Introduction

Contemporary Chinese short fiction of the past three decades has not met with conspicuous popular or critical success outside of the People's Republic, even though translations of representative work have been made widely available. Several reasons have been advanced to account for this lukewarm reception. One is that the consciously political intent of modern Chinese literature has yet to find an artistic expression of consistently high literary standard. More often than not, the writing has been tendentious and didactic without the redeeming style, depth of characterization, psychological insight and narrative control necessary to make it convincing and realistic to a discerning reader. As Lu Xun, the father of the modern Chinese short story, observed: All art may be propaganda, but not all propaganda is art. This disparity between form and content is something that the Western reader is apt to sense most acutely and single out for criticism.

The Western reader also faces the problem of accomodating himself to a Chinese reality and vision of the world which is often quite alien to his own. Contemporary Chinese fiction is firmly rooted in a Chinese context and addressed to a popular Chinese reading audience. What is fresh and heroic to the Chinese reader may appear contrived and melodramatic to Western sensibilities, and what passes for the daring and controversial in Chinese society is often tame and innocuous in another context. Moreover, since language is the central form of culture, a literature in translation can, at best, convey the spirit of the original along with the literal text, and suggest the features of that

culture in the approximate language of another. Even then, subtlety of meaning may be lost, and what is agreeable in Chinese may sound dissonant and graceless in its English equivalent.

Forged by cultural and historical forces very different from those of the West, the Chinese short story has in the past thirty years been increasingly politicized under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. It has also seen a return to a more popular base as language and subject matter have been modified to reflect the interests of a broader mass audience. This was in line with the view that socialist literature should educate and inspire the workers, peasants and soldiers about the revolution and the building of a new society. Its tone was to be both optimistic and partisan. The direction of this literary policy was backed by the concept of combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism: while literature was to portray life realistically (from the standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat), it should also do so in a heightened form and on a higher plane than would be possible in real life.

The impact of these changes on the literary writing of the new period was twofold. On the one hand, it encouraged a new generation of writers to emerge and revived interest in the more popular techniques of the native storyteller tradition. On the other hand, the increasing politicization and focus on popular roots marked a growing tendency toward insularity and dogmatism. The short stories written in the fifties were generally more successful in their treatment of rural themes and in depicting the struggles in the transition between the old and the new among the peasantry than they were in dealing with the urban scene and with the problems of bureaucracy. The heroic and the positive were well-defined and highlighted; the problematic and troublesome were either ignored or not handled in a serious way.

This tendency toward narrowing the acceptable limits of social criticism was consolidated during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and reinforced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The former saw an abrupt end to the more flexible literary policy of the Hundred Flowers period which had immediately preceded it, and the latter witnessed a political and literary extremism from which China is only now beginning to recover. Foreign literary influence came under suspicion and was severely restricted, the Chinese literary tradition itself was attacked for its feudal aspects and the concept of revolutionary romanticism was developed into the dogmatic principle

of the 'three dominances' (san tuchu). The result was a literature of formula and stereotype, now officially denounced as a 'literature of conspiracy' for its service to immediate sectarian political ends.

Responsibility for the strident and predictable quality of literary output during the Cultural Revolution has been attributed to Lin Biao and the Gang of Four for imposing a 'fascist cultural tyranny' on the literary world. Following the political downfall of the Gang of Four in October of 1976, the policy of 'letting a hundred flowers blossom' was revived, and writers encouraged to deal with certain themes and realities which were formerly forbidden or suppressed.

The present collection of short stories was selected from pieces published in China between the end of 1977 and the end of 1978. They are a representative sample of what has been officially termed 'new wave' literature (chaotao wenxue), but more popularly known as 'literature of the wounded' (shanghen wenxue), after the story *The Wounded*. All of them deal with the consequences of the Cultural Revolution. In both choice of theme and narrative treatment, these stories indicate a significant change from the mainstream of short fiction over the past three decades. This new direction in writing – along with its specific features and political background – deserves a brief introduction.

