



The Kailuan Story

—Old Mines into New

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Writing Group**

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Foreword

Rich reserves of coal lie beneath the vast plains of eastern Hopei Province. The headframe-studded coal field of fifty square kilometres is bordered by the Yenshan Mountains on the north and by Pohai Bay on the south. It is served by two fine, all-season harbours, Chinwangtao and Hsin-kang, to the east and west respectively. With the Peking-Shanhaikuan Railway crossing the area and a network of highways and rivers covering its entirety like the venation of a leaf, the collieries are well served by various transportation means. This area is the site of the well-known Kailuan Coal Mines.

The name Kailuan is an abbreviation from those of two coal fields — Kaiping and Luanchow. They comprise seven collieries: Tangshan, Linhsi, Chaokochuang, Tangchiachuang, Machiakou, Fankochuang and Luchiato. Mining has been carried on here for almost a century.

The Kaiping colliery was opened and put into operation in 1878 under the auspices of the Ching Government. Its organizational form was a so-called "merchant management under government supervision." The Ching Government did not allocate sufficient funds for running enterprises but raised money from private sources while retain-

ing control, so that the actual power was in the hands of a few bureaucrats. British imperialism lost no time in obtaining a foothold and, in 1900, took over the whole establishment. The Chinese later set up the Luanchow Coal Mining Company, which in 1912 was forced to merge with the Kaiping colliery, both to fall under the exclusive control of British imperialism in the "Kailan Mining Administration." This situation obtained until December 12, 1948 when the region was liberated and the mines were returned to the Chinese people.

In semi-feudal, semi-colonial old China, Kailuan was one of the places from which the imperialists drew the blood of the Chinese people. Under the reactionary rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, the miners were ruthlessly oppressed and exploited, treated worse than the donkeys used in the pits. On the verge of starvation and with at most rags to their backs, they toiled in the dank, suffocating pits cutting and transporting coal by hand, often at the imperialists' bayonet point or under the lash of the bosses. The scourge of disease, hunger, flood, fire, gas and dust explosions and cave-ins were among the claimers of countless workers' lives. In the years of darkness the imperialists plundered nearly 200 million tons of the best-quality coal, leaving behind a sea of tears and blood and heaps of miners' skeletons. Insatiably greedy for maximum profits, the imperialists had only the thicker seams worked, never considering the damage they did to the underground resources or the disfigurement of the land surface by unsightly subsidence and waste piled up. The entire area had become a scene of desolation by the time of its liberation in 1948.

The old collieries of Kailuan were rejuvenated after liberation. And in the 27 years since, guided by Chair-

man Mao's revolutionary line, Kailuan first of all, through a democratic reform movement, abolished the imperialist system of exploitation and got rid of the feudal bosses. The mines have followed up with continuing socialist revolution, which has ushered in a flourishing situation in socialist construction.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution freed Kailuan from the interference caused by the counter-revolutionary revisionist line of Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao, and the mines have become still more prosperous.

One needs only to enter the wooded mining area to be impressed by the activity around the many towering head-frames where sheaves turn ceaselessly, hoisting top-quality coal — "black gold" — that then flows into giant wash-eries and onto waiting railway cars. Hundreds of metres underground electric locomotives pull cars back and forth along broad, well-lit haulage roads. Fresh air is plentiful even at the remote coal faces, where workers cut into the coal seams with machines replacing picks.

A single coal face at Kailuan today yields as much as a whole colliery in the past; the output of coal in the 27 years since liberation has surpassed that in the seventy years before.

The Cultural Revolution and the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius have brought further rapid growth of production to Kailuan. The Kailuan Party committee has relied wholeheartedly on the working class, its own resources and on hard work, with the result that in the past nine years production has averaged an annual increase of over a million tons. The 1975 output of run-of-mine (ROM) coal had doubled the designed capacity, making one Kailuan the equivalent of two.

Kailuan workers look forward with full confidence and enthusiasm. They are determined to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat conscientiously, make conscious effort in carrying out the basic line and the policies of the Party, continue in-depth criticism of Lin Biao and Confucius, further promote the mass movement of learning from Taching — the pacesetter in China's industry — and go all out in striving for technical innovation and further mechanization so as to make greater contributions to socialist revolution and socialist construction.

