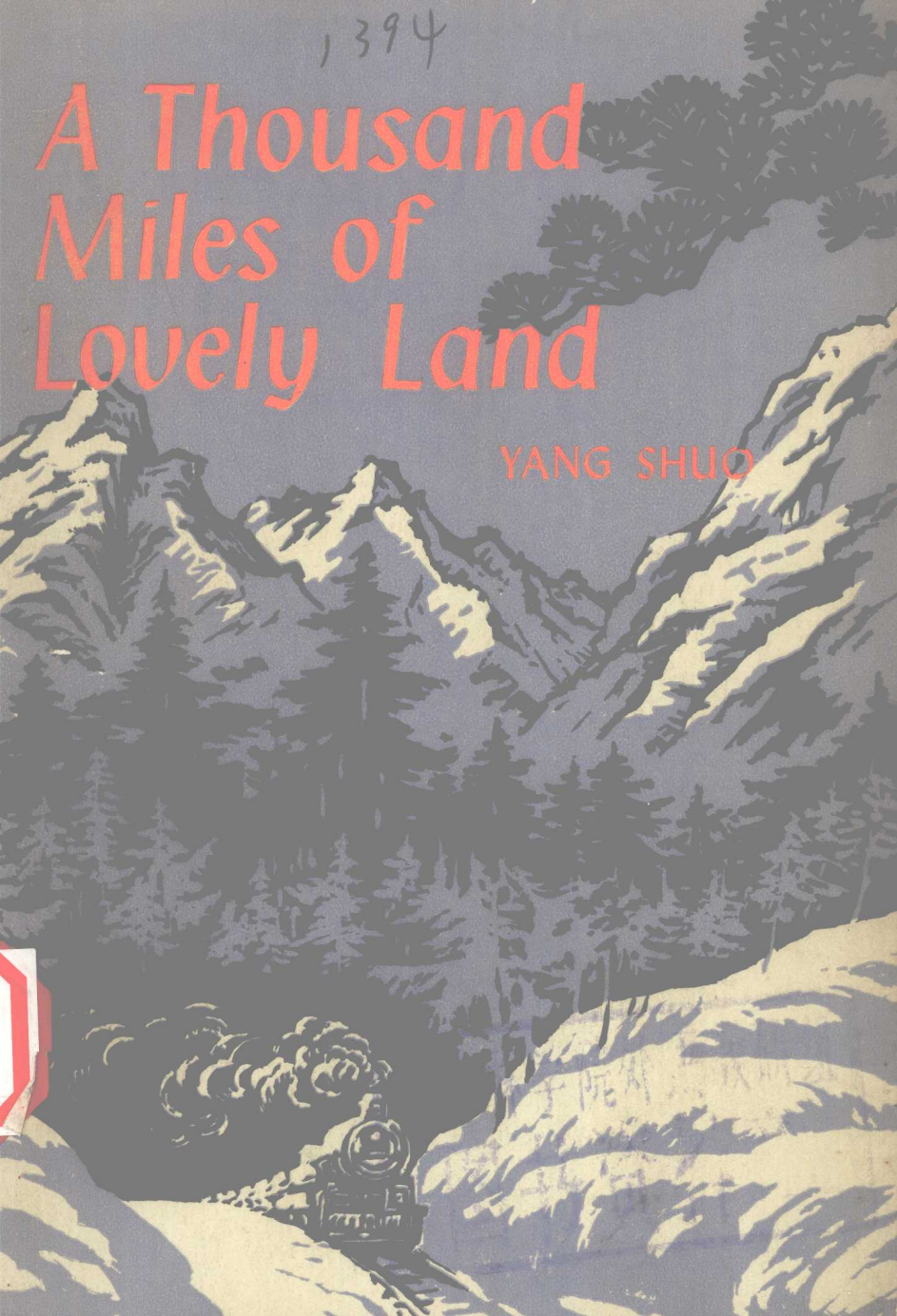


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A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land