First of all, these stories give a more realistic account of the Cultural Revolution than its predecessors could or did. The doctrine that a 'literature of exposure' (baolu wenxue) was anathema to the socialist system has been circumvented by the reminder that Mao approved of literature which exposed "the dark forces harming the masses". This relaxed interpretation of what constituted legitimate 'exposure' was in tune with the official campaign to "expose and criticize the Gang of Four". It has made a new 'realism' possible, even if its boundaries are clearly defined. Acknowledgement of the violence and suffering and lawlessness of the Cultural Revolution, previously taboo, is now permissable – providing that blame is pinned on Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.

A related consequence of this literary thaw is the revival of the tragic theme and the debate which has surrounded it in Chinese literary and academic circles. This was occasioned by the publication of the story *'The Wounded'* by Lu Xinhua in a Shanghai newspaper in the late summer of 1978. Was tragedy possible in a socialist society? The official answer was usually negative, but as the direction of literature

took a new turn in exploring the darker side of life during the Cultural Revolution, there was a storm of differing opinions. This debate has not been resolved, although some practical concessions have been granted. Thus, socialist tragedy, while not due to any defects in the system itself, is indeed possible because of the existence of unscrupulous people and backward influences that are inevitable during this transitional stage of historical development. In other words, the 'tragic aspect' of these stories must be traced to the machinations of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. This understanding is made explicit at some point in every story of the present collection.

Another striking departure from the narrative pattern of stories written in the past decade is the return of the intellectual to a prominent role as sympathetic protagonist and positive character. Teachers, scientists and technicians occupy centre stage in these stories, while workers, peasants and soldiers recede or disappear from view altogether. Older Party cadres also make a strong comeback, and urban settings predominate over rural ones. This reversal of emphasis is hardly surprising. Intellectuals and veteran Party cadres were much abused during the Cultural Revolution and their reputations suffered badly. Now that the national policy course is set for the realization of the Four Modernizations by the turn of the century, it is essential that this damage be repaired and that those with desperately needed expertise and experience be respected and encouraged in their work. Accordingly, intellectuals and older cadres are portrayed in a very favourable light: their past ordeals are pictured as heroic and their future destiny as architects of modernization as even more so.

Intellectuals and veteran Party cadres also play another important role in these stories in that they serve as models to disaffected or disillusioned youth and as bearers of the revolutionary tradition to the next generation. This touches on perhaps the most interesting development in the 'literature of the wounded': the depiction of middle or 'developing' characters (zhongjian renwu, zhuanbian renwu). Middle characters – those who are not good or bad, but are marked by a mixture of weaknesses and strengths, and are sometimes led astray by their lack of resolve or insufficient political understanding of issues – did not fare well in the literary conventions of the Cultural Revolution. Viewed as politically suspect, they were denied any major role in officially published literature. The preferred term even now is 'developing' character, which implies change in a positive direction –

from ignorance to awareness, vacillation to resolution, despair to hope, and so on.

These stories abound with middle and 'developing' characters who are full of shortcomings and doubts; moreover, they vie with more positive characters for the reader's sympathy and attention. This was virtually unheard of in the literature of the past decade. Peng Xiaolei in *Awake, My Brother!*, Tang Lin in *Dedication*, Wang Xiaohua in *The Wounded*, and even secondary characters such as Dandan in *Something Most Precious* and Yang Qiong in *Sacred Duty*, are all middle or 'developing' characters. They are also victims, the wounded, whose psychological and emotional scars parallel those physical injuries sustained by an older generation of revolutionaries.

Chinese reviewers have praised these stories for their frank treatment of juvenile delinquency, love and marriage, family separation, and miscarriage of justice – questions which had been avoided or dealt with only obliquely in the literature of the recent past. There is admittedly a fresher approach here to real social concerns, but the deeper issues at the heart of these stories remain the persistent themes of betrayal, succession, and sacrifice.

The betrayal of youthful ideals makes the problem of succession a central one in *Class Counsellor, Awake, My Brother!, The Wounded*, and *Something Most Precious*. In most of the stories, the Party acts as the agent of redemption, either indirectly – through the good offices of Chairman Hua smashing the Gang of Four – or directly through its representatives, or both. Wang Gongbo's sacrifice near the end of *Sacred Duty*, for example, inspires Yang Qiong to new courage and commitment, while Chen Qingshui appears as his natural successor. Similarly, the integrity and determination of Zhang Junshi in *Class Counsellor* and of Secretary Lu in *Awake, My Brother!* promises to bring Xie Huimin and Peng Xiaolei back into the fold.