From Slaves to Masters

Everything — the collieries themselves, production, the people's life — has changed in post-liberation Kailuan, the most important change, however, being in the people themselves. The miners, who were slaves under the bosses' heels, became masters of the country at liberation. Serious in following Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, they have been running and renewing the hundred-year-old collieries.

Slaves in the Old Society

Before liberation, Kailuan was a hellish dungeon for the miners, who were treated as slaves by the capitalists. The contract labour system and the hiring of feudal bosses, informers and toughs all protected the capitalists' sanguinary rule and merciless exploitation. During the Japanese imperialists' occupation the collieries were surrounded by trenches and guard-towers where cruel reactionary troops and police stood sentry day and night

with their guns at the ready. At the colliery gate, a miner had to take off his hat and unbutton his jacket to show his work badge, photo and identification card, which were strung around his neck, in preparation to be searched.

The working conditions down the pits were appalling, with passage possible only by crawling on all fours and safety measures grossly ignored. The dangerous mining method of block caving was used which required a miner to hew a seam into blocks with an ordinary pick, then cut the blocks free and prize them down with a spear three metres long. In the dark pits without adequate timbering or ventilation, this hazardous method increased the already high rate of accidents and put the lives of the miners in constant jeopardy.

One coal face at the Tangshan colliery was called Seventeen and a Half Cross-Cut. Coal seams here were thick and the goaf (area after the removal of coal), which ran vertically seven metres, was left unsupported. About this and other equally hazardous working conditions, the miners said in verse:

Seventeen and a Half Cross-Cut
Is a hell within a hell;
The coal is got out,
But only at death's knell.

When the miners scattered to avoid one of the cave-ins, they found a man missing and turned back to look for him. A feudal boss named Yang Shih-chen yelled: "Get back to work! What's just one man? It may be hard to find a three-legged frog, but it's easy enough to get two-legged men. Don't bother looking." But none of the miners would go back to work until the man was found and dug out from under a heap of rocks. He was already

dead — the miserable end to the miserable existence of countless toilers at the old Kailuan mines.

Coal faces lacked fresh air, the few manually operated fans near the stone drifting supplying a miner in the pit with less than a cubic metre of air per minute, a third of the minimum safety level. The temperature several hundred metres underground averaged above 30°C, and the only relief the panting, sweating workers had from it was by fanning with their own tattered jackets or hats. Noxious gases from the mine pervaded the atmosphere, and gas explosions and the pollution took heavy tolls.

A catastrophic gas explosion at the Tangshan colliery in October 1920 took 434 lives and disabled 122 more. The accident occurred in spite of the repeated warnings of experienced miners that there was a dangerously high level of gas at a coal face, and that an explosion was inevitable if mining operations continued. The bosses crassly ignored all warnings, however, and ordered the work to go on as usual. After the explosion occurred, they cold-bloodedly had the area sealed off in order to prevent further damage to their property. The men were left below to die.

The collieries were littered with skeletons and soaked in the blood and tears of the miners and their bereaved families. A toll of 5,397 deaths at Kailuan, or one fatality in less than every three days, is recorded for the years 1905 to 1948, and this figure is unrealistically low. Sick or injured miners were neglected, and once disabled they were immediately dismissed. The able-bodied fared little better, for a long day's toil brought no more than a mere pittance, and many miners had to sell their children to live on, while their wives went out to beg in the streets.

Before the birth of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, a miner's maintenance at Kailuan came to little more than half that for a mule, whose fodder cost half a silver dollar a day, while a full-time worker got 27 cents. A mule hauling coal in the pit was better treated than a man, for its driver was forbidden to beat it at will, while the miners were often beaten and cursed by the bosses. Once when a mule and its driver were trapped in a pit by a roof caving, the workers who went to the rescue were rebuked by the feudal boss for trying to get the man out first.

Get that mule out!" he demanded. "Never mind the man!" When the indignant miners refused, he flew into a rage and ordered: "Hurry up and get that mule out! Do you hear? The man can wait." The miners could take no more and gave the boss a thrashing, chased him out, and rescued their class brother.

Heroic Struggles

Where there is oppression, there is bound to be resistance. The miners at Kailuan never knuckled under to the reactionary rule of the enemy, were not intimidated but on the other hand waged long and heroic struggles against it.

