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In Memory of the Forgotten

I

I have long been wanting to write something in memory of some young writers – for no other reason than that grief and rage have assailed my heart now for two years, and I am eager to shake them off in this way so that I can relax. To put it bluntly – I want to forget these young people. Two years ago now, in February 1931, during the night of the seventh or the morning of the eighth, our five young writers were murdered. No Shanghai papers dared carry the news: they may not have wanted to or thought it worthwhile. *Literary News* alone had a few articles containing veiled allusions to it. In Number 11, which came out on May 25, Mr. Lin Mang observed in his *Impressions of Pai Mang*:

He wrote a good many poems, and translated some of those by the Hungarian poet Petöfi. When Lu Hsun, then editor of *Torrent*, received his manuscript, he wrote to say that he would like to meet him. But as Pai Mang did not care to meet celebrities, finally Lu Hsun looked him up himself and encouraged him as best he could to write. The young man could never sit in one place writing, though. He ran off again on his business, and before long he was arrested again. ...

This account is not quite correct. Pai Mang was not so supercilious. It was he who called on me, though not because I had expressed a wish to see him. I was not so supercilious either as to write casually to a contributor I did not know, telling him to call on me. The reason for our meeting was a perfectly normal one. He had sent in a translation from the German of a life of Petöfi, and I wrote to ask him for the original, which was printed as the preface to the collected poems. He found it more convenient to deliver the book than to post it. He was a young man in his twenties, with a serious face and a rather dark complexion. I forget what we talked about on that occasion, and can only remember that he told me his surname was Hsu and he was from Hsiangshan. I asked why the woman who signed for his mail had such a peculiar name (just what was peculiar about it I forget), and he said she liked it that way – she was a romantic. He didn't altogether see eye to eye with her. This is all I remember.

That night I checked his translation roughly with the original and found that, besides one or two slips, he had in one place deliberately distorted the meaning. Apparently he did not like the expression "national poet," for in each case he had changed this to "poet of the people." The next day I received a letter from him saying how sorry he was to have talked so much when we met, while I had talked so little and seemed cold, so he felt rather disheartened. I wrote back explaining that it was human nature to speak little at a first meeting, and told him he should not alter the original according to his own likes and dislikes. As his book was with me I sent him two of mine, suggesting that he translate a few more poems for our readers. He did so, and brought them over himself, and this time we talked more. The life and poems were later published in Volume II, Number 5 of *Torrent*, the last number to appear.

The third time we met was on a hot day, I remember, when someone knocked at the gate and I opened it to find Pai Mang. As he was wearing a thick padded gown and dripping with sweat, we both burst out laughing. Only then did he tell me that he was a revolutionary and had just been released from gaol. All his clothes and books had been confiscated, including the two volumes I had given him. He had borrowed this gown from a friend who had nothing thinner, but he had to wear a long gown. That was why he was sweating like that. I dare say this is the occasion Mr. Lin Mang was referring to when he says: "He was arrested again."

Delighted by his release, I immediately paid him for his translation so that he could buy a thinner gown. Still I was very sorry about my books falling into the hands of the police – bright pearls cast

into darkness. There was a volume of prose, another of verse. According to the German translator, the collection he had made was more complete than any collection in Hungary. They were printed by Reclam's Universal-Bibliothek, so that in Germany you could have bought them anywhere for less than a dollar. But to me they were treasures, for I had ordered them from Germany through the Maruzen Bookshop thirty years before, when I was a passionate admirer of Petöfi. I was afraid, as the book was so cheap, the shop would be unwilling to order it, and made my request with considerable trepidation. For a while I always carried it about with me; but as times alter men's affections change, and I gave up the idea of translating it. I decided it would be a happy fate for this book to be given to this lad who was as devoted to Petöfi as I had been. That is why I took this presentation seriously and got Jou Shih to deliver the two volumes for me. How unjust that they should have fallen into the hands of "Three-strippers"* and their like!