Such is not the case in the story *Something Most Precious*, where the harrowing encounter between father and son discloses differences which cannot be immediately bridged. Dandan's betrayal of his uncle Chen and his betrayal in turn by propaganda during the Cultural Revolution cannot be forgiven by his father, who cannot betray his own and the Party's principles. In this brief tragic sketch, the wounds are not healed and the problem of succession remains unresolved.

Sacrifice is also a constant theme. The story *Dedication* endorses sacrifice as a noble and heroic act worthy of emulation. The scientist

Lu Yimin undergoes the trials of the Cultural Revolution as a kind of rite of passage and emerges more willing than ever to make further sacrifices for the future. When the younger generation has trouble coping with the renewed demands for sacrifice, it is the brave example of an older generation of revolutionaries that is called forth to reawaken its commitment. Typically, although they are ailing, infirm or dying, these older characters (Wang Gongbo, Yan Yixing, Secretary Lu, Wang Xiaohua's mother, Zeng Tonglin) are still willing to sacrifice what little strength they have left for the goal of modernization. And if personal example is not enough to strike a responsive chord, these stories – particularly *Class Counsellor, Dedication* and *Marriage* – appeal to patriotic and nationalistic sentiments to justify their demands for sacrifice.

The weaknesses of these short stories will be obvious to the critical reader. Characterization still lacks depth and subtlety: individuals are oversimplified or overdrawn and their personalities are often inconsistent or one-dimensional. Much of the optimism in the endings is unconvincing and artificial. The intrusion of political editorializing is not only tiresome, but also unnecessary to make a point already obvious from the text itself. Subject matter is still far too limited and restricted, and the range of positive characters too narrow. The exploration of the causes and origins of social problems is often superficial and abstract. In many areas, the political implications of theory and practice are contradictory. These are only a few of the shortcomings of this collection, and a full critical analysis of them is beyond the scope of the present introduction.

On the positive side, these stories have reintroduced a much needed element of realism back into contemporary Chinese fiction. In the Chinese context, this is a bracing tonic for a readership impatient with the false optimism and monotony of literature in the past few years. The willingness to portray the quality of suffering in a contemporary setting is enough to draw enthusiastic approval and is a definite step forward in the development of current writing in China. The 'literature of the wounded' deserves to be read, even if it does not quite come to grips with the problems that it raises.

At the present time in China, the debate is still going on as to how far this kind of literature can go. Literary circles have already been set up at various universities to encourage further writing of this type. Whether these representative pieces can be taken as harbingers of a

radical change for the better in contemporary Chinese fiction remains to be seen. The direction is a promising one, and the reader can only hope that it will be pursued a lot further down the road.

Bennett Lee

Hong Kong

March, 1979

The Wounded

Lu Xinhua

Translated by Bennett Lee

It was Chinese New Year's Eve. Outside the train window, nothing was visible but the twinkling of coloured lights that flashed by near and far. This was the spring of 1978.

Xiaohua turned her gaze back to the carriage and glanced at her watch. It was midnight. She tidied her long black hair and rubbed her bloodshot eyes gently, then turned and took out a small pocket mirror from her bag hanging by the window. Adjusting her face to the pale light, she looked at herself in the mirror. It was a squarish, pretty face with a light complexion: a straight nose, thin lips, well-proportioned features, a chin that jutted slightly forward, dark eyebrows and deep-set, quiet eyes that sparkled occasionally in the dim light. She had never scrutinized her own young and attractive face so carefully before. As she gazed, however, she saw tears forming in her eyes. With a startled gesture, she clasped the mirror to her breast and cast a sweeping glance around. Only when she saw that everyone else in the carriage was sleeping did she relax, heave a sigh and put the mirror back in her bag.