Their first strike for higher wages broke out as early as 1882, in the first days of the mine. The entire coal field was seething and work had stopped altogether — a hard blow to the reactionary Ching rulers. Though this first strike action was suppressed by the feudal Ching rulers, it nevertheless led to many more such struggles at the Kailuan mines, and from then on the workers' movement surged vigorously forward. Between 1882 and 1921 there were thirteen strikes in the area.

After 1921, the Chinese Communist Party led the Kailuan workers' movement in an organized way into a new historical stage of political as well as economic struggles against the class enemy. This is shown in the unprecedentedly large-scale strike of 1922 involving five collieries. The miners' representatives met first on October 16 with the director of the mines and proposed a thirty per cent fringe benefits allowance for workers whose monthly wage was less than fifteen silver dollars, and some other measures to improve the workers' conditions. Not only had the mine authorities rejected the proposals but they colluded with the reactionary government in posting notices threatening the workers. The workers' reply came on October 23 when the miners at the Linhsi, Chaokochuang, Tangshan, Tangchiachuang and Machiakou collieries, and the dockers at Chinwangtao port, went on strike and telegraphed their declaration throughout the country.

On October 25 the mine owners called out more than a hundred foreign aggressor troops and 200 policemen from Tientsin, who went by rail to Linhsi to suppress the striking miners. The miners learned of this and decided to intercept their enemy at the Kuyeh railway station near Linhsi. They marched in mighty contingents, miners from Chaokochuang, railway workers and local peasants joining in force to give support. The crowd thronged the station, their angry shouting of slogans resounding far and wide. The workers had interrupted the rail line, so when the enemy's train pulled in, it ran off the rails. The enemy scrambled out and began shooting. The many thousands of workers and peasants, armed with axes, picks and broadswords, closed in on the intruders and routed them. With country-wide popular support, the strikers persisted for 25 days until victory.

In his brilliant essay "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society," Chairman Mao highly praises the revolutionary militancy of the Kailuan miners at that time. He points out that from the strength displayed in the strikes of the Kailuan miners and of other industrial workers **we can see the important position of the industrial proletariat in the Chinese revolution.**

Led by the Chinese Communist Party, the Kailuan workers' movement surged ever higher, with several scores of major strikes between 1922 and 1948, when the area was liberated.

During the Japanese imperialist occupation the miners took to armed revolt to oppose the ruthless exploitation by the enemy. They broke into a puppet police station, seized weapons and ammunition and organized themselves into guerrilla units, stepping onto the road of armed struggle as Chairman Mao directed.

On the eve of liberation, the Kailuan workers again rallied in arms, organizing pickets to protect the mines in anticipation of the liberation.

Masters in the New Society

After liberation, following the launching of democratic reforms and the deepening development of socialist revolution, the miners struck down the feudal bosses and abolished contract labour and all brutal exploitative systems of the imperialists. Many Kailuan workers stepped into leading positions, running and building up the collieries.

The imperialist manager of the old Kailuan mines had stated arrogantly at the time of his flight in face of the liberation: " 'Pit-beggars' can't run mines. Kailuan won't

last three months without us!" Quite on the contrary, however, the Kailuan collieries have been so modernized in the past two decades and more that in production, technology and many other respects they are far superior to what they were under imperialist rule. It is the self-same miners who were called "pit-beggars" by the imperialists and reactionary authorities who have achieved this.

Yen Tzu-ching, Party secretary of the Machiakou colliery, is an example. Driven by poverty, he had begun working as a miner in the Tangchiachuang colliery at the age of fifteen. From pushing coal carts on a connecting bridge, he was soon transferred down the pit pushing tubs, cutting coal and pulling baskets. The baskets weighed a good seventy kilogrammes each when loaded, and to pull them a miner had to move on hands and knees along the low, dark and stifling haulage road, panting in the heat, a rope round one shoulder and a worn-out shoe-sole tied to each knee. An overseer or feudal boss would sit on the sidelines with a whip or club in his hand ready to come down on anyone he thought was a little slow. Young Yen Tzu-ching worked like a man beyond his years, straining till he gasped for breath and sweat rolled down his body with every move he made. By the end of the long work day his back was covered with wounds and his hands and knees were bleeding. When a foot injury caused the limb to swell so that he could scarcely walk for several days, he was compelled nonetheless to go down the pit and work. Yen spent eleven years toiling underground like this.

