

The Peach Blossom Fan

桃花扇

Translated and Abridged by
T.L. Yang (楊鐵樑)

Original play by Kong Shangren (孔尚任) published in 1699.
Rewritten as a novel by Gu Sifan (谷斯範) in 1948.

‘What is so unique about the peach blossom fan? It is not unique,
but is made unique because of the peach blossoms on the fan
The peach blossoms are the beauty’s bloodstains.
The bloodstains represent her determination to wait for her
lover. Even at the risk of a cruel death, she is not prepared
to be humiliated, nor yield to the powerful and the treacherous.’

(Kong Shangren, 1648–1718)



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Preface

This story concerns a young scholar and a courtesan who loved and lived in the last days of the Ming Dynasty when their world fell apart. The final collapse of the Ming is a kaleidoscope through which one perceives honour and corruption, patriotism and disloyalty, friendships and betrayal, public spiritedness and unrestrained rapacity, cruelty and also kindness. It is at once a romance and a history movingly told. Above all, it argues convincingly that the noble ideals of man must surely survive, even as his life on earth is shattered.

In 1948 Mr Gu Sifan (谷斯範, alias Nanfang Fan 南方範) published his novel *The New Peach Blossom Fan* (新桃花扇), based on the play by Kong Shangren. His novel has been published in Taiwan under the title of *The Peach Blossom Fan* (桃花扇).

Gu was born on 4 March 1916 in Zhejiang Province. In 1949 he worked as a journalist in Shanghai. In 1951 he was a war correspondent in Korea. He is now the Vice-Chairman of the China Writers' Association, Zhejiang Branch, and lives in Hangzhou City. He is the author of many books and articles.

The play was written by a scholar-official, Kong Shangren (孔尚任) of the early Qing Dynasty, in the form of verses. Kong was born in 1648, in the fifth year of the Reign of the first Manchu Emperor, Shunzhi (順治). He was a 64th generation direct descendant of Confucius.

In 1684 Emperor Kangxi (康熙) travelled to the rice-growing region, south of the Yangzi River. In the winter of that year, he was on his return to the capital via Shandong Province. When he arrived at Confucius' birthplace in the province, he went to pay his respects at the sage's temple. Kong was chosen to deliver a

lecture on the classics before the throne. So impressed was the Emperor that Kong was appointed a Doctor of the Imperial Academy of Learning.

Four years later he accompanied the Vice-President of the Board of Works to oversee the dredging of the Yellow River. It was not until the winter of 1689 that he was able to return to Beijing. Upon his return he continued to work in the Imperial Academy.

In 1694, he joined the Board of Population and Revenue as Assistant Secretary. In 1699, he was promoted to Secretary in the same Board, in charge of affairs in the Guangdong Province.

In the summer of the same year, he published the play *Taohua Shan* (The Peach Blossom Fan), which he had been working on for over ten years, after three revisions. One evening in the autumn of that year Emperor Kangxi sent a member of the imperial household to ask Kong for a copy of the play. In some haste Kong found a copy at Zhang Pingzhou's (張平州) home and had it delivered in the middle of the night.

Unfortunately, the play incurred the displeasure of the Emperor because it spoke approvingly of officials loyal to the Ming Dynasty and sarcastically of the traitorous generals who surrendered to the Manchus. In the spring of the following year Kong was dismissed from office.

Kong remained in the capital for two more years after his dismissal. In the winter of 1702 he returned to live in his native village in Shandong Province. He died in the spring of 1718, aged 70.

The Peach Blossom Fan is a historical play, based on facts which occurred in the last year of the Ming Dynasty (1644–1645).

In an introductory remark, Kong wrote:

As to the achievements and failures of the government, and the assembly and dispersal of the literati, nothing is fictitious and all have been verified. As to the love affairs of men and women, and the casual conversations between guests, I might have indulged in some elaboration, but even these are not entirely fabricated.

According to history the hero of the story, Hou Fangyu (侯方域), and the heroine Li the Perfumed Lady (李香君) were real persons who lived in Nanjing. Hou was born in the last years of the Ming Dynasty, and he refused any official appointment under the new Manchu Dynasty. At first he abandoned himself to the music halls and brothels, but later repented and devoted himself to poetry and the classics. In the eighth year of Emperor Shunzhi's Reign (1651) he passed the prefectural examination with the degree of Assistant Licentiate. He died three years later.

The peach blossom fan, too, truly existed. When the fan was stained with the Perfumed Lady's blood, a friend Yang Longyou (楊龍友) transfigured the stains and added branches and leaves to turn them into a picture of peach blossoms.

In 1644, a rebellion under the leadership of a peasant, Li Zicheng (李自成), was started in Shanxi Province, and he soon seized the then national capital, Beijing. Emperor Chongzhen (崇禎) hanged himself at Coal Hill. General Wu Sangui (吳三桂) invited the Manchu forces to enter China. The whole of the country north of the Yellow River was thus plunged into a state of extreme chaos. The capital of Ming was then moved to Nanjing, called the Subordinate Capital (留都).

In the fifth month of that year the Governor-General of Fengyang, Ma Shiying (鳳陽總督馬士英), together with other military officials, put Prince Fu (福王) on the throne and established the Southern Ming Dynasty. This was Emperor Hongguang (弘光).

Soon afterwards, the Manchu armies crossed the Yellow River and continued on to the south. All the garrisons in the area surrendered, and the city of Yangzhou was lost, followed by the southern capital Nanjing.

As the story of *The Peach Blossom Fan* unfolds, we see the loyal members of the Revival Club (復社), Chen Dingsheng (陳定生), Wu Ciwei (吳次尾) and others, engaged in a struggle with the remnants of the Grand Eunuch Wei Zongxian's (太監魏宗賢) party, in particular the arch villain Ruan Dacheng (阮大鍼). This was a conflict that could be traced back to the periods of Emperor Wanli (萬曆 1573–1620) and Emperor Tianqi (天啟 1621–1627). It was an internecine conflict between members of the ruling class. One side was represented by Ruan Dacheng, and it consisted of a group of corrupt and cruel men who were waiting for the opportunity to seize power again after the death of Eunuch Wei Zongxian. On the other hand, there were the Eastern Forest Party (東林黨) and the Revival Club, which comprised scholars with high ideals, though somewhat ahead of their times. They were the remaining loyalists after their brothers were almost completely eliminated by Wei's party. But these scholars were not men of action, instead they whiled away their time in pleasure houses and restaurants, lecturing, debating and arguing. Clearly, they were not men who could shoulder the great and heavy responsibilities of saving the nation in a catastrophic emergency.

In Nanjing, Prince Fu ascended the throne with the support of Ma Shiying, Ruan Dacheng and remnants of Wei's party. Loyalists such as Shi Kefa (史可法) and Zuo Liangyu (左良玉), with the support of the Revival Club, objected but without success. Prince Fu assumed the title of Emperor Hongguang (弘光) and spent his time with wine, women and song. His special interest was the selection of maidens in his palace for theatrical performances.

Ma and Ruan were therefore able to enrich themselves by selling official posts and titles, and confiscation of properties. They arrested a great number of members of the Eastern Forest Party and the Revival Club with a view to obliterating those societies.

The imperial court in Nanjing relied on the four garrisons north of the Yangzi

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River to defend what was left of the empire. At the upper reach of the River was Shi Kefa who carried the title of President of the Board of War in Nanjing. He was committed to the Ming cause but was isolated by the commanders of the other four garrisons, who fought even amongst themselves. Worst still, they were in league with Ma Shiyong, who instructed them to ignore Shi Kefa. Shi was thus completely isolated in his headquarters in Yangzhou City. In those circumstances, there was only Shi left to defend his country against the onslaught of the Manchu forces. Besieged in Yangzhou City and without help, Shi was defeated and later killed by the Manchus.

The Southern Ming collapsed at the same time. It had lasted only one year.