She was tired, but couldn't sleep. For a moment she rested her head in her arms on top of the tea table, but within a few minutes lifted it again. Across from her were a young engaged couple travelling to Shanghai to see their relatives. They had

talked animatedly about their studies and work and the changed political situation of the past year but were now worn out and slept leaning against one another. On the other side, a middle-aged woman from the city was dozing off next to a little girl about four or five years old who was already asleep. Suddenly the girl kicked her legs out and cried in her dream: "Mama!" The woman was startled awake and leaned over to kiss her daughter's face. "It's alright, darling. What's the matter?" But the girl didn't say anything more and, after stirring slightly, went back to sleep.

Again silence reigned. Only the train continued to rumble rhythmically, like a lullaby, and the carriage rocked the passengers gently asleep.

But she still couldn't sleep. Seeing the couple opposite her as well the mother and her daughter, she felt a wave of loneliness sweeping over her again. That cry of "Mama!" from the child in her dream was like a knife through the heart. The word had become such a foreign sound to her, yet what a sense of hope and expectation it stirred up in her now! She could almost imagine the gray hair and weathered face in front of her, and wanted to rush immediately over to her embrace and beg forgiveness. She shook her head and tears welled up in her eyes again, but she held them back and took a deep breath. With her head resting in her hands and elbows on the tea table, she looked out of the window once again.

"Nine years have passed by ..." she recalled with bitterness.

That was when she had struggled with her own anger against her 'renegade' mother. Her mind in a turmoil, she had signed up to go down to the countryside before graduation. It was so hard to comprehend: how her mother, a long-time revolutionary, was something that crawled out of an enemy dog-hole, a figure like the character Daiyu in the novel *Song of Youth*, to be hated and detested.

She hoped that the charge would prove to be untrue.

Hadn't her father, when he was alive, told her how she had risked her life time after time and braved enemy gunfire to rescue wounded soldiers? How could she have surrendered and turned traitor after she was captured and thrown into prison?

When her mother was branded a renegade, Xiaohua lost all her best friends and fellow students and the family had to move to a small and dingy room. Because of her mother, she was expelled from the Red Guards and suffered all kinds of discrimination. As a result, she hated her mother even more for her treacherous and shameful past. At the same time she couldn't forget her mother's deep love for her, and the fact that her parents had treasured her, their only child, like a pearl ever since she could remember. And now it was like an ugly scar on her clean and fair complexion, a mark of shame. She had no choice but to criticize her own petit-bourgeois instincts and draw a line of demarkation between herself and her mother. She had to leave her, and the sooner and the farther away the better.

When she took the train that left Shanghai, she was just a young girl of sixteen with a wan face and pigtails. Amongst the middle school students who were going to the countryside, her childlike face and lean figure stood out as all the more helpless and vulnerable. She sat in a corner of the carriage staring out of the window. None of the other students came over to talk to her, nor did she try to talk to anyone else. It wasn't until the train sped into a mountain tunnel that she looked up at the two pieces of luggage on the rack above which were hers – a canvas bag and a bedding roll which she had packed carefully behind her mother's back. Right up to the time that she boarded the train with her classmates, her mother had been completely unaware of her plans. She will probably have arrived home by now, she thought, and would have seen the note left on the table which read:

I am breaking with you, and with this family.

Don't try to find me.

Xiaohua June 6, 1969

She would cry, Xiaohua thought, and perhaps be hurt. And even if she herself couldn't forget the loving care that she had received since childhood she must show no pity, she told herself. After all, she was a traitor, even if she was my mother.

The train had by then quieted down. It was only then that she noticed the students around her – some sleeping, leaning back against their seats, and others reading. The young man about her age sitting opposite her was staring at her in curiousity. She looked down in embarrassment, but he asked her in a friendly way: "Which year are you?" "1969" she replied, raising her head. "1969?" he echoed in surprise. "Then you ..." "I graduated ahead of schedule." When she said this much, her eyes brightened for a moment, as if grateful for his concern. She took the opportunity of looking him over. He was of medium height, fair-complexioned with a pair of lively eyes. "What's your name?" "Su Xiaolin. And yours?" "Wang Xiaohua" she answered, blushing.