After liberation, filled with class hatred, Yen Tzu-ching plunged heart and soul into the stormy democratic reform movement and stood at the forefront of the struggle against the capitalists and feudal bosses. He gloriously joined

the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, and in 1952 was appointed chief of the production safety section at the Tangchiachuang colliery. He became the deputy director in charge of production at the Machiakou colliery in 1956.

Change of position, however, in no way changed his political qualities as an ordinary miner, whether in his more than ten years as deputy director or in his present capacity as colliery Party secretary and revolutionary committee chairman. Always setting his mind to the tasks at the colliery and never far from the rank and file, he has taken productive labour as a constant duty, at times combining it with tackling hard problems.

One example was in 1961 at the Machiakou colliery where the longwall inclined slicing mining method was adopted at some coal faces, with wire netting used as artificial roof. Previously, when mining was done overhead, the roof pressure increased and frequent falls of gravel occurred, which however endangered lives and hindered production. Yen thought about this problem while working at one of these faces. Then he called veteran workers and engineering staff together for a conference at which they decided to lay the wire netting up close to the roof instead of on the floor. This controlled the rock-falls and raised productivity. The miners said: "Old Yen is really our fine leader. He hasn't forgotten his class origin or allowed his head to be turned by his change of position. He's still very much one of us!"

From the ranks of these former "pit-beggars" not only have leading cadres come to the fore, but technicians as well. Ouyang Chi-hsiu, an engineer of the Fankochuang colliery, is one example. A miner working down the pit at the Linhsi colliery before liberation, Ouyang leapt from a literacy-class pupil to a graduate of the Peking Mining

Institute, thanks to the concern of the Party. He took the higher learning as a task expected of him and, aware of its role in socialist construction, spared no pains in learning. Combining theoretical study with his own practical experience, he completed the study task given him by the Party with flying colours.

Assigned to the Fankochuang colliery after graduation in 1958, Ouyang took up the jobs of mining team leader, mining technician, and then mining engineer. He and the miners succeeded in improving the haulage system, effecting great economy for the mine. Later, summing up experience and analysing relevant geological data, they changed the mining method at the No. 7 and No. 8 seams, raising the quality of the coal and reducing material input and production costs. He and the workers also contributed to safety in production. He worked down the pit for over two months at a seam where rock-falls were frequent, studying the regularity of the variation of roof behaviour after which they designed a new roof-control method that prevented the falls.

Veteran workers are the backbone of the Kailuan mines. Wu Hsu-chih, a veteran worker at the Tangchiachuang colliery, had toiled for a landlord in his early years before coming to Kailuan in 1938 only to find that he had left the landlord's dungeon to step into the capitalists' hell. In his ten years down the pits before liberation, his wife and four children all died, leaving him alone and desolate. Liberation reversed his status from slave to a master of the mines, and he was very stirred by this. With a strong sense of responsibility he wrote in his diary: "The Party is my mother, the colliery my home. I'll listen to the Party and take good care of my home." Guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, Wu has never in the 27 years

since liberation asked for a single day's leave of absence, nor has he been late once. Always on the first car down the pit, he prepares for the day's work, while at the end of his shift he checks to see if everything is in proper order and is the last to leave. Wu is always on hand for the hardest jobs.

At the end of 1960, a 400-metre haulage road at a coal face in the 6th gate of the Tangchiachuang colliery was inundated, threatening nine scraper chain conveyors, equipment worth more than 100,000 yuan. After several tries to retrieve the scraper chain conveyors had failed, Wu Hsu-chih volunteered for the job with six other workers. The floor in the gate had heaved up so that the haulage tunnel, which should have been two metres high, was only a sixth of a metre, and water was gushing through. Turning to his comrades, Wu said encouragingly: "Tackling such a problem is like fighting a battle — if you don't defeat the enemy, he'll defeat you. There are bound to be difficulties in revolutionary work, and where there are difficulties, there is bound to be drive."

The tense battle began. Wu Hsu-chih led the way to enlarge the passageway onto the haulage road till it was big enough for them to make their way through into the flood area. Working in raincoats, they removed stones and dug channels to lead the water away. Several days were spent working like this in the chilling ground water. Though Wu was suffering with arthritis from toiling in the old society, he did not complain or stop working. His fellow workers urged him to see a doctor and leave the work to them, but he would not hear of this, absorbed as he was in saving the equipment. When all but one trough had been dragged out, the situation worsened. The floor continued heaving up, which made transporting by cart or