There are at least three works in English about the play. Richard E. Strassberg wrote a PhD thesis entitled 'The Peach Blossom Fan: Personal Cultivation in a Chinese Drama' in 375 pages (Princeton University, 1975). It is mainly a dissertation on a genre of Chinese drama called the Southern Drama. Chen Shih-Hsiang and Harold Acton translated the play in 1976 with 312 pages (University of California Press, Berkeley). In 1991, Li Rongyao, He Donghui and Huang Weiwei published *The Peach Blossom Fan and Other Qing Dynasty Stories*, covering 221 pages.

The drama has also been translated into the Japanese language.

This book is believed to be the only translation of Mr Gu Sifan's novel, albeit an abridged version. In my attempt to render the book more readable and manageable in length, I have omitted much of what I regard as matters peripheral to the central theme. The result is a book just over half the length of what a full translation would be.

In this work, I have received much encouragement and help from my sister Lorraine and her husband Professor David Cheng, to whom I give my grateful thanks. I must also thank the Hon Mr Justice Rogers, Dr Kan Lai Bing and Mr Lam Shan-muk for their help.

T.L. Yang
August, 1998
Hong Kong

Introduction

White bones and ashes lie forlorn, scattered,
And there lies the peach blossom fan, tattered.

What use is it to dream of revival,
Or of a love affair rudely shattered?

It is said that the poem was written by a renowned music teacher, Su Kunsheng of Nanjing, during the reign of Ming Dynasty's last Emperor, Chongzhen (1628–1644). After Nanjing was lost to the invading Manchus, Teacher Su spent his days as a hermit in the Mountain of Misty Abode, making a living as a woodcutter.

In the tenth year of the first Manchu Emperor, Shunzhi (1653), one Wu Meicun was summoned to the Imperial Court in Beijing, and he met Teacher Su in a remote village when he passed through Nanjing.

Afterwards, Kong Shangren became aware of this poem, but how he came by it was not known. Kong used the poem to end his drama *The Peach Blossom Fan*, which consisted of forty acts.

A golden thread which trails through the drama is the tragic and lingering romance of the classical scholar of the period, Hou Fangyu, and the well-known courtesan of the Qinhuai River region, Li the Perfumed Lady. It is a story based on the fall of the Ming Dynasty, also called the Southern Ming because its capital had been moved from Beijing in the north to Nanjing in the south.

As Kong held up his pen deep in thought, he must have mourned the loss of the old dynasty and the fate of those who remained. He thus sought to 'voice his

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approbation and condemnation through poetic allegory'. The result is a very moving story.

In his Foreword, he said:

The drama *The Peach Blossom Fan* tells of events which took place in the Southern Dynasty. There are still people, now old, who are alive. From the songs and dances on the stage and the comments and hints outside the theatre, one learns about events of the past three hundred years. Who were those who caused the collapse of the dynasty? To what events could be attributed her defeat? When did events come to a close? Where was it that matters came to rest?

Not only are those in the audience moved to tears, the drama also serves as a lesson on how a dynasty was vanquished and thus set people's hearts aflame.

The drama was completed in the thirty-eighth year of Emperor Kangxi's Reign (1699). It immediately created a sensation in the capital and became immensely popular. Kong said, 'In the midst of such luxurious music, there may be in the audience a man sitting all by himself, covering his face with the sleeve. He would be one of those officials who have survived from the old days.' That an official of the lost country was moved to weep in this way is an indication of the truthfulness and sincerity of the play.

Su Kunsheng was the Perfumed Lady's singing-teacher. She was passionately in love with Hou Fangyu at the time, and Su was then teaching her to sing *The Four Dreams of Jade and Tea*, written by the scholar-official Tang Xianzu.

When Ruan Dacheng set a trap to harm Hou Fangyu, he fled to the north in great fright in order to join the staff of Shi Kefa. Teacher Su acted as a messenger and took his lady pupil's peach blossom fan to him in the military camps in the north. After the fall of Nanjing, he searched everywhere for him on her behalf. Indeed, old man Su was a rare friend in need to those lovers.

Eventually, the couple met in an ancient nunnery on a deserted mountain. Teacher Su personally saw how the two wept in front of each other and then parted. He himself suffered all the pains as a consequence of the downfall of his country and he saw enough of the tender romance of a young couple. It is therefore not surprising that he was able to write such a greatly moving and melancholy poem.

1

In Cai Yisuo's Bookshop

It was a sunny afternoon in the third month of the sixteenth year of Emperor Chongzhen's Reign.

An old man of over fifty years of age, and of slightly less than medium height, arrived at a large bookshop in the Three Hills Street of Nanjing City. He stretched his neck and looked into the shop a few times, stroked his short, grey beard and hesitated. Raising his head he saw a horizontal board above the shop, on which was clearly written: 'Cai Yisuo's Bookshop'.

He therefore summoned up his courage and asked, 'Manager! Is Master Hou of Guide Prefecture inside?'

'He lives at the Tongji Gate!' replied an employee wearing a turban tied in a pig-snout knot. He was about twenty years of age and walked with a limp in his left foot.

'I have already asked there. They said he'd just come to the bookshop,' the old man said.

Feeling a little embarrassed, the man with a pig-snout turban said, 'Wait for a little while. He and Master Chen have gone to the city *yamen* to copy down the gazette. They will soon return'. Thus speaking, he wrapped up a pile of books and called, 'Old father, I am delivering the books to the lord Qian Muzhai's house!'

Giving his acknowledgement from the inside, a man came out to the shop front. He was a man of the world, middle-aged and alert, and he was the proprietor of Cai Yisuo's Bookshop. Seeing that his visitor was not a scholar, but a man pretending to be genteel, and that he was looking around and turning over the pages of his books at random, he became irritated and said, 'Old one! If you want

to buy any books on current affairs, *The Commentary on the Five Reigns since Emperor Jiajing* is the best book of this Reign. The set price is three mace. If you want to buy, I'll give you a ten-percent discount, at two mace and seven candareens!

The old man shook his head and said, 'Too expensive!'

Proprietor Cai burst out laughing. 'How can it be expensive? Rice is selling at seven mace per picul. In the north where the brigands roam, you can't buy a picul of rice even with three taels of silver. How can price not be high at a time when there is fighting everywhere? If you want something inexpensive, here are a few copies of *The Story of the White Rabbit* and *The Peony Pavilion*, though water-stained. They are quite interesting to read.'

The old man touched his grey beard and replied haughtily, 'I can recite *The Peony Pavilion* word by word — and without missing a single beat!'

It was then that Proprietor Cai knew that he was a teacher of songs and verses. Just as he was to make his answer, three young scholars swarmed inside.

The one in front was tall and about twenty-six or seven years of age. With a fair complexion and bright, dark eyes, he had the easygoing manner of a young nobleman. The man behind him was about forty, with a long face and small eyes, and a long, handsome beard. Behind was a man about thirty-three or four years old. He was slightly shorter and more matured. And he wore a grey turban matching his grey robe.

The first one was indeed Hou Fangyu of Guide Prefecture. He beckoned to the old man and cried, 'Old Su, how is it that you can spare the time to come to the bookshop?'

The one addressed as 'Old Su' replied, 'Master Hou, I have been waiting for half a day!'

'I have been discourteous, I have been discourteous!' said Hou repeatedly. Then, pointing at his two companions, he asked, 'Do you know these two?'

Smiling at the one with the handsome beard, the old man smiled and said, 'This is the famous Master Chen Dingsheng, the leader of the literary world, and head of all the young scholars. Everyone knows him!'

Chen's father was a senior member of the Eastern Forest Party. He had been a senior member of the Censorate, with the title of Tutor to the Heir Apparent. Chen's own fame was not inferior to that of his father's. He was an important member of the Revival Club.

Teasingly he scolded the old man, 'Old Su, do not talk rubbish! We are all of the same ilk, so why speak so ceremoniously! Do you know this gentleman?' Sticking out his thumb, Chen exclaimed, 'He is the eldest son of Inspector General Huang the martyr in the reign of Emperor Tianqi, Huang Taichong by name!'

Old man Su raised his fists in salute and said to Huang Taichong, 'I have been disrespectful! May I invite you to come to the Old Quarters at sometime to honour me with your presence?'

