucian admonition against drinking might have something to do with it, but more likely it was because the family was never upper crust. Just the same, Confucius never said a word about smoking and for whatever reason, the men in the family were all heavy smokers. Now, Youde sat across from his brother, lit a cigarette and took a long, long draw, for the first time in thirteen months.

Youde's brother said, "Panto's attempt to go back to work seems to have failed but you will get your job back for sure. I looked into it and was assured that people with 'not-guilty re-education verdicts can get their jobs back. First of all, you have yet to fulfill the teaching obligations for being sent abroad to study."

Teachers who studied in America on government scholarships were obligated to work at their original posts for three years upon their return, in Youde's case in Putzu High School. If it weren't for Yu-kun, Youde would have been working at the school, promoting democracy and, if advancing smoothly, would have been heading for a brilliant future in education. But now, for one thing, the government was not likely to put a person with a 'Red' label in important position. On Youde's part too, he had not a scintilla of desire to rise to a high position under this government. From this point on, all he wanted was to treasure the happiness of living peacefully with his mother, his wife and children.

After the cigarette, they sat down to dinner. Youde's eyes moistened at the sight of the bowl of white rice. 'My prison friends are probably walking around the room after eating their dinner.' Youde picked up the chopsticks barely containing his tears. Every dish was delicious. Youde felt it was almost too wasteful to eat them all in one meal. The conversation at the dinner table ranged from the talk about family members, about prison life and international developments. It continued long after the dinner and into the dead of the night.

114. Going Home

At daybreak the following morning, Youde bade goodbye to his brother and sister-in-law and got on the first express train from Taipei to Chia-yi. This time he carried with him not the bundle tied in the floral scarf but a smart, American-bought suitcase that

his wife had sent to Taipei just for this occasion. The suitcase that had once been jam-packed with novel gifts from the land of America – even Santa Clause would have looked upon it with envy -- was now filled with only dirty laundry and items in need of sanitization, not a single item to please little Ah-jing. Yet he looked forward to this reunion with more yearning than any before.

The train was not crowded. Nevertheless, it was noisy with chatter. People talked about trivial things in exaggerated manners. But Youde, sitting by himself in a corner seat by the window, was not at all annoyed. Rather, he enjoyed the fast tempo of human conversation that he had been long deprived of. 'There's no need to hush and I can talk to any man or woman as I wish. I am free now', Youde realized with ever more appreciation.

The train sped south.

The scenery outside the train window soothed his ravaged heart. The fields of Taiwan's late autumn in November were still abundantly green, a rich brocade woven from the blackness of harvested fields, golden rice stalks awaiting harvest and the brilliant emerald leaves of the sugar cane.

The nearby hills and mountains were a whole cloth of green from the dense evergreens, only a few red leaves poking through here and there. And faraway, the dark green mountain range meandered, drawn sharply against the blue sky. The landscape was peaceful itself. 'No matter how you looked at it, it was not a landscape that could cultivate violent personalities,' Youde thought.

The train entered the tunnel. The passengers hurriedly lowered the windows.

Youde recalled the ride a year ago when he was sent to Taipei. Unlike that trip, this time he saw in the window's reflection not the pitiful Huang Sheng-san in the drama he once played, but rather, a well groomed, fine looking young man, one with all the appearances of a man heading for home to hug his wife and children! A smile came to his face. And for no reason, he remembered how he had spurned the offer of cigarettes from the kind police officer who accompanied him last time. Youde reached into his breast pocket, pulled out a cigarette and lit it. 'I am free now.'

The train stopped at a station. The food vendors swarmed to the window.

Youde stood up and bought a can of candy drops, a humble present for Ah-jing. The image of the Bull's daughter, little Ah-bi, quickly doubled up with that of Ah-jing's.

The express arrived at Chia-yi ahead of schedule. Youde walked the length of the overpass toward the light rail station where the train to Putzu originated. This small train had always meant the smell of home to Youde. A train of only two or three cars, it was the only suitable transportation for people lugging a load and Youde took many a trip home on it during his student days. He remembered how lots of people would greet the students at the platform and vie to carry their luggage.

It was also by this train that Youde returned from America roughly a year ago, with three suitcases no less. At that homecoming, many friends and co-workers also came to the station, not to mention the special agents who coldly looked on from the station master's window.

'Will my wife be there to greet me? I informed her last night

that I'd be arriving by this train.'

The train traveled west along the Tropic of Cancer, cutting across the golden rice paddies and brimming, green fields of sugar cane.

The ride, with its comforting swaying, had always induced sweet dozing. But today Youde was not able to get any shut-eye, too worked up by the approaching reunion with his family. Instead, on the back of his closed eyes, first the images of his mother, his wife, his daughter and the son he had yet to meet went by like a slide show. They were soon replaced by the images of his fallen friends: Yu-kun, Wen-bang and others. He could see them vividly and down to the last detail, now talking, now gesturing. They will never again ride this train and step off at the platform of that white train station.

The train whistled, a loud one for a light rail.

Youde poked his head out of the window to look ahead. The white building at the edge of the huge expanse of green field came into view. As it got close, he spotted a figure on the platform, a lone figure holding a child's hand. That's got to be Panto. She is here after all!

Youde took out his handkerchief and waved widely.

The figure loomed larger and larger till Youde was able to make out it was Panto. When he got even closer, he could see that she was holding a baby in the other arm – the baby he had yet to see. Youde imagined the small cluster of mother and children waiting patiently for the train to appear on the horizon.

The small train whistled once more, then glided into the platform. Youde jumped off the train before it barely stopped.



■ The author and his family at home after his release in November, 1955

Suddenly, a plume of white steam spewed out from under the engine with a puff and streamed onto the platform, temporarily obscuring Youde's vision.

"Papa!"

Breaking the wafting white steam, Ah-jing was running toward him dressed in her red polka-dot dress. And on her heels was Panto racing over with the baby in her arms.

A river of tears, no longer stoppable, streaked Youde's cheeks.

He dropped the suitcase and picked up Ah-jing in his arms, his tears wetting her cheeks.

"Honey, welcome home ..." Youde's wife, choking back her tears, reached out and grabbed tightly onto his arm. A husband who had returned from a place worse than hell. When Youde put Ah-jing down, Panto unabashedly slipped herself into his arms. Youde found the four-and half month old baby smiling innocently in her arm.

"I caused you a lot of suffering," Youde said, squeezing Panto tighter.

Panto simply said, "I'm glad it's over," and let the tears freely run down her cheeks.

The baby in her arms was livelier than his snapshot suggested, a robust little fellow. Looking down at the baby, Youde broke into a smile: No wonder everybody said he looked like his father.

The baby laughed when Youde put his face close and poked at the baby's cheek.

"We had better hurry. Mother's waiting at home."

"Then let's go."

Youde picked up Ah-jing again and carried his suitcase with his other hand.

They walked the length of the deserted platform and exited the station from the narrow ticket-taker's gate.

The large clock in the waiting room was pointing at half past twelve.

Outside the white station building, the mid-day sun was brilliant, flooding the road that led to Youde's home with white light, as if making a lie of his nightmare of the past thirteen months.