II

It was not modesty alone that stopped me from trying to meet contributors. The desire to save trouble was an important factor. I knew from long experience that nine out of ten young people, especially young writers, were hypersensitive and took themselves tremendously seriously. If you were not very careful, misunderstandings tended to arise. So I generally avoided them. If we met I was naturally too nervous to dream of asking any favours. The only man in Shanghai in those days with whom I dared laugh and chat freely, and whom I even asked to do odd jobs for me, was Jou Shih, who had taken the books to Pai Mang.

I forget when and where I first met Jou Shih. I believe he once said he had attended my lectures in Peking, so it must have been eight or nine years earlier. I forget, too, how we came to be so close to each other. However, he lodged in Chingyunli, only four or five doors from my house, and somehow or other we struck up a friendship. The first time he called I fancy he told me his name was Chao Ping-fu (Peaceful Return). But once, when talking about the colossal arrogance of the gentry in his parts, he said a certain local worthy had taken a fancy to his name, wanted it for his son, and told him – Jou Shih – to stop using it. So I suspect his original name was Ping-fu (Peace and Happiness), for that would appeal to a country gentleman more than the *fu* meaning "return." He came from Ninghai, Taichow, as you could tell at a glance from his brusque Taichow manner. He was rather impractical too, and sometimes reminded me of Fang Hsiao-ju,** whom I imagine must have been very like him.

He stayed at home writing or translating, and after we had met a good many times and found a good deal in common he started bringing a few more young people with the same views, and we set up the Dawn Blossoms Press. Its aim was to introduce the literature of Eastern and Northern Europe and to import foreign woodcuts, for we felt we should give what support we could to this vigorous, simple new art. Then we put out *Dawn Blossoms*, *Modern Short Stories of All Countries* and *The Garden of Art*, all in line with this aim. We also published the paintings of Koji Kukiya*** to expose the pseudoartist of the Shanghai Bund, the paper tiger Yeh Ling-feng.

Jou Shih had no money, though. He borrowed over two hundred dollars to start printing. In addition to buying the paper, he did most of the editing and most of the odd jobs – running to the printers, making prints, or proofreading. He was often disappointed, however, and would frown as he related what had happened. His early work is filled with a spirit of gloom, but actually this was not his character. He believed that men were good. When I described cases of deceit, friends betrayed or blood-suckers, the sweat would stand out on his forehead, and he would stare in short-sighted, shocked surprise.

"Are such things possible?...“ he would protest. "Surely not. ...“

But before long Dawn Blossoms Press had to close down – I will not go into the reasons here – and for the first time Jou Shih knocked his idealistic head against a brick wall. All his work had been wasted, and on top of that he had to borrow a hundred dollars to pay for the paper. After that he was less sceptical of my contention that "human hearts are evil," though sometimes he would sigh: "Are such things really possible?" Nonetheless he went on believing that men were good. Then he sent the few books left to Dawn Blossoms Press, which should have been his, to Tomorrow Bookstore and Kwanghua Bookshop, hoping to raise a little money on them. At the same time he went on translating for all he was worth in order to repay the debt. He sold to the Commercial Press his translations of *Danish Short Stories* and Gorky's novel *The Artamanovs' Business*. I fear, though, these manuscripts may have been lost last year in the fighting and fire.

By degrees he lost his aloofness, till he dared walk out with girls – friends or girls from his home town – but he always kept three or four feet away from them. This was a very bad habit, for when I met him outside and there was a pretty girl three or four feet away I could never be sure if she was his friend or not. Yet when he walked with me he kept close to my side, supporting me, in fact, for fear I might be knocked down by a car or a tram. For my part, it disturbed me to see him with his short sight looking after someone else, so we floundered along the whole way in a state of tension. That is why I never went out with him if I could help it. The sight of the strain on him made me feel a strain too.

Whether by the old morality or the new, if he could help others at his own expense he would choose to do so and take up a new burden.