Half closing his eyes in a mighty laughter Chen interrupted, 'Don't you spoil

the fun for yourself, Master Huang is the well-known bookworm of our Revival Club, and has never been to a brothel in his whole life!

Huang's fixed stare at Chen caused Hou and Proprietor Cai to laugh out. Cai handed old man Su a cup of tea respectfully and apologized for not having enquired of his honourable name earlier. He had not imagined old father Su was also a well-known figure in Nanjing.

At the time an old scholar of about fifty came in and stood at the entrance. His name was Wu Ciwei. He was of small built, slight and short, with high cheek bones, a thin white beard and a ginger-coloured complexion. His stare was at once cold and severe, and he looked at old man Su with the utmost anger.

Taking fright, old man Su went forward and bowed. 'May I ask the master his honourable name?' he said.

Chen spoke from one side, 'This is a senior member of the Revival Club, the very famous Wu Ciwei!'

Su at once said, 'So this is Master Wu. I have long admired you!' But Wu just looked at the skies and ignored Su. Hou saw this and came up to save the situation, saying, 'Brother Wu, you act like a Judge in the Nether World!'

Laughing sarcastically, Wu said in retort, 'I am born with this character of mine and so people dislike me.'

Chen hurried over and whispered to Wu in his ears, whereupon Wu screamed in great delight and embraced old man Su so tightly that he almost wrapped him into a bundle.

He said again and again, 'Old father! I have been disrespectful. I have heard that you were a retainer in Beardy Ruan's home, and that you were a teacher of music for his private troupe. So the truth is that you have resigned and left him when four years ago you saw our *Public Proclamation to Prevent Disturbance in the Subordinate Capital* and realized that Beardy Ruan was the underling of Grand Eunuch Wei Zongxian. If Brother Chen had not mentioned it, I would surely have chased you out of here!'

Making fun of Wu, Chen said, 'And you are the senior member of the Revival Club! With a character like a firecracker, you explode at the least provocation!'

At this point Proprietor Cai said, 'Just now Secretary Zhou Zhongyu of the Board of Rites sent a messenger with three invitation cards. He invites you three masters to drink wine with him.'

Hou saw that there were indeed three large red invitation cards on the shop counter, inviting them to arrive at about a quarter after four o'clock in the afternoon. Chen frowned and said, 'This is already after noon, how can we make it? Yesterday, Secretary Zhou mentioned to me that Beardy Ruan was busy cultivating Marquis Liu Kongzhao and Marquis Zhao Zhilong these past few days; also he has recently become buddy with a member of the royal clan from Jiangxi Province, by the name of what-is-it Zhu Tonglui, calling each other brothers. He hopes to rely on the power of great officials and members of the royal family to strike down all the upright gentlemen in Nanjing in a single swoop.'

'What charge is to be brought against us?' asked Hou in agitation.

Chen answered, 'If there is a will to accuse, there is a way to find a reason. It is the same old thing again. The Revival Club is accused of gathering and stirring the people to slander the government.'

Wu said angrily, 'I have already said it. We must never never allow that dog of an eunuch's party to get away with anything. I am prepared to go to any extreme. Let us issue a public invitation and assemble all the scholars in Nanjing to go together to the Treasury Square, there to demolish his Stone Nest Garden and beat Beardy Ruan to pulp. How's that?'

Laughing loudly Chen cried, 'You old gentleman! Truly you are old in age but young at heart. Your temper is even hotter than that of an adolescent. Secretary Zhou is a man of action, and when he does something, he too looks at the immediate future without looking at the consequences. If the two of you were to act in unison, Heaven knows what trouble you would cause. In fact, Secretary Zhou has only heard some loose talk about it. In the capital there still are the President of the Board of Works and the President of the Board of Revenue and Population. They are upright gentlemen of the Eastern Forest Party, and were trusted by Emperor Chongzhen. What do we have to be afraid of since we have their protection? Even if Beardy Ruan has eaten the leopard's gall, he would not dare take this course! This is why I say it is better for Brother Hou to go alone to seek further information. If we all go together, we shall simply attract attention. Brother Huang, what do you think?'

Huang had been standing beside the bookshelves without saying anything. He now nodded.

Hurriedly Proprietor Cai called out, 'Master Hou, have some wine before you go. There is time yet. I have already asked my wife to prepare the wine and food. Besides, we have old father Su here.' Thus speaking he invited his guests inside.

Wu hesitantly asked Hou, 'You people have been to the city *yamen* to make a copy of the gazette. What is the news about the roving brigands?'

Hou played with his robe and shook his head, sighing, 'It is a mess, a mess!'

Wu asked impatiently, 'What in truth is the situation?'

'The nation is not like a nation; the troops are not like troops. What more is there to say?' answered Hou. Then he turned to old man Su, 'There are several prefectures in my native Henan Province, where almost all the residents have died in the long drawn out war. I have not received any letter from home in three months. I do not even know if my father is still alive or dead. Ah, ah! Old Su, let us go and drink to our hearts' content!'

Old man Su spoke in a low voice, 'Are you a good friend of the lord Yang of Guizhou Province?'

Hou asked, 'Are you talking about the husband of Ma Shiyang's younger sister, Yang Longyou?'

'Yes,' Su said.

As Hou was about to reply, Chen turned and gave him a mysterious look. Old Su quickly blinked his eyes as a signal to Hou and stopped him from speaking.

Hou was puzzled but dared not ask any further when he saw old Su's signal.

The table was laid in the parlour behind the shop front. There was a small courtyard outside the parlour. It was neatly and tidily maintained. Under the eaves on the left were some palm trees; diagonally opposite were planted some oleander trees. On the ground around the walls was a row of potted plants. Though Cai was a seller of books, his acquaintances were mostly well-known scholars in the literary world in Nanjing or students in the Imperial Academy of Learning, so his parlour was furnished in good taste, quite without the vulgarity of mere merchants.

In the central place of honour was hung the calligraphy of Qian Muzhai. On the left was a painting of some rustic scene, on the right a painting of orchids, perhaps by an artist of the Song Dynasty, judging from the age of the paper.

After a while, the apprentice brought the wine in a pewter jug. There were six cold dishes: pickled fish, pressed duck, shredded meat, sausages, drunken prawns and pig's entrails, all being tasty delicacies for drinking wine.

Everyone was familiar with the seating arrangement. Wu was the eldest, so he sat in the seat of honour. On his left were Chen and Huang; on his right Hou and Su. Cai was the host and sat opposite Wu. During the meal Chen resorted to stories about Ruan Dacheng to stimulate their appetite. He told the stories in such a humorous way that all laughed without stopping.

Huang alone sat silent, for he could not help feeling that he did not really fit into their company. In terms of learning and status, Chen and Hou were without doubt leaders of the Revival Club, and their names were known even in the remotest areas. But Huang could not approve of their conduct. What he hated most was that though the affairs of the nation were so bad as to be beyond help, yet they were still fooling around in the brothels. Wu's conduct was one grade above theirs, and he was one of the few true leaders in the Revival Club, but he went to extremes and was too hotheaded.

Huang thus felt deeply that he was all alone. Quietly he stared at the small courtyard. The evening sun shone obliquely at part of the walls; a few sparrows were chirping noisily amongst the oleander trees. He lived in the Clear Cool Temple in the western part of the city, some three or four *li* from Three Hills Street. He was worried that he could not reach home before dark.

Noticing this, Chen asked, 'Brother Huang, is it because of the oleander trees that you are reminded of your wife?' Gnawing a duck bone, he half shut his eyes and spoke with great affectation, 'Who can blame you? In this beautiful weather when the sun is so spectacular, and yet be shut inside a monks' temple for the whole day!'

Huang could only blush and was about to lose his temper when Proprietor Cai quickly interrupted them and changed the topic. 'I say that in this world those who achieve things are scholars, and those who spoil things are also scholars. If Li

Zicheng didn't have Niu Jinxing as his adviser, how could he be commanding a force of over a million men and roam about seven or eight provinces. The refugees all say that not only does Niu take total charge of military matters, he even teaches Li every day how to read!

