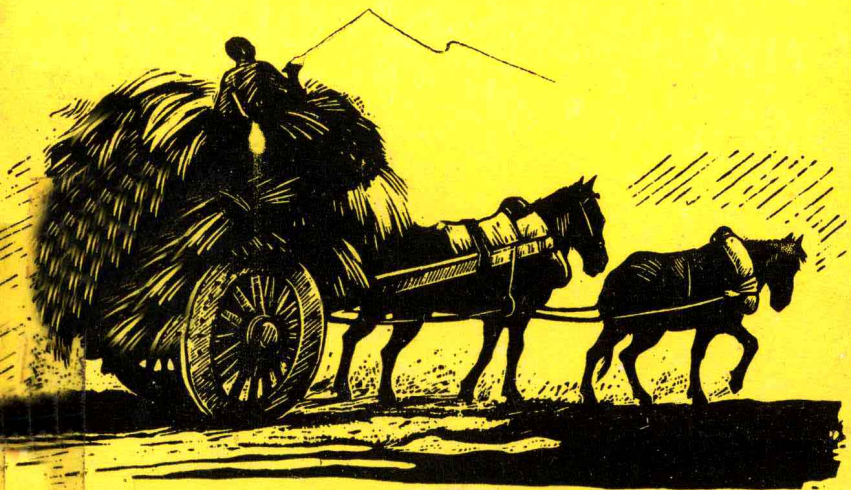


A CHINESE NOVEL

THE GOLDEN ROAD

A Story of One Village in the
Uncertain Days After Land Reform



The Golden Road

HAO RAN

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INTRODUCTION

The Golden Road is the most significant Chinese novel to emerge in the last fifteen years. A dramatic story of one North China farming community in the early days after the revolution, it concerns the relationship between the Chinese peasantry's desire to overcome its poverty and peasant efforts to collectivize agriculture. In addressing a central question of our times — how to eliminate poverty — this work clearly demonstrates that the triumph of the Chinese revolution in 1949 did not resolve the rural crisis but served to open up wider perspectives for economic and social development.

The process of revolutionary transformation in the countryside profoundly affected the lives of all involved and came to be powerfully symbolized by one word: *fanshen*. Coined in the liberated areas of North China during the late forties when the land reform movement was shattering the economic, social, and political power of the landlords, *fanshen* literally means "to turn over." To the hundreds of millions of peasants participating in the destruction of the feudal, medieval order, it meant emancipation — from the landlords, from superstition, from ignorance; and it signified the beginning of a new life. With the acquisition of land, tools, and political power, one fifth of humanity had entered a new world.

The trials of land reform and the successive steps toward agricultural collectivization which brought an end to private farming have provided the raw material for many of

the best novels and stories of contemporary China. Novelists such as Ding Ling, Liu Qing, Zhao Shuli and Zhou Libo, whose works have been translated into English and published by the Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, hold the view that socialist literature should reflect the needs and tastes of the general public; it should portray life realistically but in an optimistic and idealized manner, free from the limitations of real life. They have produced a genre of literature which is fundamentally political in nature, designed to stress the positive aspects of the revolutionary process and intended to inspire those engaged in the building of a new society.

Hao Ran, the pen name of Liang Jinguang, is in the same tradition as these writers but of a younger generation. Born on March 25, 1932 in an impoverished peasant family in Zhaogezhuang Mining Town, Hebei, North China, he grew up in times of tremendous social turmoil. During his first decade of life, he was orphaned and his homeland invaded by Japan. To make a living, he ran errands for the Communist soldiers fighting the Japanese.

In 1946, Hao Ran became a cadre in one of the liberated areas, serving as head of the Children's Corps. As the battle for China was raging in 1948, he was admitted into the Communist Party, and during the first years of the People's Republic, he participated in the setting up of mutual-aid teams and cooperatives in Hebei's Jixian County where he had moved around 1940. In all, he worked for eight years as a cadre at the grass-roots level, with these experiences providing invaluable first-hand material for his literary career.

Hao Ran first began writing at the age of seventeen when the need to encourage peasants in production had compelled him to pick up a pen and compose a short skit on the subject. But his real boost came in 1954 when he joined the

staff of the *Hebei Daily* as a reporter. During the next ten years, while he worked for various publications as a correspondent and then as an editor, he published seven collections of short stories, one volume of prose and three children's books.