Several students who had overheard their conversation stopped reading and broke in. "Wang Xiaohua, how did you manage to graduate ahead of schedule?" She was dazed for a moment, then thought she would try to bluff her way through, but she was never a very good liar and in the end told them the truth. When she finished her story she hung her head, fully expecting them to give her a cold reception. Instead, they reassured and comforted her sympathetically. Su Xiaolin said: "You've done the right thing. Don't worry, when we get to the countryside we'll all help you out." Xiaohua thanked them all with much gratitude.

Time passed and as she became accustomed to the warm support of collective life, Xiaohua began to free herself from the bitter memories of her family and along with the other students from Shanghai began to settle down in a coastal village in Liaoning province in the northeastern part of China.

She made steady progress and in the following year made an application to join the Communist Youth League. To her surprise, they turned her down, citing the fact that her mother was a renegade.

When she found out, she went to see the League Branch Secretary in tears and pleaded with him: "I've broken off all relations with my family and have nothing to do with my mother anymore. You must have known all this ..." Su Xiaolin and several other of her friends confirmed this. "It's true. Last year her mother found out that she was here and sent a parcel of clothes and food, but Xiaohua sent it back without even opening it. Even the letters that her mother wrote she sent back without even opening them." "Yes, I know" said the League Branch Secretary with regret, "but Shanghai has sent a letter of investigation to our League Committee here. And then the provincial leadership has always put great stress on this ..." He gave a shrug and a bitter, helpless smile.

Xiaohua was at a loss as to what to do.

It wasn't until the spring of her fourth there that she was reluctantly admitted into the Youth League. By that time, she no longer felt so excited by it any more.

Chinese New Year came again. This was the hardest time for her. One by one the young people living there went home to visit their families, leaving her alone in the dormitory. Outside, the air was pungent with the smell of gunpowder as firecrackers were set off to welcome the New Year and children everywhere were singing, shouting and dancing. The sounds of drums and gongs rang out through the night.

The little joy she did have came when some peasant families had her over to their homes, but once she went back to her empty room it was even more depressing than before.

Her only comfort was the sincere concern and support that the peasants showed her. They had written many times to the League committee demanding approval of her application for Youth League membership. Su Xiaolin also came to see her

often. Over the past years of living and working together, a close and warm relationship had developed between them. Su Xiaolin liked her for her innocent and honest character and for her hardworking spirit. She on her part thought of him as the only person in the world that she could trust and often poured out her inner troubles to him. Since that evening on the beach when they had had a heart-to-heart talk, they had become even closer.

After a long stroll along the beach, they had sat down on the sand. Before them, under the moonlight, stretched the sea. An onshore breeze brought the smell of the ocean in along with the washing sound of the waves on the shore. They were silent for a time, then Xiaolin suddenly asked her: "Xiaohua, do you miss your family?" She was taken by surprise, but raised her head and, after a moment's hesitation, replied: "No. Why are you asking me that?"

"You know, Xiaohua, I think you ought to write home and ask about your mother. Lin Biao was responsible for persecuting a lot of old cadres. Your mother just might have been one of them."

"No. It's not possible" said Xiaohua, fingering a corner of her coat. She shook her head in anguish, "I've considered it so many times before, but it's impossible. I heard that Zhang Chunqiao himself handled her case and gave the verdict. It couldn't have been a mistake." She shook her head again.

Xiaolin finally sighed and began speaking his thoughts aloud angrily. "Chairman Mao said that there are bound to factors that a person derives from his or her class or family origin, but what is decisive is a person's actual deeds. Yet it seems that 'like father, like son' is dominant in politics and that if one's parents are reactionaries, then the offspring can't be otherwise."