Old man Su interrupted and observed, 'In that case the bandit Li is not an illiterate fool?'

'Not only is he not an uneducated fool, his learning is such that even a Licentiate is a nobody in his eyes,' Proprietor Cai observed.

Hou laughed and said in friendly rebuke, 'You better be careful, or you will be beaten in the city *yamen*. Are these words we are permitted to utter?'

Wu had just imbibed a little too much wine and he spoke up in defence of Proprietor Cai, 'What is it which cannot be said in this world? Li Zicheng's meals are simple, and he shares the hardships with his soldiers. That is why he is able to win the hearts of his troops and fight a good fight! Look at us! Just take the expenditure of the palace alone, each month half a million taels of silver is required. Which one of the officials at court does not wear a jade belt and a heavily embroidered robe, so elaborate is his costume that he is like a clump of flowers or a cluster of brocade. Even a lowly official of the sixth rank in a Board has thirty to forty servants and maids, but I have heard that the soldiers at the front have not received any wages for three or four months already. We thought Zuo Liangyu is expert in fighting, but eyewitnesses say Zuo's soldiers are as poor as beggars. So how can they fight? True, the national treasury is short of money, the country is poor, and the soldiers' wages are being withheld. Why is the country poor, is it not because corrupt officials are so numerous that they are like hair on a cow? Beardy Ruan held office for a term as Director of the Imperial Banquets Department and raked in several ten thousand taels of silver. His residence in the Treasury Square is built like a palace in Heaven. As to all the Censors at court, have they been able to impeach a single one? They could but squash a fly but do nothing to chase away a tiger? Censor Zhan had accused Yang Longyou the Magistrate of Jiangning County of corruption. They caught the man and seized the corrupt money, and we thought he would be bound and taken out of the palace's central gate to be beheaded. However, his brother-in-law Ma Shiying came forward to give him support and after that nothing more was heard of the matter. After his dismissal Yang just spends his days enjoying himself on the No Worries Lake and the Qinhuai River. He does not even know there is such a thing as law in this world!'

Old man Su interposed, 'The lord Yang is a kind man. We call him "the good sort". Though he befriends Beardy Ruan, he speaks badly of him behind his back'.

Suddenly old man Su seemed to have thought of something else and said, 'When Beardy Ruan saw the *Public Proclamation to Prevent Disturbance*, he said, "That impoverished Licentiate Wu Ciwei who deserves to die! He was only used by others. If I should give him two or three hundred taels of silver, would he not suck up to me?"'

Continuing on Su said, 'He hates Secretary Zhou of the Board of Rites even more, saying that he backs the Revival Club behind the scene and gave his support to the publication of the Proclamation'.

Chen said, 'Truly this is a case of blaming the kitchen god for one's own stomach-ache. What has this matter got to do with Secretary Zhou?'

After some further thought he continued, 'Probably he already knows about this matter. When Beardy Ruan sent him a letter pleading that the Proclamation should be withheld from publication, Secretary Zhou simply threw the letter into the fire and remarked, "This dog of a beardy fellow." He speaks of military affairs and boasts of martial arts as if he is an upright gentleman, he should be unmasked so everyone can see him as he is!'

As they were engaged in this animated conversation, suddenly they heard a commotion in the shop front. A little apprentice came in running, his face turned deathly pale in fear.

5

Huang Taichong's Debate with Qian Muzhai

After the disturbance at the Confucius' Temple, Hou and his friends picked a quiet place and held a discussion.

Knitting his brow Hou said, 'Though the incident today is most satisfying, we were a bit rash. If the authorities should take the matter seriously, even Libationer Wang would be punished.'

'It was my fault,' Huang confessed. 'It was I who moved my hands first.'

'What do you mean by "rash"?' Wu sneered. 'If you attacked a tiger without killing it, there will be no end of trouble in future. It is because there are too many of us who are genteel that Beardy Ruan's life is spared!'

Hou was not convinced by this kind of reasoning, 'In that case, is it right to assault people in the Temple?'

'Why not?' shouted Wu. 'An assault upon the eunuch's son within the Temple grounds has the same meaning as Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* which condemns unruly and thieving officials!'

Stroking his long, delicate beard Chen smiled and said, 'It is a pity that the Confucius in the Temple is made of stone. Otherwise, he would surely come down the Hall of Great Accomplishments and help in the assault!'

Everyone laughed when he said this, whereupon Chen continued, 'Today, we acted correctly in beating him. We also acted correctly in letting him go. Beardy Ruan did not know about our fierce determination. He thought our publication of the Proclamation was the result of momentary agitation and it would be completely forgotten after a long lapse of time. No! We have not forgotten! We surely cannot forgive a big, bad egg who harms the nation and wrongs the people!'

Why do I say it was correct to release him? If he was indeed killed in the assault, then we will have brought greater calamity upon ourselves. I fear that the Revival Club and Beardy Ruan might then perish together. If one Beardy Ruan dies, there will be another Beardy Ruan. But why should the Revival Club be brought down with him?

'Let us not indulge in useless talk. We must find a way to resolve the matter,' said Huang.

'I have already thought of a way,' Chen said. 'I do not know how you feel. I suggest that Brother Wu and Brother Huang should go and see old Master Zhou Zhongyu and Qian Muzhai; ask them to smooth things over with Libationer Wang. I will go with Brother Hou to discuss the matter with our club members at the Imperial Academy of Learning. We should send a detailed report to old master Wang and say this matter has nothing to do with the Academy Scholars; it is purely a private quarrel between Brother Huang and Beardy Ruan.'

'What kind of talk is this!' old Licentiate Wu exclaimed in anger, 'How can we place all the blame on Brother Huang alone?'

Chen smiled, 'Old master, you do have a hot temper. I have not finish speaking yet! Brother Huang's honourable father was harmed by Wei Zongxian's party and died as a result. He beat up Beardy Ruan to avenge his father, so there is good reason for him to strike the man. On the other hand, our joint assault on Beardy Ruan may be described as an assembly of unruly people to cause trouble. We could but oblige Brother Huang to take all the blame himself for the rest of us!'

Clapping his hands Chen cried, 'Great! Great! Brother Wu, let us go and see old Master Zhou and Qian Muzhai!'

Wu Ciwei was still uncertain, but said, 'Even if nothing has happened, I would still go and visit old Master Zhou to learn from him, but I am not going to Qian Muzhai's place!' Thus speaking, the two set off towards Zhou Zhongyu's home.

Secretary Zhou received them warmly. Wu and Huang saw that he did not have an air of arrogance, a senior official though he was. They were therefore much gratified.

After tea was served, Huang Taichong related the assault on Beardy Ruan in the Temple.

'Interesting! Interesting!' exclaimed Zhou when he heard it. 'This time the dog of a bearded thief has lost face!'

Huang said, 'The nation's law does not permit assault on people in the Temple of Confucius. We are worried and know not what to do!'

'We would like you, old master, to help us,' Wu joined in.

Zhou smiled, 'It is quite proper to beat Beardy Ruan. What punishment will there be for you? In years gone by, he had done to death many righteous men of the Eastern Forest Party. Give him a few blows of the old fist! This is letting the thief off lightly!'

He then told his visitors about Ruan's association with Marquis Liu, Earl Zhou

and Captain Zhu of the royal clan. He went on to talk about Ruan's evil plan to falsely accuse old master Jiang Yueguang.

Sighing, he stroked his grey beard and lamented, 'I am useless now. My health is getting worse. I have neither the spirit nor the energy to deal with Beardy Ruan. The great affairs of state have fallen on your shoulders. You are young and able.'

Seeing that the aged master was full of sorrow and on the verge of tears, Wu comforted him and said, 'You should take care of yourself. We all rely on your support, old master!'

'What is your view of the present situation?' Chen inquired.