The publication of volume one of his first novel, *Bright Skies*, in September 1964 brought Hao Ran into the literary limelight. It was greeted with enthusiasm by the public and established him as a major writer on the theme of revolutionary transformation in the countryside. He left his job at the time as an editor of the journal *Hongqi* (Red Flag) to devote himself full time to his writings and to the activities of the Beijing Writers' Union.

The outline of Hao Ran's second novel was begun before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 but were put aside for four years while he participated in the movement, which included a six month stint in the countryside at Zhoukoudian Commune, about 45 miles southwest of Beijing. In 1972, the first volume of this novel, *The Golden Road* appeared, bringing Hao Ran to the pinnacle of his literary career. An ambitious project, it was envisaged as a four volume work tracing the course of collectivization in the countryside from 1950 to 1956. Volume two, like its predecessor a mammoth creation of a half a million words, was published in 1974. Sections of volume three subsequently appeared in periodicals but the whole has never been completed.

The first volume of *The Golden Road*, which is translated here, concerns events in one village during the first few months of 1950. It derives much of its strength from Hao Ran's extensive knowledge of the speech, customs and way of life of people in eastern Hebei. Its slow moving presentation is reminiscent of the rural story-telling tradition

practiced by itinerant folk artists. As a modern day storyteller, Hao Ran uses vivid colloquial language with an occasional historical allusion, reflecting his close ties with the rural populace. His familiarity with farming tools, planting conditions and soil quality is unmatched by any other modern Chinese novelist.

Unfortunately, this novel is flawed in several ways, as a result of certain literary practices in vogue in the early seventies. Quotations from Mao Zedong printed in bold face, over-emphasis of the role of the leading character and excessive rhetoric mar this work. With the author's consent, such parts have either been dropped or modified in the English version. Also cut for reasons of economy were many extraneous anecdotes and portions that presume an intimate knowledge of Chinese history on the part of the reader.

Despite its flaws, *The Golden Road* has a definite place in the literary history of New China. It remains the best of the novels published since 1966 and it shows the path that its author firmly believes will lead hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants from poverty to prosperity.

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Chris Gilmartin
Beijing, 1980

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

For the convenience of readers, the original Chinese names have been shortened. The full names are given in brackets.

Caifeng (Qian Caifeng)	<i>Fiancée of Erlin.</i>
Crooked Mouth	<i>Former landlord in Greenfields.</i>
Daquan (Gao Daquan)	<i>A Party member in Greenfields.</i>
Erlin (Gao Erlin)	<i>A young peasant in Greenfields, Daquan's brother.</i>
Fan Keming	<i>A cook in the district office in town, but whose home is in Greenfields.</i>
Grandma Deng	<i>An elderly poor peasant in Greenfields.</i>
Gu Xinmin	<i>The head of Heavenly Gate County.</i>
Jinfa (Zhang Jinfa)	<i>The village head of Greenfields.</i>
Jiukuan (Deng Jiukuan)	<i>A poor peasant in Greenfields.</i>
Liang Haishan	<i>The Party Secretary of Heavenly Gate County.</i>
Liping (Zhou Liping)	<i>A Youth League member, Zhou Zhong's daughter.</i>

Liu Xiang	<i>A poor peasant in Greenfields.</i>
Luo Xuguang	<i>Deputy leader of a land reform work-team in Greenfields.</i>
Qin Fu	<i>A middle peasant in Greenfields.</i>
Qin Kai	<i>A middle peasant in Greenfields, Qin Fu's brother.</i>
Ruifen (Lu Ruifen)	<i>Daquan's wife.</i>
Shaohuai (Feng Shaohuai)	<i>An upper-middle peasant in Greenfields, a distant relative of Daquan.</i>
Tiehan (Zhu Tiehan)	<i>A Party member in Greenfields, the leader of the village militia.</i>
Tough Hide (Jin Shou)	<i>A loafer in Greenfields, Jinfa's cousin.</i>
Wenji (Qin Wenji)	<i>Qin Fu's eldest son.</i>
Wenqing (Qin Wenqing)	<i>A Youth League member, Qin Fu's youngest son.</i>
Zhou Zhong	<i>An old poor peasant in Greenfields, an activist.</i>

I

Greenfields Reborn

A fiery sun rose from the horizon, gilding the rambling plain and the thatched-roof houses in the old village with a crust of gold. Smoke from breakfast fires hovered above the streets which were alive with sounds of cocks crowing and children merrily laughing.