It was beginning to get chilly. Seeing that Xiaohua only had a thin jacket on, he asked: "Are you cold?" "No." She gazed at him with feeling, "How about you?" He lowered his eyes again and gazed silently out at the shimmering water,

Liang Zhaoxian

then spoke again. "Xiaohua, do you think it's wrong for a revolutionary to have emotions?" She couldn't answer him as thoughts of her own life brought the pain back to her again. When Xiaolin turned and saw the tears welling up in her eyes, he tried to say something to comfort her, but he could hardly hold back his own tears. Finally he blurted out what he had been keeping in for such a long time. "Xiaohua, you haven't got any family to depend on. If you believe in me, then ... then let us be good friends!" Her heart was pounding. She looked at him with astonishment and disbelief. "Really? Do you really mean ...?" "Yes, I mean it, of course, I do" affirmed Xiaolin, offering his hand in warm friendship. "Xiaohua, trust me!" She fell into his arms and embraced him.

A smile reappeared on Xiaohua's face. In the fields and in the dormitory her sunny voice could be heard more and more often, singing happily. Her face regained a healthy colour and shone with a youthful glow.

The following autumn, because her health wasn't good and because they needed teachers in the local village school, Xiaohua was transferred there to teach. Xiaolin was shifted to a job in the commune office.

One afternoon, after attending a staff meeting there, she went to Xiaolin's dormitory. The door to his room was unlocked, but he wasn't in. As she picked up some of his dirty clothes to wash for him, she happened to see his diary on the small table near his bed. When she casually flipped through a few pages, she happened to read what was written the night before:

> I have a real headache today. Secretary Li told me this morning that the county Party committee was planning to transfer me to the propaganda department, so they're looking into my political background. He said that the County committee had stressed that my relationship with Xiaohua was a problem

of world outlook and class line. If it continued, they would have to reconsider my transfer. I just can't understand this rationale ...

Xiaohua was stunned. She left the room hurriedly and walked back to her school in a daze, only crying when she had lain down on her bed.

The next morning after breakfast, head throbbing.

She went straight to the Secretary of the County Party committee and said to him calmly: "Secretary Li, I'm breaking off with Su Xiaolin. Please don't let my association with him affect his future."

After this, it was as if she had become a different person, even more impassive and taciturn than before. Although Xiaolin refused the job at the county level and tried to court her as before, she deliberately avoided him. By now, she had realized that her own status would not change and that the noose around her own neck would also encircle anyone who associated closely with her. While she did truly love Xiaolin, she felt that it would be wrong to involve him in any trouble. The doctor had told her that her health might improve if she got married, but she was prepared to sacrifice her own happiness for his. She made up her mind to never again open up her heart to anyone.

From this time on she channelled all her love and attention onto the schoolchildren that she taught. She spent her savings on buying them school supplies and devoted her evenings to helping them review their lessons. The close bonds that developed between herself and the children helped her to forget, for the time being, all that had gone before.

Another two years went by. Xiaohua had matured into a young woman. After the fall of the Gang of Four, she felt more relaxed and at ease and began to smile again. When she took part in a parade demonstration organized by the villagers to celebrate their downfall, she was moved as she had scarcely been before. But when she fell to thinking of the

past again, she would lapse once more into melancholy.

One day as she was looking over some of her student's exercises, a friend handed her a letter with the postmark Jiangsu province on it. Who could it be from? She wondered. When she opened the letter, she discovered that it was from her mother. The address had changed. If it had been before, perhaps she would have torn it up right away, but this time she couldn't help but read it through.

Dear Xiaohua:

It has been 8 years now since you broke off relations with me. It was not your fault and I don't blame you for it. I just want to tell you that my case has been rectified and that the incorrect verdict passed on me has been reversed. The 'renegade' label put on me has been overturned as part of the plot of the Gang of Four to seize power.

I am now back at my old school post in a leadership position. Unfortunately, my health has been poor these past few years and I'm suffering from severe heart trouble and rheumatic arthritis. Still, I'm determined to do what I can for the Party.

Xiaohua, it's been eight years since I last saw you. I want to come and see you but my health won't allow it. Please, can you come to see me, as soon as possible?

With love,

Mother 20.12.1977.

Xiaohua was dumbfounded. "Can it be true?" she asked herself. Her heart was pounding.