Zhou became even more agitated and said in an angry voice, 'There is no solution to the present situation. The country has increased taxes a few times. The people are exploited to such an extent that they could but eat tree barks and roots. After spending such a large amount of money collected through taxes, and maintaining over a million troops, the result is that we have nothing but bandits. All the generals are bandits. Zuo Liangyu is a little better, but even he is arrogant and his soldiers are cruel. They have more than sufficient capability to harm the people. Finished! Finished! I can see the whole nation is finished!'

Wu and Huang saw that Zhou was emotionally upset and dared not continue the conversation. They could but take their leave and come out.

Wu refused to see Qian Muzhai and returned to the bookshop at Three Hills Street, so Huang went by himself. Qian's residence was nearby and he arrived after turning a few corners.

Qian was already an old man of sixty-two. In the fifth year of Tianqi's Reign, Wei wielded tremendous power and Qian was dismissed from office. He did not feel badly about it, however, and returned home.

In the first year of Emperor Chongzhen's Reign, he was appointed Vice-President of the Board of Rites. Being involved in a dispute with someone over the recommendation for a cabinet appointment, he was sentenced to be dismissed and beaten with a pole. In front of the Emperor and numerous officials, his trousers were pulled down for a beating on the buttocks, which event greatly hurt his pride.

In the ninth year of Emperor Chongzhen's Reign, he was again falsely accused and taken to the Board of Punishment for trial. Having been imprisoned for a full two-year term, he became pessimistic and downhearted. He now spent his days drinking wine, reading the Buddhist canons, and collecting old books and old paintings. In his home village he built a country house, called the Mountain Hamlet of Red Beans. There he housed a rich collection of books and paintings reputed to be the best south of the Yangzi River.

Often he came to Nanjing to look for books and paintings, for which purpose he rented a few houses near the Peach Leaves Ferry.

When Huang Taichong arrived, he was just studying a painting by a famous painter called Wang Shuming, who lived in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. The

two men looked at the painting for a time and then entered into an earnest discussion of history.

Suddenly, Huang remembered his mission. So he changed the topic and told him about the incident at the Confucius' Temple. He said he was concerned that Libationer Wang might be punished, and pleaded with Qian to smooth things over.

When Qian heard that Chen and the others had assaulted Ruan, his countenance immediately changed. 'Brother,' he said, 'let me say something you may not wish to hear. We are all men of letters and reason. It is improper that one should use his hands and feet and behave like a coarse, stubborn fellow from the country. Besides, though Ruan was implicated in the Eunuchs' Case, he is nevertheless a Metropolitan Graduate. How could you humiliate a man of status?'

Huang was unable to defend himself when thus reproached.

Qian continued, 'When your honourable father was still alive, we were close friends. So I am treating you as a member of the family. If there is anything you wish to say, there is no harm in being frank and straightforward. Let me ask you, what is your view of Wu Ciwei's character?'

Speaking with conviction, Chen said, 'Our Revival Club stresses four virtues: integrity first; life and death last; strict discipline and moral rectitude, and distinction between right and wrong. The only person who can achieve all four is old Ciwei and no one else.'

'Any defects?' asked Qian.

'There are defects. Too stubborn in conduct, too extreme in speech,' Chen replied.

Qian touched his white beard and laughed. 'You are rightly the favourite disciple of Zhou Zhongzhou. You really know something! Ciwei is his own worst enemy because he is quick-tempered and stubborn. I have much advice to give him, but have not the courage to open my mouth. When an opportunity presents itself, it would do no harm for you to talk with him nicely.'

The old man's eyes were puffed and his complexion was pale. He spoke hesitantly and slowly, 'Old people's view of things is always different from the young. By comparison we are calmer and more level-headed, more ready to think of others. Brother, do not be annoyed, but I say that Ruan Dacheng is not too bad. Though he had done evil things in the past, he is deeply repentant now. The man has abilities. He is eloquent, and most energetic in doing things. With such a man, he will be a pillar of the nation if led along the right path. but if he takes the wrong route, he could be a demonic tyrant.'

Displeased, Huang muttered, 'According to what the old master says, we were in error by hitting Ruan. We should have allowed him to strike us instead!'

Qian blushed and waved his hand, 'No, no! This is not what I mean. I did not say Ruan was a good man. That he is ostracized by upright scholars is quite in accord with the saying, "Those who seek retribution cannot survive." I am only

saying that to beat up one who has already fallen is meaningless. Beside, he is already repentant, we should give him the opportunity to turn over a new leaf.'

Huang cross-examined Qian, 'Old master, have you heard that Beardy Ruan is hob-nobbing with high officials and members of the royal clan?'

Qian felt that the aggressive manner in which he spoke was unbecoming of one addressing his senior. He grumbled, 'I never seek news about what is happening outside. I have been an official before. I have been in prison before. I have enjoyed the glory of being a Metropolitan Graduate before. I have suffered the humiliation of being beaten on my bare buttocks in front of all the officials at court. I have seen through everything in this world. The firm policy which I espouse is: shut the doors and refrain from asking about worldly things; open the books and pursue the study of ancient texts.'

As they were talking, a servant boy came in and announced, 'The lord Yang of Guizhou Province is here to pay his respects.'

Qian said, 'Yang Longyou is a frequent visitor. I need not go out to greet him, just invite him into the study.'

When Yang entered and saw Huang there, he felt a little ill at ease. Raising his fists together in salute, he said, 'Brother Huang, we have not met for a long time!'

Huang did not approve of Yang's conduct, so he half ignored him and just nodded.

Qian felt sorry for Yang and said in jest, 'Brother Yang is a very good man indeed. He possesses a pair of leisurely legs to run errands for people. If you, Brother Huang, are in need of a pair of leisurely legs, just ask him. In Nanjing City, whether it be a palace or a *yamen* above, or a brothel or a teahouse below, he knows them all intimately.'

Yang blushed, 'You are indeed joking! In truth I am tired of living in Nanjing. Since I have much free time on my hands, I long to return to my home in Guizhou Province.'

'Is it because you have been snubbed by Purity that you are so downhearted?' Qian scoffed.

Shaking his head, Yang said in defence, 'No, no! I see that the situation is bad. The three garrisons of Wuhan will soon be lost; the fighting in Shanxi too is going badly. The Qinhuai region is not a suitable place for permanent residence. "Of the thirty-six ways, escape is the best way." It is better that I should pack my bags as quickly as possible and return to Guizhou.'

Qian clapped and laughed, 'You sound like Zhou Zhongyu, always worrying about this or fret about that. In fact, it is as if he is in fear that the sky might collapse. Just try and think! Wuhan is very long distance away from Nanjing by the waterway. Along the route are stationed many troops. Do we need to bother our hearts about it?'

'Sir, you are cut off from the outside world,' Huang interjected. 'Nowadays,

the troops lose every battle they fight, but the way they bully the ordinary folk is worse than the banditry.'

Qian burst out laughing, 'This is how you young people look at things! I have read numerous history books and investigated the happenings of the past and present. You say that the present administration is corrupt and the warlords are excessively powerful. In fact, the Han Dynasty was just like this. The Tang Dynasty and the Song Dynasty were similarly so. It is so now, and it will be so in the future. I have seen through this world. So I say, it is far better to chant the Buddhist sutras and amuse yourself with old books and old paintings!'

Huang found the talk getting more and more disagreeable, so he rose to leave.

Qian had intended to ask him to stay for dinner but, when he saw Yang making faces at the back, he knew that he had something important to discuss. He therefore took out a copy of *The True Records of Emperor Wanli's Reign* and a copy of *A Commentary on the Diamond Sutra* and presented them to Huang.

He said, 'I am the author of these two books. I shall be grateful for your comments.'

Huang had always disapproved of the study of Buddhism by scholars. But these being gifts bestowed by his senior, he was obliged to accept them out of courtesy. He decided, 'I shall take them back for the monks in the temple as a favour to them.' He thus gave thanks and accepted the books.

When Huang reached the door of the study, Qian whispered into his ear, 'Rest your heart, I shall surely visit Libationer Wang.'