YANG SHUO



A THOUSAND MILES
OF LOVELY LAND

Yang Shuo

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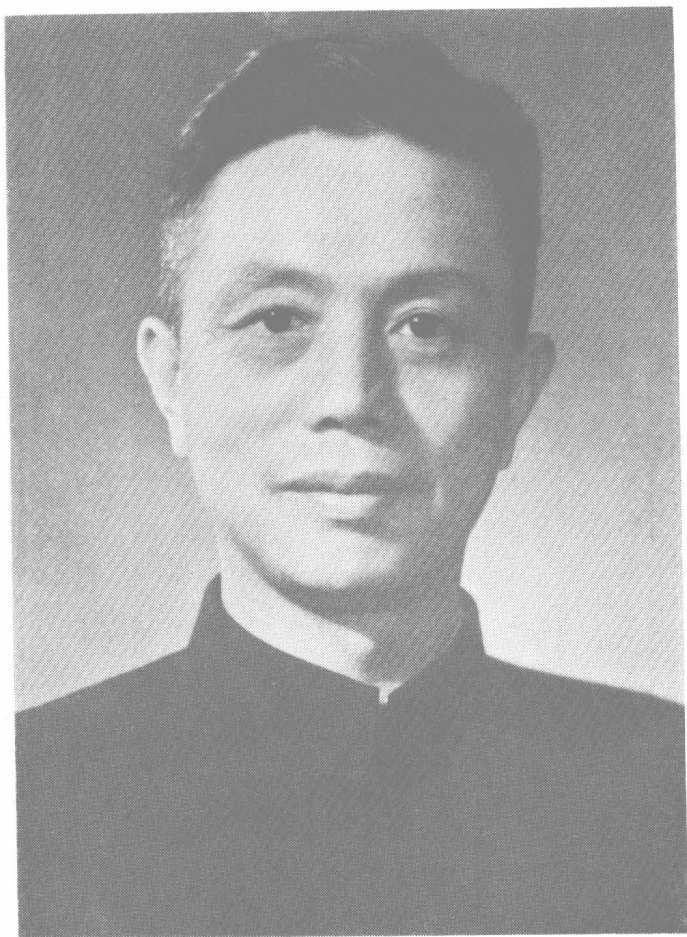
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FOREWORD

Since the Chinese People's Volunteers came to Korea in the winter of 1950, we have again and again hailed their splendid feats with salvoes. Victories are naturally exhilarating; but the heroes who win them are more exhilarating still. Almost throughout the past year I have been on the march with a CPV unit made up of railroad workers and have come to know a lot of them. Ordinary everyday folk, they are working-men in their true colours. Each of them has lived his own life, has his own family and his own past. And I wonder what has urged them to join the CPV, to come to Korea, and to plunge into this bitter war, one leaving his fiancée on the eve of marriage, another not waiting to bury his dead father, a third parting from his wife and children; all giving up their peaceful life. I seem to perceive a flame burning in the inmost recesses of their hearts. It is the flame of love: love for their country, for their people, for justice and peace. It is for this love that they have given up their personal happiness, their personal ties...and even their lives. Where can one find a greater love than that? That is the love that I want to write about.

This is one of the main threads that run through my story. But there is another: the further growing and strengthening of the great friendship which has sprung up between the Chinese and Korean peoples, in the

course of their common destiny and in the midst of their common struggle and the common shedding of their blood.

I am writing this on the night of June 4, 1952. It has just struck three. Nearby, bombs are exploding in quick succession. The Korean hut where I live is shaking and trembling. Red flames dart in through the door.

The raid over, I go out of doors for a walk. In the distance a cuckoo keeps on calling in the tranquil moonlight. It is time for rice-planting. In a few days young shoots of rice will be planted in all the paddy fields as far as one's eyes can reach. No brute force, I am certain, can ever hope to destroy our life; our work goes on as usual. It is in such circumstances that I put down my last word and wind up the work, only to realize that I have not succeeded the least bit in describing the people and the events. I have kept on writing, thrilled with the pride of belonging to such a great people, and at the same time painfully, acutely aware that my uncouth style fails to do justice to their character. Forgive me if my writing has detracted from the glory which is my people's due.

I dedicate this book to the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea, with gratitude to the comrades who have helped me in the course of writing.

THE STORY BEGINS

It was August 1950. In a peasant's house in north Korea flowers were in full bloom along the wall of the back yard. They grew in clusters with crimson petals like those of the rose. Autumn is a dewy season, and morning after morning the glistening beads of dew on the petals glided down the tendrils looking fresh and fair.