In the end he made a deliberate change. He told me plainly that in future he should alter the contents and form of his writing. I said I thought that would be difficult. If he was accustomed to using a knife and was now required to use a stick, how could he do it? He answered simply: One can learn!

This was no empty boast. He did start learning from scratch. At about that time he brought a friend to see me, a Miss Feng Keng. After chatting for some time I felt there was still a barrier between her and myself, and suspected that she was a romantic, eager for quick results. I also suspected that she was at the bottom of Jou Shih's recent decision to write a long novel. But I suspected myself as well – perhaps Jou Shih's uncompromising answer the last time had found the weak spot in my laissez-faire attitude and I was unconsciously transferring my resentment to her – in fact I was no better than the proud, hypersensitive young writers I dreaded meeting. She was a delicate creature, not pretty either.

III

Not till after the League of Left-Wing Writers was founded did I discover that the Pai Mang I knew was the Yin Fu whose poems appeared in *The Pioneer*. I took a German translation of an American journalist's account of his travels in China to one meeting to give him, thinking this might help him to improve his German. But he did not turn up. I had to enlist Jou Shih's help again. Not long after this they were both arrested, however, and my book was confiscated again, falling into the hands of "Three-strippers" and the like.

IV

Then Tomorrow Bookstore asked Jou Shih to edit a periodical, and he consented. The publisher also wanted to print my translations, and asked him to find out what arrangements to make for my royalties. I copied out my contract with the Peihsin Bookshop and gave this to him. He stuffed it into his pocket and hurried off. That was late in the evening of January 16, 1931, and little did I know that this was to be our last meeting and our final parting.

The next day he was arrested at a meeting, and I heard that I was wanted by the authorities because he had that copy of my contract in his pocket. The contract itself was quite plain and intelligible, but I had no wish to go to such unintelligible places to explain it. I remember a venerable monk in *The life of Yueh Fei*****, who sat cross-legged and died as soon as the bailiff who was pursuing him reached the gate of the monastery. He left behind this couplet:

As from the east the law arrives
I seek the Western Paradise.

That was the best way of leaving this sea of bitterness that slaves could imagine. When no "champion" was in sight, this was the ideal way out. Not being a venerable monk, I cannot seek nirvana at will. Besides, I hanker after life. So I ran away.

That night I burned old letters from friends, picked up my son and went with my wife to a hotel. Within a few days all sorts of rumours had spread to the effect that I had been arrested or killed, but of Jou Shih there was very little news. Some said the police had taken him to Tomorrow Bookstore and asked whether he was an editor there or not. Others said he had been taken to Peihsin Bookshop and asked whether he was Jou Shih or not. And he had been handcuffed – a sign that his case was grave. But no one knew the nature of the charge.

During his imprisonment, I saw two letters he wrote to fellow-provincials. The first was as follows –
January 24

With thirty-five other prisoners (including seven women), I came to Lunghua yesterday. Last night we were put in chains, creating a precedent for political prisoners. This case involves so many people that I don't expect to be out very soon, so I would appreciate it if you would take over my work in the bookshop. Everything is all right, and I am studying German with Yin Fu – please tell Mr. Chou***** that Mr. Chou mustn't worry – we haven't been tortured. The police and the security officers have asked for his address several times, but of course I don't know it. Don't worry!
All the best!

Chao Shao-hsiung

That was on the front of the page.
On the back was written:

I want two or three tin rice bowls. If they won't let you see me, just leave the things for Chao Shao-hsiung.

He had not changed. He wanted to study German and work harder than ever. And he still showed the same concern for me as when we were walking together. Some of his statements were wrong, though. They were not the first political prisoners to be put in chains, but he had always thought too highly of officialdom and imagined it had been enlightened until it started to be cruel to him and his friends. In fact that was not so. Sure enough, his second letter was very different. He wrote most bitterly, and said Miss Feng's face had swollen. Unfortunately I made no copy of this letter. By that time even more rumours were rife. Some said he could come out on bail, others that he had already been sent to Nanking. Nothing was certain. And more telegrams and letters were arriving to ask for news of me. Even my mother in Peking fell ill of anxiety, and I had to write letter after letter to put things right. This went on for about three weeks.