Seeing that the sky was getting dark, Huang hurriedly returned to the Clear Cool Temple via the Three Hills Street. When he reached the Stone City Gate, he noticed a big fellow following him at a distance of twenty or thirty paces behind. If Huang quickened his pace, the man too would quicken his pace. If Huang slowed down, the man would also slow down. Huang had a suspicion that that man was up to no good.

When he reached the Black Dragon Pond, he saw a teahouse, the proprietor of which was an acquaintance. He had hoped to invite the proprietor to escort him to the Temple, but when he opened the door, he could see brightly-lit candles inside and three young women playing a card game. He quickly retreated and summoned up his courage to walk on.

When he turned around to look, the big man had already disappeared. He thought for a bit and laughed uncontrollably, 'Nanjing is where the Subordinate Capital is. How can there be any robbers!'

He crossed the main road, went over a small mound and walked along the foot of the Clear Cool Hill. When he was near the temple, he suddenly heard quickened footsteps behind him. He turned his head and was startled to see a big fellow leaping out of the woods.

The man let fly his foot and aimed a kick at Huang's chest. Quickly dodging the attack, he stumbled and nearly fell. The books he was carrying under his arm had already scattered all over the ground.

Since his father's unjust death, he had taken boxing lessons from a martial instructor. That was why he was able to defend himself, though just barely. While fighting, he shouted, 'Catch the robber! Catch the robber!'

The assailant was astounded when he saw that Huang knew how to box. And when he saw the lanterns come flying out of the Temple, he was even more alarmed. He lingered until twenty or thirty monks and cooks, all carrying lanterns, surrounded him and attacked with wooden rods, carrier poles, forks and knives. He then left Huang and pulled up his legs to flee. Several quick-witted monks had already prepared two or three lengths of ropes to trap him up. Caught unaware, he fell flat on the ground.

30

The Great Betrayal

The familiar people they saw were Cai Yisuo and Lady Propriety.

Cai was implicated because of his connections with several leading members of the Revival Club. After this, his bookshop was forced to close and the shop premises were sold to another for selling cakes and biscuits. His living quarters at the rear of the shop were forcibly occupied by Chief of the Embroidered Guards Feng Kezong as his private property and without having to pay even a copper. Old Cai was now bankrupt and had no way of making a living, so he moved to live in the countryside over ten *li* away from the city.

That morning, he heard that Ma and Ruan had vanished together with their followers, so he entered the city to take a look at his former residence. He bade the cripple Hu to stay behind at his house as a caretaker, whilst he returned to the country to live.

The night before, Lady Propriety had made her escape out of the royal palace. She was determined not to return to the Old Quarters and engage in her former trade. Having thus made up her mind, she waited until daybreak and sold the jewellery she was wearing. She then looked for a lady companion to accompany her back home in Paulownia City. She, however, could not foresee that as soon as it was light, ten of the thirteen city gates were closed, and the other three only allowed people to enter but not to go out. Going from the Treasure Gathering Gate to the Tongji Gate, and from there to the Peace Gate, she found that no one was permitted to go through any of them. When she was in a quandary as to what she should do next, she heard people in the neighbourhood say, 'The Treasure Gathering Gate is now opened!' Quickly she dashed over there to take a look and

was disappointed to find it was only a rumour. It was there that she ran into Proprietor Cai whom she had met before several times and was hence acquainted with. That was the reason why they were walking together.

Hou and Liu saw that Proprietor Cai had a sallow complexion and was much thinner than before. Lady Propriety had not changed at all, still retaining her grace and beauty though now dressed in coarse garments as a rustic.

When the four met, they had a thousand things to say. So they selected a quiet spot and engaged in an animated conversation.

Hou could not wait to ask Lady Propriety about Perfumed Lady's fate in the palace. He was also eager to know where she had escaped to.

'Several tens of us, imperial concubines as well as eunuchs, left the palace in the middle of the night at about the third watch. In the confusion, no one could find anybody else. I am afraid I did not see Perfumed Lady,' replied Lady Propriety.

Seeing that Hou wanted to continue with further questions, she looked at him intently and teased him, 'Master Hou, how is it that you are only concerned with the Fragrant Fan Pendant and nobody else?'

Then, she said seriously, 'For a long time, she had had the intention to shave off her hair and become a nun. If you really want to find her, you must go to the Mountain of Misty Abode and ask her friend Jade Lady, who lives at the Preservation of Truth Monastery there. If she succeeded in going out of the city last night, I guess she would surely go and look for Jade Lady.'

Proprietor Cai then asked for news about Wu Ciwei, Chen Dingsheng and Huang Taichong.

'Since the county magistrate offered a reward for old Wu's capture, he has been a fugitive and I know not if he be dead or alive,' said Hou. 'As to Brother Chen, I hear he is at his home in the village in Yixing. For a long time now, I have not had any news about Brother Huang since his return to Zhejiang Province.'

As the four were talking excitedly, someone outside the lane cried, 'Pockmarked Liu is in the lane! Pockmarked Liu is in the lane!'

In a short while, a large number of curious onlookers surged in and filled half the lane. There were now too many people around to permit the four friends to talk with ease, so they dispersed. Hou and Liu returned to their lodgings, whilst Lady Propriety stayed temporarily with Proprietor Cai's relative. Cai promised her that when the city gates were opened, he would find her a reliable lady companion to accompany her back to Paulownia City.

The city gates remained firmly closed the next day.

The 'rabblés' remaining in the palace grounds put the Prince on the Throne. On yellow paper and written in red ink, a proclamation was issued. Copies were posted in all the main streets. Both within the palace grounds and without, people raised festoons and ornamental lanterns and set off firecrackers. Though the populace were 'seeking joy in bitterness', the nobility and officials pretended to be deaf and mute. Not one of them paid a courtesy visit or offer congratulations to the new ruler.

Two senior Licentiate, Xu and Xiao, braved death to call on Earl Zhao. Crying bitterly, they begged him to support the Prince, defend the city and protect the Throne. Not only did Earl Zhao refuse to heed them, he charged them with being Zuo Liangyu's co-conspirators and ordered that they be bound and beheaded in the streets.

On the same day, others who were executed in public included eight of Ma Shiyang's common soldiers seized by Earl Zhao as Ma's spies. The red-nosed Zang Yijia, the drama instructor in Ruan Dacheng's employ, was also arrested. He nearly became the victim to die in place of Ruan. Fortunately, Earl Zhao wished to present a few troupes of girls to perform for 'the Great Commander of the Great Manchus' and was in need of a drama instructor, so Zang's life was spared.

At that moment, the thirteen gates were still firmly closed. The relationship between the nobility and officials on the one hand and the 'rabblés' on the other was so hostile that it was like water and fire.

The situation worsened after the execution of Xu and Xiao.

Hou and Liu happened to be in an area which came under Earl Zhao's jurisdiction. Seeing that a widespread search was conducted for 'Zuo Liangyu's co-conspirators' and 'the spies of Ma and Ruan', they were too scared to venture out but hid themselves at home.

Two more days went by.

On the evening of the fourteenth of the Fifth Moon, people in the streets said, 'The Manchu army has just arrived from Zhenjiang. They are now stationed at the foot of Purple Gold Mountain. Duke Zhu, Earl Zhao and Imperial Son-in-Law Gu Qi have been there to pay obeisance. The head of the Manchus is the same Dorgan who slaughtered eight hundred thousand inhabitants in Yangzhou. Earl Zhao has been rewarded for his meritorious deed with a dukedom. Further gifts include gold stirrups, silver saddles, horses from the royal stable, sable jackets and caps studded with eight precious stones. In order to show his benevolence and magnanimity, Dorgan had a meal with them seated on a mat placed on the floor.'

These were the actual facts without elaboration.

For this reason, Earl Zhao was immensely proud of himself. When he returned to the city, he boasted grandly that he was the 'Founding Official of the Nation'.

On the same night, he transmitted the Manchu Commander's proclamation to placate the people.