"Grandpa, grandpa," cried a boy about ten, running with a flower he had just plucked, "what's this flower? I don't know what it is."

"Of course you don't. Even your mother doesn't know its name. It's called the flower of endless days (*Hibiscus Mutabilis*). It used to grow all over Korea forty years ago," said grandpa, his hands clasped behind his back, slowly breaking into a smile. He was at least seventy years old. With his snow-white beard and the ribbons of his white gown fluttering in the wind and a black gauze hat on his head, grandpa looked like a figure in some old Chinese painting.

"I remember you said you didn't know its name when I asked you last time," said the boy's mother softly, as she spread out the freshly reaped millet with a rake to dry in the yard.

Her words sent the old man back to the old days. "Ha, who dared to tell you the truth then? You young people couldn't understand how serious things were

then. You would have talked and then we would have been done for!" grandpa said sighing and shaking his head. Then he began to recite an old song:

*With a history of five thousand years,
With a thousand miles of lovely land,
With the flowers of endless days blossoming all over
the eastern hills.
There spreads our beautiful Korea.*

Korea, as we know, is a lovely country covered with mountains and rivers. In ancient times, the feudal regime of Korea had taken the flower of endless days as the national flower, though the people had a greater love for the azalea which bloomed all over hills and dales in spring. The flower of endless days grows in clusters, world without end. They bloom from June and July to the end of autumn. They flourish and multiply all over the land; they even manage to grow when dropped in the mud by a careless hand.

At the beginning of the present century, the Japanese had conquered Korea and annexed it. Then the people of Korea lost their freedom. And because the flower of endless days was the national flower of the old Korea, the Japanese hacked away the shrubs wherever they were to be found and punished people who planted them. So almost all the shrubs in the land were hacked down and used as firewood.

"All hacked down?" asked the child at a loss, his dark eyes staring at the old man. "Then how could we have got some here?"

"That's just it," answered grandpa, smiling and stroking his beard. "They couldn't destroy the plants, let alone the people. The Japanese tried and failed and

now the Americans are trying in vain. Year after year, fine fellows rose to grapple with them; no sooner did one fall than another stepped into his place. Your dad was one of them. My heart became hard at the sight of the blood that was shed."

As the old man was speaking, the U.S. troops were bragging about pushing on into China within three days. As if taking over from the Japanese, they were marching north along the road that led the Japanese to ruin.

The child looked up at his grandfather with rapt attention as he listened to the story. Suddenly he heard another boy calling his name, "Kangkunni! Kangkunni!"

He ran out, the flower between his lips.

Grandpa trudged along behind him with his stick. His limbs were as stiff as wood. Autumn was always rainy and it had drizzled for so many days that the air was damp and heavy. What luck to have a fine day like this with dazzling sunshine everywhere! It seemed particularly dry and refreshing. Elated by the fine weather, grandpa made his way towards the village government to ask for news from the front. Before he had crossed its threshold the sound of laughter and singing reached him. A crowd was gathered at the door, standing on tiptoe and peeping in.

The house was packed with young people of about twenty. The small tables were covered with wine cups and dishes. Squatting in front of a table and raising his cup, the village head was toasting the recruits and giving them a send-off.

"Grandpa, grandpa, I want to be a soldier too!" cried Kangkunni, suddenly emerging from the crowd and clutching at the old man's stick.

"Don't talk nonsense, how can you become a soldier

when you're not the height of a rifle," grandpa said.

"When will you let me go then?" asked the child turning up his dark and shining little face.

"When you have grown up," answered grandpa with a smile.

A group of young women blocked the doorway, laughing and clapping their hands. Someone in the house shouted: "For the thousand miles of our lovely land!" Inside and out a volley of shouts burst forth. Echoes vibrated and grandpa felt a tugging at his old heartstrings. In the seventy years of his life, much had passed before his eyes; and the sight of these bright young fellows heading for the battlefield, for the freedom of the nation, reminded him of his dead son and the Japanese. These thousand miles of land now appeared in his mind's eye no longer as an isolated peninsula but as an outpost of world peace; and blossoming all over the land was no longer the flower of endless days, symbol of the ancient dynasties, but flower of heroism which would bloom for ever in the memory of man.

I

The two themes of this novel will unfold like two flowers on one plant; let us look at one blossom first.