At ten o'clock in the evening Xiaohua lay on her bed reading the letter over and over again. Somehow it was as if she were already home, opening the door of their old home and seeing her mother at the table, writing. When she looked up, her mother cried out in surprise: "Xiaohua!" and rushed

over toward her. Overcome with emotion, she embraced her mother in her arms. After a while, she lifted her head, wiped the tears from her eyes and asked: "Mother, what are you writing?" "Nothing. It's ... nothing at all." She tried to hide the paper from her with a sudden look of terror. Xiaohua quickly snatched the paper and read on it the words "Supplementary Confession On My Case As A Renegade". Xiaohua stared at her and cried out: "You're shameless!" Then she turned abruptly to walk out. "Where are you going?" "It's none of your business!" But her mother one step ahead of her and blocked the door, hair dishevelled. Suddenly Xiaohua screamed and came back to her senses. She was alone on her own bed. Panic-stricken, she sat up and felt her own heart beating wildly. "Should I go to see her?" wondered Xiaohua aloud. She couldn't make up her mind.

Two days before Chinese New Year, after receiving an official letter from the school where her mother worked, Xiaohua quickly packed her luggage and caught the earliest train for Shanghai.

So now she sat on the train, heading for Shanghai. How could she calm herself down? On the one hand she was excited and happy, yet on the other hand miserable and full of regret.

At daybreak on the first day of the Chinese New Year, the train entered the Shanghai station with a confident, prolonged whistle.

When she got off the train, Xiaohua walked all the way down the platform with the little girl and her mother and saw them off at a bus stop. Only then did she jump on a number 18 tramcar, one bag hanging from her shoulder and the other grasped firmly in her hand, and head for home.

Outside the tram window were familiar street scenes and buildings from her childhood. The thought of going home filled her with a special happiness. She thought to herself: It's Spring Festival. I wonder what mother is doing now? She doesn't like to sleep in so she must be up by now. When I

open the door, she'll probably be having breakfast. Then I'll just sneak up quietly and call out to her in a gentle voice so that she'll be startled and turn around and see me. Then she'll be so surprised that she'll cry ...

With these thoughts in her head she got off the tram, turned into 954th Lane and counted the address numbers: 16-18-20. At 20 she stopped and went up to the familiar brown door. Trying to restrain her excitement and nervousness, she tapped twice. No answer. Perhaps she's not up yet, she thought. She knocked again, louder this time. Still no answer. Now a little anxious, Xiaohua pounded on the door. But the house was still silent.

A little girl suddenly appeared behind her, half-chewing a piece of cake, and asked her: "Who are you looking for? The people in that place moved out three days ago." "Where did she go?" asked Xiaohua. The little girl hesitated, then ran back to her house. A moment later, a woman in her thirties came out.

"Are you looking for Mrs. Wang, the principal? She's moved to No. 1, 816th Lane. May I ask who you are?" Xiaohua paused for a second, then answered with a smile: "I have some business with her. Thanks."

Xiaohua went to No. 1, 816th Lane and found a newly-built dormitory for workers. When she saw a pot of plum blossoms, her mother's favourite flower, on the door step, she knew she had come to the right place.

But the door was closed. Perhaps she's not feeling well and stayed in bed, thought Xiaohua. Before she could knock at the door, a middle-aged man brushing his teeth outside No. 2 called out to her: "Are you looking for Mrs. Wang? She's not here. She fell ill yesterday and was taken to the hospital." Xiaohua gave a start. "Which hospital? Do you know the room number?" The man shook his head. "I'm sorry. I don't know." Xiaohua asked if she could leave her luggage there for the time being and rushed off in the direction of the local hospital.

It being New Year's Day, the corridor of hospital was empty. She ran up to the information desk but found noone there. When she turned around she saw several white-coated doctors coming around the corner talking to one another. Xiaohua went up to them and asked: "Excuse me, doctor, but can you tell me which room Mrs. Wang is in?" One of them, a thin man wearing glasses, looked at her for moment, then, as if remembering something, handed her a note which was in his hand. "You must be from her school. She has been seriously ill. Could I ask you to send a cable to her daughter? Here's the address. Mrs. Wang passed away this morning. Please tell her ..."

"No No." Xiaohua stared ahead in shock. Suddenly she began to walk forward, then stopped. "Which ... which room?" The doctor pointed down the hall. "Number 2."