A cloud of dust suddenly boiled up from a side lane. Chickens flapped their wings and scooted off in every direction. It was not a gust of wind nor a cart — just Zhu Tiehan charging out of an alley. He was not running, no pressing business was beckoning him; his gait always suggested a great to-do. This ruddy-complexioned young man was unusually tall and strong; he even seemed to breathe more powerfully than others. Although it was the coldest time of year when dripping water instantly solidifies, the collar on his partially buttoned padded jacket flapped open, exposing his swarthy chest.

When he was born, his mother had failed to lactate and he had howled from hunger under a shabby quilt beside her. Not a speck of rice was to be found in the house; his father could only scrape together wild vegetables which he cooked into broth for the newborn baby. Tiehan lived on chaff and vegetables for the next nineteen years. He never owned a stitch of decent clothing: in summer he wrapped a gunny sack

around his middle and in winter he threw another one over his shoulders. He was famished, freezing and neglected, but he never fell ill; even a slight headache was rare. All in all he was much healthier than those who feasted on meat and fish and bundled up in silk quilted jackets. Believing he was destined to survive, his parents called him Tiedan (iron egg) and gradually everyone else picked it up. During the upsurge of land reform, a comrade from the work team who was helping him write an application for Communist Party membership persuaded him to change his name from Tiedan (iron egg) to Tiehan (iron man).

Now he rushed over to the old locust tree in front of the "Tall Steps," a common nickname for the landlord's former domicile because of the particularly high steps leading into the compound. Wrapping both arms around the tree trunk, he kicked off his shoes and nimbly shinnied up the tree. He reached for a cardboard megaphone hanging from a branch and was about to speak into it; but then he paused, yanked off a dead branch, and broke it into several pieces. With his eyes squinted mischievously, he looked down the street.

Two friends were approaching from the east. Qin Wenqing was carrying a roll of paper and a bucket of paste. He had his hair parted on one side, a style common among students, and looked gentle and good-natured. Zhou Liping, two thick braids hanging down to her waist, walked along beside him, completely absorbed in their conversation. She was carrying a washbasin in one hand and a long-handled broom in the other.

"He hides at home and barely ever steps out of our courtyard," Wenqing was saying. "He sees the new society through a crack in the gate. All he ever does is sit around and calculate how to make another buck. It makes me look bad."

"Your father is weird," Liping declared. "Why's he so afraid of us poor peasants anyway? The government policy is clearly to unite with middle peasants."*

"Well, it's not hard to see why. All those rumors spread by the Kuomintang reactionaries just before Liberation scared the hell out of him. Since land reform he has softened a bit. You can even spot a smile on his face once in a while. But he's still very suspicious of anything connected with the government. I wouldn't mind him being so conservative if only he wasn't such a drag on me."

"Why bother with him? Even women are liberated now. How can he get in the way of a young man like you?"

"He was against me teaching in the night school. Daquan had to spend two evenings persuading him. Why, if it weren't for Daquan, Heaven only knows what kind of fuss he would have made."

"You just can't deal with conflict," Liping asserted. "And Daquan is too patient. Now if things were left up to me, I—"

Suddenly Liping screeched as something hit her on the head. Before she could look up, a barrage of dry branches came hailing down on her.

Pleased with his prank, Tiehan laughed so hard the whole tree shook. He ignored Liping's tongue-lashing and raised the megaphone to his mouth. "Hey, all you group leaders,

* After liberation in 1949, land reform was carried out in China's countryside to uproot the feudal ownership of land. According to the government policy on determining the class status in the rural areas, the rural population at that time was classified into landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants (who were subdivided into upper-middle, middle and lower-middle peasants), poor peasants and workers (including farm laborers). The landlords and rich peasants belonged to the overthrown exploiting classes.

attention please! The village head is going to a district meeting soon, so we need to collect examples of recent improvements in our village and gather together everyone's opinions."

He repeated his announcement several times, then started to laugh again.

Liping waved her broom in the air and yelled, "You rotten egg! I dare you to come down here and have it out with me."

With one arm wrapped around a branch, Tiehan dangled his big feet and countered, "If you had any guts, you'd come up here."

"You come down!"

"Haven't you been running around every day yelling that men and women are equal now? After all that racket, looks like you haven't made the grade yet."

Liping shoved Wenqing. "Climb up there and pull him down for me."

"I don't want to get in his way," Wenqing declined, stepping back.

"Scaredy-cat," Liping spat. Then she picked up her basin and left in a huff.