The northern part of the land of Korea borders on China, with the deep-blue Yalu River running between. From spring to winter rapid currents surge forward with bluish waves giving a scaly look to the water.

A huge iron-bridge with ornamental railings stretches across the river linking up the two peoples' life and

thoughts like a chain. On the northern bank, not far away from the bridge, lived a veteran railway worker about forty, named Yao Chang-keng. With him were his wife and his daughter, Yao Chih-lan, a girl telephonist on the railway. Chang-keng had been engaged in road maintenance work until the day of liberation. Then Wu Chen, the new director, came and was at once struck by his honesty, understanding and industry and gave him one promotion after another till he now finally found himself chief of the engineering section.

Chang-keng was a man who had weathered storms. For years, he worked through sun and rain till his face was as rugged as stone. He rarely laughed. Many people disliked him at first sight and called him stubborn behind his back. His old acquaintances, however, thought differently. To them he was one in a hundred for mature wisdom and lofty character.

This character was shown by the following event which his wife loved to talk about. Before he went to work on the railway, he had earned his living as a mason and house painter. Driven from pillar to post, he blithely changed his job many times. In his early days when the "Manchukuo" puppet regime was in power, he got a job building houses for the Japanese, on the night shift. A vicious Japanese foreman developed a habit of striking the workers with a hammer whenever they displeased him. Once, during the dog-days, when everybody was stripped to the waist, Chang-keng was working hard, mixing cement with water. The sweat was pouring off him. Seeing that he was bathed in sweat, the Japanese with a malicious grin, started to pour sand right on his back. This was more than he could

bear. Biting his lip he knocked the foreman headlong into the cement.

Mrs. Yao was a half-blind woman with a heart of gold. But she had a weakness for long-winded talk. She was so garrulous that she was sometimes found talking even to cats and dogs. Lifting a broom she would say to a chicken that had inadvertently strayed in, "Who asked you to come in, you little devil. Out you go!"

As soon as the chores were over, Mrs. Yao would sit before her gate, sewing and chatting to her neighbours. She would embark on an endless stream of complaints about how she had to toil and moil for her husband and daughter, while really boasting about them.

"What shall I do now?" she once held forth. "Pa wasn't back until midnight again last night. He doesn't care a bit about regular meals or regular sleep. He stays at his working site day and night and completely forgets the family. There was a snowstorm one night last winter, and everybody was asleep. All of a sudden he got up out of bed and looked out of the window. Then he opened the door and walked out. I called after him but he didn't answer. Then I found out later that he had gone out, in the middle of the night, to get men to sweep away the snow so that it wouldn't put the trains off the rails."

"Look what a long face he's always pulling," she digressed, "I have spent half of my lifetime with him without ever hearing him crack a joke. But strangely enough, one autumn day he came in bubbling with joy. I was wondering what had made him so happy, when he said to me before I had a chance to ask, 'I feel as happy as I did on our wedding day.' That was the day he was admitted into the Chinese Communist Party.

You see, practically everybody has become a new man since the Communist Party came."

"You're a lucky one all right, Mrs. Yao," a woman who lived next door put in. "Your husband has come through his long ordeal, and your pretty daughter has learned to write and do accounts. You'll soon be marrying her off and dandling a grandson on your knees."

Mrs. Yao's heart brimmed over with happiness at her neighbour's praise of her daughter, though she pretended to be bored with the subject.

"Why, what luck have I ever enjoyed?" Mrs. Yao said, knitting her brows. "My daughter is nothing to be proud of. She's simply wearing me out. She won't look at a piece of needlework. Goes off walking to the office with her father. And now, on top of it all, she's gone and picked herself a boyfriend. I know free choice in love is the height of fashion nowadays and there's nothing I can do whatever I may think about it. But she'll soon be getting married and she can't sew a stitch. So I have to work my fingers to the bone getting her trousseau ready. Even then she's dissatisfied and picks holes in my work. I couldn't please her even if I worked myself to death."

The couple had once had two sons but they lost them both, and the daughter, as the only child in the family, was the apple of their eye. Yao Chih-lan was now a girl of eighteen, tall and slender, with liquid eyes and heavy eyelids. With two little plaits hanging down her back, she looked as pretty as a lotus fresh from the water.