It read: –

This is a notice to the civil and military officials as well as all civilians of Nanjing

On Sacred Command, the grand army led by me has reduced the turmoil in the country to quiet I have succoured the obedient and extirpated the recalcitrant Wherever the grand army went, their knives were never stained with blood Whenever officials came to surrender and present their seals of office, we have either benevolently promoted

them out of the usual ranking order, or permitted them to stay in their current posts. Not a blade of grass has been disturbed amongst the people, and their properties are safe and secured as before.

With the special regard Heaven has bestowed upon our Dynasty, we have been victorious in every battle, and triumphant in the conquest of every city.

I assume you are all already familiar with the above facts.

Be that as it may, in publicizing our virtues, we do not need to reveal our military might. We now beckon to you with benevolence. The course of human affairs and the timeliness of our enterprise must be perfectly clear to you all by now.

Prince Fu has usurped the Supreme Title. Not only does he buried himself in the pleasures of wine and women, he trusts the mean and the despicable. As a consequence, people's livelihood deteriorates by the day. The civil official wields great power, but is only devoted to evil deeds and bribes. The military official belittles their master and is nothing but the fox in a tiger's skin. They all behave generally in an insubordinate manner.

Those above and those below are not of one heart. The people's sufferings are great. When I think of these matters, I sigh repeatedly. For this reason, I have acted according to Heaven's Will, punished the guilty, and saved the people from fire and water.

Let my admonitions be understood.

By command of Dorgan, the Prince of Yu, appointed by Imperial Command the General of National Pacification.

In the early morning of the next day, Earl Zhao placed on his head the cap studded with the eight precious stones and wore on his person the sable jacket. Seated on the imperial horse equipped with a silver saddle and gold stirrups, he assumed such air that it was as if he was the one and only hero of the age! At the head of all his officers and soldiers, all armed to the teeth with knives and axes, round shields and firearms of various kinds, they rushed towards the palace in a mighty wave. When the 'unruly mob' defending the palace saw that the enemy commander had on his head a gem studded cap, they all thought they were being attacked by the Manchus. In great panic, they were thrown into confusion without a fight. Amidst the rolling of drums on Earl Zhao's side, the defenders were easily defeated. Included among the prisoners of war was the Prince who had been Emperor for only three days.

Upon quelling the 'unruly mob', Earl Zhao at once transmitted his order that each and every household should paste on their front door a poster with the two characters 'obedient subjects' written on it. In place of the usual couplets pasted on the front door in celebration of the Spring Festival, each house must put up a sign written in elegant calligraphy on yellow paper, either the words 'Ten thousand thousand years to the Great Manchu Empire', or the words 'The wind and rain

being timely, the nation enjoys prosperity and the people enjoy peace'. And even that was not enough. Heads of villages and districts were obliged to reward the 'imperial troops' stationed outside the city with money, meat, rice, cooked food, tea, sweets and tobacco. Those who disobeyed would be charged with treason.

As a result, in the same afternoon, the bearers and carriers formed a long line of seven or eight *li* all the way to Purple Gold Hill.

Taking advantage of the moment, Hou and Liu sneaked out of the capital and hurried towards the west. There they joined up with General Zuo Liangyu's son, Zuo Menggeng, and placed their hope of national restoration on this young general.

On their way to Anqing, they saw nothing but chaos and devastation. Everywhere there was fire and smoke, and not one piece of land was left untouched. Along the route, nine out of ten houses were abandoned. The countless number of minor bandits, small thieves, coupled with deserters from the army and militia, caused such havoc that a traveller might in a moment of carelessness lose his life without even knowing how. For this reason, the two friends were obliged to exercise extreme caution.

Making detailed enquiries as they proceeded, they covered not more than forty to fifty *li* in a day.

We shall now leave the travellers here on their arduous journey, and return to the story of the Emperor's escape from Nanjing. At daybreak, they came out of the city through Moling Pass and came to rest at a small village within the Li River County.

Ma and Ruan's intention was to make for Zhejiang Province. It was dangerous to have in their party the Emperor, for he was bound to be the target of the Manchus' pursuit. In order to protect their treasures contained in hundreds of baskets and also the lives of their families, Ma and Ruan advised the Emperor to seek the protection of Duke Huang Degong in Wuhu. To facilitate the Emperor's departure, they gave him some silver and assigned a few soldiers for his protection.

Though the Emperor was reluctant to leave the large party, he knew full well the unenviable position he was in. The former times had vanished, and the present was very different. It could not now be compared with the days when he sat on the Throne in the great Hall of Military Valour with his crown and yellow robe. He did not dare refuse to comply, so he left for Wuhu in a rage.

On the next day, he arrived at the suburb of the Peace Prefecture. There it was said that Marquis Liu had arrived on the previous day from Nanjing, and the troops defending the prefecture were his men. On hearing this the Emperor was overjoyed. And he sent Eunuch Han to enter the city with a royal decree, commanding the good Marquis to come out and greet His Majesty. But how was he to anticipate that the Marquis should ignore him altogether and drive Eunuch Han out of the city? The Emperor of the Great Ming Dynasty was not even given a bowl of cold rice.

It goes without saying the combined anger of the Emperor, the Queen Mother

and the Queen knew no bounds. Even the two Grand Eunuchs, Lu and Han, found the rebuff unbearable. They pondered secretly, 'This little old emperor is now not worth a copper. What is the point of continuing on as his eunuchs?' They divided the silver given by Ma and Ruan and ran away like a whiff of wind.

When Emperor Hongguang saw that his eunuchs had decamped and the silver had been stolen, he could only cried 'Bitterness!'

Though he had not a copper on him, fortunately the distance from the Peace Prefecture to Wuhu was not great, so he and his party arrived at noon of the following day.

When Duke Huang saw the unexpected arrival of the royal party, he was completely stunned. After ascertaining the facts, he cried bitterly and at once stopped his 'brotherly quarrel' with Zuo Menggeng. Then, he swore a solemn oath to recover Nanjing and to protect the region south of the river from being seized by the invading barbarians.

Seeing that there was at last someone who was willing to protect the royal house, the Emperor was overjoyed.

He had such an agreeable time that he cast Nanjing out of his mind. Each day he enjoyed himself in the military camp watching plays and drinking wine. But sadly, the good days did not last very long.

On the twenty-first of the Fifth Moon, Earl Liu Liangzuo, who had already surrendered, tried to persuade Duke Huang to join the Manchus. Unable to repress his fury, the Duke put on his armour to come out and fight the Earl. Unexpectedly, he was hit by an arrow shot by Zhang Tianlu, an officer serving under Zuo Liangyu. The arrow was firmly lodged to the left of his windpipe, about an inch in depth and causing unbearable pain.

Coincidentally, the senior officer remaining in the city, Tian Xiong, took the opportunity of the moment to turn against the Duke and seized the Emperor. Tian then surrendered with his captive.

Seeing that all hope had gone, the Duke heaved a great sigh, pulled out the arrow, and stabbed himself in the throat to commit suicide.

On the twenty-fifth of the Fifth Moon, Liu Liangzuo and Tian Xiong took the Emperor, the Queen Mother and the Queen to Nanjing under an armed escort.

On the same day that the Emperor arrived in Nanjing as a captive, Ma Shiying and his mother, disguised as the Queen Mother, arrived in Hangzhou after a prolonged journey.

They had intended to rest there for a while. But having heard that one by one, Danyang, Changzhou, Wuxi and Suzhou had been taken, and the Manchu forces were pouring towards Zhejiang Province without stop, they were so terrified that they made plans to resume their journey at once.

An order went out for the confiscation or requisition of ships to ferry the fugitives across the Qiantang River. The officials and civilians of Shaoxing, however, objected that 'Ma the thieving Prime Minister' should cross the river to

the south. To this end, they recruited a number of soldiers to guard the river banks. Not knowing that the Queen Mother was false, they petitioned her to decapitate Ma Shiying!

Ma kept his several thousand soldiers behind in order to protect his enormous riches and his family, so he decided not to act rashly and fight with the people of Shaoxing. Forcing himself to suppress the anger in his chest, he gave up the idea of crossing the river and remained in Hangzhou.