She stumbled down the hall in a daze and pushed open the door. All the people in the room turned around and stared at her. She pushed her way through them and made her way to the side of the bed. With trembling hands, she drew aside the sheet covering her mother's face. It was a face that she hadn't seen in nine years, a face lost to her forever.

Her mother's face was pale and wan, framed by grey hair, and revealed scars of old wounds faintly visible among the creases on her forehead. The eyes were still half-opened in a tranquil gaze as if waiting for something.

"Mama!" The word that she had kept suppressed for nine years came out in a heart-rending cry. "Please look at me! Mama, I've come back." She shook her mother's arm but there was no answer.

After a long time when her crying had subsided, she looked around vacantly at the people in the room. Tears were running down their faces as well. Among them she caught sight of a very familiar face, young and handsome, that was also clouded in sorrow. It was Su Xiaolin. She almost cried out to him, but he spoke first: "Xiaohua, it's alright. It's all over now."

The following day after the cremation at Longhua, Xiaohua and Xiaolin walked quietly along the bund by the river where she had spent so much of her childhood. It was already very late and a penetrating wind was blowing in from the river. She leaned against him and felt her cold heart warmed by his presence. She was grateful to him. When he had learnt that her ailing mother had been rehabilitated, he had gone immediately to see her on his vacation time. And when he heard that she had fallen seriously ill, he had rushed to the hospital in the middle of the night to see how she was. So they had met, and he had looked after her in her daughter's place, though only for a short time. This thought was a comfort to Xiaohua.

They walked silently under the street lamps. Suddenly Xiaolin remembered the diary and took it out of his pocket, turned it to the last page and gave it to Xiaohua to read. "Your mother wrote this before she died, the night before yesterday." Under the dim lamplight, she read:

> .... to this day I've been longing for my child to come back, but she hasn't come yet. Now, seeing Xiaolin, I find I miss her even more. While she hasn't been as physically mistreated as I was by the Gang of Four, the wound in her heart will be much worse than all the wounds on my body. This is why I'm so anxious to see her again. My life is almost over, but I'll try to hold on for a few days more so that I can see her again ...

Xiaohua's eyes blurred with tears. She left Xiaolin and ran to the river's edge. Leaning against the wall, she gazed absently at the shimmering lights on the water's surface.

After a while, she raised her head. The agitation on her face turned to a quiet anger. She held Xiaolin's hand tightly and with eyes shining spoke slowly and with emphasis: "Dear mother, rest in peace. I will never forget who was responsible for your wounds and mine. I shall never forget Chairman

Hua's kindness and closely follow the Party's Central Committee headed by him and dedicate my life to the cause of the Party."

The night was peaceful and the current of the Huangpu river flowed swiftly to the east. Suddenly from the distance came the sound of a ship's whistle. Xiaohua felt a surge of resolve and, taking Xiaolin by the arm, together walked with him down the stone steps and with big strides headed toward the bright lights of Nanjing Road.

Marriage

Kong Jiesheng

Translated by Geremie Barmé

I was married to a young overseas Chinese man called Wu Guoliang at New Year. They say that good things don't come easily, and I guess that's pretty true about our marriage.

1 WE'D NEVER HAVE TALKED TO EACH OTHER IF WE HADN'T ARGUED

It all began about two years before the fall of the Gang of Four. At the time I was a deputy group leader in the Xinghua Lock Factory as well as being the Branch Secretary of the Youth League. My work was under the personal supervision of the Deputy Secretary of "political work", but thinking back on it now, I guess I was pretty muddle-head.

Wu Guoliang didn't have a very good reputation in the factory, but I never had anything to do with him. We were virtual strangers. What was guaranteed to make him unpopular was his job – he was Head Quality Control Officer of the factory. But that still wasn't really the problem. I never worried about treading on a few toes. The thing that ruined things for him was that he was an overseas Chinese who had come back to China. Overseas Chinese were even worse than "stinking old nines"* intellectuals. Lots of people

* "Chou laojiu", the ninth category of reactionary elements in China during the Cultural Revolution, literally "stinking old nine".