Chih-lan was a great lover of books, or a "bookworm", according to her mother. She used to borrow books from a library and spent the evenings reading them. She

would read on and on, laughing and weeping with her characters, forgetting her meal and everything.

Mrs. Yao was worried that her daughter's mind might be poisoned by some unbecoming chapbooks that came her way. One day she asked anxiously: "What are you reading, you silly girl?"

"*The Story of Liu Hu-lan*,"* Chih-lan said, showing her the cover of the book.

When Chih-lan came to the scene of Liu's execution, she felt sad yet excited. "Liu's a girl and I'm a girl too, why can't I learn to act like her?" Since then she set Liu as her example.

Chih-lan came to know Wu Tien-pao, her sweetheart, in the evening school for railway workers and employees. To all appearances they looked like competitors rather than lovers. Chih-lan was a girl telephonist, Tien-pao a locomotive driver; both were members of the New Democratic Youth League and keen rivals in studies and work. They used to make fun of each other, conveying serious thoughts in jokes.

"How dare I compete with him?" Chih-lan would say, making eyes at Tien-pao while holding back a smile. "He is a regular steam engine and all I can do is try to catch up with him."

"Well, it's no use just talking," Tien-pao would retort with a smile. "Let's have a contest if that's what you want."

Mrs. Yao didn't think much of Tien-pao when she saw him for the first time. He was a rather short fellow with a dark complexion; and with his shock of hair sticking out from under his cap, he had the look of a

* A peasant girl who was killed in 1947 by the Kuomintang forces.

magpie. But his face was beaming and radiant. Full of some mysterious joy, the young man kept on whistling and laughing alternately like a little imp. Small in size but large in heart, he didn't mind Mrs. Yao's disapproval; he went on talking and smiling until she couldn't help laughing.

"Ma, what shall we have for lunch?" said Chih-lan, recovering from a fit of laughter. "Shall we ask him to stay and try some of our dumplings?"

"I know how to make dumplings — light as lead," Tien-pao put in.

"Don't bother, you're our guest; sit down and have a cup of water," Mrs. Yao said, beaming.

"How can a man like him sit idle?" Chih-lan said, laughing. "Let him go and chop some firewood."

After saying "Idle love to sit idle", Tien-pao threw off his blue coat and flung it to the brick bed. With sleeves rolled up, he got down to his task, whistling while he worked.

"He is nice!" Mrs. Yao mused, her eyes fixed upon Tien-pao while mixing flour with water. "And he is straightforward too; you can see right into him as if you were looking into a pool of clear water." With a new interest Mrs. Yao began to ply him with questions, trying to worm his story out of him.

Tien-pao winked a glance at Chih-lan, meaning he knew that her mother was taking stock of her future son-in-law.

"Oh, so you want to know about my past?" Tien-pao said gleefully. "Well, with a full-grown man, it's not so simple as you might think. Mother died when I was born and father when I was barely three. But, rain and shine, I somehow managed to grow up."

"All you know is how to wag your tongue!" Chih-lan jeered, covering her laughing mouth with the back of her hand. "You never say a single serious word."

"Aren't I talking seriously?" Tien-pao rejoined. "After the death of my parents I lived a life of terrible hardships and sufferings. Even the mosquitoes and lice used to think my flesh too bitter to bite."

"Just listen to the way he talks," Chih-lan said, stealing a look at him. "Making a joke out of bitter experience. How is it that nothing ever worries you?"

"Worries me?" rejoined Tien-pao. "In the past I hated those cursed oppressors so much that I simply had no time to worry about myself. I would have worried to death if I had. Now that life and the world have changed for the better, I can hardly find anything to worry about, though I would very much like to. Just tell me what there is for me to worry about."

"With you around, my boy, no one has anything to worry about. You'd put life into a dummy, I believe," Mrs. Yao said, laughing. "There is enough firewood now, and if you are not tired out you can put on your coat and go and fetch some vegetable oil from the little shop at the north end of the street."

Tien-pao put down the axe, shook the dust off his hands, seized a coat and flung it on his shoulders.

"Hey, I've lost something important," he suddenly cried out, fumbling in the pocket.

"What's that?" Yao Chih-lan hastened to ask. "Nothing but that broken harmonica, I expect. You know you bore everybody to death playing on it all day long."

Tien-pao shook his head without answering.

Yao Chih-lan gazed at him for a moment and then