Soon the news of Emperor Hongguang's captivity reached him. He then thought of a new trick. Together with Ruan Dacheng and Fang Guo'an, they raised Prince Lu, then residing in Hangzhou, to be the Regent.

Now this fellow Fang Guo'an used to be an officer under General Zuo Liangyu. He had betrayed his general and turned to Ma even when Zuo was still alive. Ma did his best to cultivate this man and recommended him to the Emperor to be the Earl of Eastern Pacification. Feeling indebted to Ma for this benevolence, he did whatever Ma wished. The result was that after Prince Lu became Regent on the tenth of the Sixth Moon, Ma was able to retain his office of Prime Minister.

On the thirteenth, when Prince Lu had been Regent for only three days, the vanguard of the Manchu forces reached the suburbs of Hangzhou. Ma and Ruan were the first to lift up their feet and ran. Fang Guo'an fought a battle with them and was totally defeated. He too took flight.

They fled to Jinhua in one breath, travelling by road and by river.

Seeing that his patrons only had regard for their treasures but not his safety, Prince Lu exclaimed repeatedly, 'I've been swindled! I've been swindled!' Now left by himself in Hangzhou, there was nothing he could do to vent his anger. So he put on his thick skin and surrendered to the Manchus.

At that time, the three garrisons, once so powerful, were no longer a force to be reckoned with. Duke Huang Degong had committed suicide. Earl Liu Liangzuo had surrendered. Earl Liu Zeqing had gone overseas with his stolen treasures, beauties and family members.

General Zheng Hongkui of Jingkou and his Inspector-General Yang Longyou took what still remained of their army and boarded the ships at Chongmen Island, whence they escaped to Fujian Province.

Zuo Menggeng, who was one of Emperor Chongzhen's favourite generals because of his triumphs over the roving brigands, also put on his thick skin and surrendered. His Inspector-General Huang Shu followed suit.

General Yuan Jixian of the River Command preferred death to surrender, so Zuo and Huang tied him up and presented him to the Manchus as a 'gift'.

When Hou and Liu heard the news about Zuo, they were so vexed they nearly died. So they had to give up Anqing.

For the moment, they were undecided where they should go. Then, they heard from the refugees, 'The grand armies of Liu Zeqing and Zheng Hongkui have joined together on the banks of Yangzi River. Raising the righteous banner against the Manchus, they now beckon all righteous people to give up their lives for the nation!'

When Hou and Liu received the information, they were overjoyed. Travelling by day and by night, they hurried towards the east.

On a day in the beginning of the Sixth Moon, they arrived at a place near Moling Pass. It was only then they knew what they had been told was a rumour. In fact, Liu Zeqing had gone overseas with his treasures and beauties to search for his Garden of Eden. And Zheng Hongkui and the 'good sort' Yang Longyou had already travelled by ship to Fujian.

Hou and Liu were now greatly alarmed, for there was nowhere they could turn to. Just at that time, the Manchus handed down an order, called 'Shave the Head Order'. It meant: 'Either leave your head but get rid of your hair, or leave your hair but get rid of your head.'

Both men had long hair, so they might well lose their heads if they were discovered by others along the way.

Liu intended to visit the neighbouring counties, so as to seek information about the activities concerning the fight against the Manchus and about the restoration of the nation. He was prepared to offer himself as a courier between those counties. Having left Hou with the silver, he disguised himself as a travelling Taoist monk and went on his way.

Hou recalled that Lady Propriety had said Perfumed Lady might be staying with Jade Lady at the Preservation of Truth Monastery on the Mountain of Misty Abode. Eager to seek her out, he rested during the day and travelled by night and went towards the mountain by a circuitous route.

He had two objects in mind. First, he might find out about Perfumed Lady's whereabouts. He was particularly eager to visit the Mountain of Misty Abode, because when he and his lover parted company, they agreed to meet each other in the Temple of Misty Abode on the mountain. Second, he would select a secluded spot deep in the mountain to hide himself. This way, he could retain his long hair as a symbol of his continued loyalty to the Ming Dynasty.

Postscript

By Gu Sifan, author of the novel,
The New Peach Blossom Fan

The novel was started in the second half of 1946. It was serialized in the *Southeast Daily* of Shanghai for a year and a half. In 1948, the title of the novel was changed to *The New Peach Blossom Fan*, which the New Century Press of Shanghai published. In 1957, a revised edition was published. By now over six hundred and seventy thousand copies have been printed.

Why did I write this long novel at the time? I was motivated by two considerations. First, I feel that a novel not only offers literary enjoyment, it also enriches one's knowledge of history, and inspires national confidence and self-respect. There is an old adage: 'From ancient times, righteousness and evil are like ice and coal.' Through historical facts the original picture of history may be truthfully discerned. From these facts, we may distinguish right from wrong. From them, too, we may examine current events as though we are looking into a mirror.

There was in the Southern Ming Dynasty no lack of people with high integrity and lofty ideals. Examples are Wu Ciwei, Huang Taichong, Shi Kefa who died as a martyr in Yangzhou City, Liu Zongzhou who sacrificed his life for the country by fasting, and the upright and unbending Zhou Zhongyu. Their personalities demonstrate the fine traditions of China's scholarly and official class.

In dealing with history, not only must we criticize, we must also pursue continuity. These men's unshakable patriotism and their firm belief that moral courage is more important than life and death is exactly the kind of quality which should be continued.

My second reason for writing this novel is this. *The Peach of Blossom Fan* describes how the power of state fell into the hands of Ma Shiyong and Ruan Dacheng in the Southern Ming Dynasty, which had its capital in Nanjing. They sold official posts and traded in peerages. Corruption was rife. There was at the time a ballad amongst the populace: 'The Premier wants only money, the Son of Heaven only wine.' And, 'Scrape together all the money on the south of the River and stuff into the mouths of the Ma family.' These evil men withdrew the troops who were fighting the invading Qing army in the front, and despatched them to the south to fight a bloody battle with Zuo Liangyu. Taking advantage of the lull, the Qing force came straight into China and surrounded Yangzhou City with an army of a hundred thousand men. The city however was defended by Shi Kefa with only five thousand soldiers, it was therefore impossible to resist the enemy. The city fell and he died for his country.

When I was writing this novel, I saw with my own eyes how corrupt the government of the day was. At the time the country was deep in a civil war. Inflation soared, and people had no means of living. The situation was similar to the small court of the Southern Ming Dynasty three hundred years before. I therefore seized upon the historical events as my theme and, 'borrow the old to satirize the present'. This then was my second motive for writing this lengthy story.

The first credit for the publication of the revised edition in 1957 by Shanghai's Cultural Press must be given to Wang Dingcheng (王鼎成).

I was then a teacher in the Shanghai Municipal Girls' Teaching where the well-known educationalist Chen Heqing (陳鶴琴) was head. He gave me much help and introduced me to the historian Jian Bozan (翦伯贊), so that I had the opportunity to learn at the feet of the expert whose speciality was the Southern Ming Dynasty.

The political campaigns in the 1950s never ceased. It was therefore almost a miracle that this lengthy story saw the light of day, describing as it did the various roles of kings, generals and ministers, scholars and beauties.

The novel was at the time the only book of its kind within the whole country.

It was entirely due to Wang Dingcheng's courage and prescience that the book was published. Without paying any attention to the prevailing political wind, and without weighing the honour or benefit that might befall him, he at once published a hundred thousand copies.

Unfortunately, during the Cultural Revolution, Mr Wang Dingcheng was persecuted by the Gang of Four and died a bitter man. In the turmoil that last ten years, cultural dictatorship caused enormous damage. Following the criticism of the film called *The Peach Blossom Fan*, this historical novel was denounced as 'a fan which fans a demonic wind', and it was boasted that it must be reduced to ashes.

History is just. After the fall of the Gang of Four, my long novel *The Peach*

Postscript

Blossom Fan broke new ground and once again met its readers. Of the revised edition over four hundred thousand copies were printed.

I am deeply thankful to Mr T.L. Yang. With his warm love for the country, and by his practised hand, he has translated this novel into English in spite of his busy schedule.

January, 1998
Hangzhou