The weather turned colder, and I wondered if they had quilts where Jou Shih was. We had. Had he received the tin bowls? ... But then we received reliable news that on the night of February the seventh or the morning of the eighth, Jou Shih and twenty-three others had been shot at the Lunghua Garrison Headquarters. There were ten bullets in his body.

So! ...

Late at night I stood in the hotel courtyard, surrounded by ramshackle junk. The whole world was asleep, including my wife and son. I was profoundly conscious that I had lost very good friends, China very good young men. I grew calmer after my first distress, but force of habits asserted itself in the calm and made me string together these few lines:

I am used to long nights in spring;
With my wife and child my hair is turning white;
A mother's tears I see in a dream,
On the city wall the royal banners are changed;
I have seen my friends become ghosts;
In anger among the swords I seek for a poem.
I lower my head. How can I write out these lines?
Moonlight like water shines on my dark garment.

The last two lines were not true though, for in the end I copied the verse out and sent it to a Japanese singer.

But in China at that time we could not publish this poem. We were sealed in more tightly than in a tin. I remember Jou Shih had gone home just before New Year and stayed so long that some of his friends reproached him on his return. He told me in great distress that his mother had lost the sight of both eyes, and he could not bear to leave her when she asked him to stay a little longer. I know the heart of that mother and Jou Shih's devotion. When *North Star* was first published, I wanted to write something about Jou Shih, but could not. All I could do to commemorate him was to select Käthe Kollwitz's woodcut *The Sacrifice*, which shows a mother giving up her son in agony of spirit, and this I alone understand.

Of the four other young writers killed at the same time, I had never met Li Wei-sen, and had only seen Hu Yeh-pin once in Shanghai and exchanged a few words with him. The one I knew relatively well was Pai Mang or Yin Fu, for we had corresponded and he had written for my magazine. But I can find nothing of his today. I must have burned all his contributions on the evening of the seventeenth, before I knew he was among those arrested. I still have his *Poems of Petöfi*, and looking through this I found four lines of his translation written in ink beside one of the "Wahlspruch" (Maxims):

Life is a treasure,
Love even dearer;
But to win freedom,
I would throw both away!

On the second page is written Hsu Pei-ken, which I suspect was his real name.

V

Two years ago today, I was lying low in a hotel while they went to the execution ground. A year ago today I was escaping through the gunfire to the International Settlement while they lay buried none knows where. Only this year am I sitting at home again on this day, while the whole world is asleep, including my wife and son. Once again I am profoundly conscious that I have lost very good friends and China very good young men. I grow calmer after my distress, but force of habit asserts itself in my calm, and has made me write.

If I go on, I shall still be unable to publish what I write in China today. When a lad I read Hsiang Tzu-chi's *Reminiscences* and blamed him for writing a few lines only, then finishing what he had barely begun. But now I understand.

It is not the young who are writing obituaries for the old, but during the last thirty years with my own eyes I have seen the blood of so many young people mounting up that now I am submerged and cannot breathe. All I can do now is take up my pen and write a few more articles, as if to make a hole in the clotted blood through which I can draw a few more wretched breaths. What sort of world is this? The night is so long, the way so long, that I had better forget or else remain silent. But I know, if I do not do so, a time will come when others will remember them and speak of them. ...

February 7 and 8
1933

*Members of the Shanghai police force in the international settlement who wore three stripes on their armllets.

**A minister who was killed for opposing Prince Yen during the Ming dynasty.

***A contemporary Japanese artist, whose work Yeh Ling-feng plagiarized.

**** A popular novel about the famous Sung dynasty general who resisted the Golden Tartars.

*****Lu Hsun's real name was Chou Shu-jen