Tiehan called out, "Wenqing, now you've seen it with your own eyes. For the first time Liping has admitted she's been licked. And I'm the one who did it!"

Wenqing laughed, then said more seriously, "Tiehan, come on down and help us set up the village office."

"If I help you, who's going to canvass the members of my group?"

"Everyone in your group is praising the government to the skies except my father. Compliments are all you'll get. Why bother?" Wenqing retorted and followed after Liping.

"That's just what I'm after. The more good news the

better. The district leaders are concerned about the *fanshen** peasants. I want to tell them all the good news." As he said this, Tiehan slid down the tree and noticed his shoes were missing. "Liping," he screamed at the top of his lungs, "give me back my shoes!"

Standing at the top of the Tall Steps, Liping held up her broom in one hand and the basin in the other. "What are you talking about? Who wants your shoes!"

Puzzled, Tiehan bent down to look around. Suddenly a heavy shoe landed squarely on his head. As he looked up, Liping was taking the other shoe from the basin and getting ready to let it fly. Tiehan went charging up the steps.

Quick to react, Liping snatched the bucket from Wenqing's hand and threatened, "If you dare come up here, I'll dump all this paste on your head."

Tiehan bargained, "No more trouble if you give me back my shoe."

"Are you going to pull any more tricks on me?"

"Give me back my shoe," Tiehan demanded.

"Not unless you promise to behave yourself."

"Okay, okay."

Just then a group of people sallied out of a nearby alley, bundles, basins, bowls, brooms and pitchforks in hand. A few were lugging a cabinet. Everyone was laughing and chattering as if they were part of a triumphal procession.

* "Literally, it means 'to turn the body,' or 'to turn over.' To China's hundreds of millions of landless and land-poor peasants it meant to stand up, to throw off the landlord yoke, to gain land, stock, implements, and houses. But it meant much more than this. It meant to throw off superstition and study science, to abolish 'word blindness' and learn to read, to cease considering women as chattles and establish equality between the sexes, to do away with appointed village magistrates and replace them with elected councils. It meant to enter a new world." (William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, New York, Vintage, 1966, p. vii.)

Tiehan, always one for a good time, ran over and asked, "What's going on here?"

"We're helping Aunt Chen move," Lu Chunjiang replied, his ruddy cheeks showing from under a big iron wok over his head.

Tagging along after the crowd, Tiehan boasted, "You're just moving now? We moved everyone in our group two days after the houses were assigned. You're falling behind."

"Not everyone does such a slapdash job," countered Lu Chunjiang. "We repaired all the houses that are going to be handed out so that they look like new. New houses for new people. If you don't believe me, go take a look for yourself."

Realizing that he had blundered, Tiehan grinned ingenuously at Chunjiang, then worked his way over to Aunt Chen, who was holding onto a couple of old hens. "Aunt, do you have any other heavy things? The heavier the better. I'll move them for you."

The widow was so thrilled by the excitement of moving she could not keep her mouth shut. "Where are your eyes? With so many helping hands, one trip will take care of the whole thing," she replied glancing around at the crowd. "Besides, you cadres have your hands full as it is, without worrying about me. By the way, I just heard your broadcast to the group leaders. Even though you're not my group leader, I want to tell you my criticism of Daquan —"

"Oh, Aunt," Chunjiang came over and said, "why don't you just drop it."

"What are you doing?" Tiehan glared at Chunjiang. "She has a right to speak her piece."

"I was itching to move into my new house as soon as I got it," Aunt Chen recounted. "But then Daquan told me

to wait. The windows needed to be fixed. All right, I let him have his way. After the windows were fixed, he said wait a few more days so we can replaster the walls. Okay, I said, replaster the walls. Then the night before last I saw the walls had dried so I found Daquan and told him I'd been dreaming about living in my new house, nothing could keep me from moving in now. But he said that the *kang** should be relaid. I said no. Mixing mud and plaster is too much trouble in winter. I could just make do for a while. So last night I found some people to help me move. But when I got there, the *kang* was already fixed. Someone told me Daquan, Yongzhen and Chunjiang did it the night before. It was so cold. And they worked all night without a bit of heat in that house. What if they had gotten sick? How could I bear to see that?"

Tiehan blinked. "Huh! Is that all that your criticism amounts to? Forget it. Better go snuggle up on your *kang*."

"Tiehan," Aunt Chen yelled, "how can you be so undemocratic? When my group leader comes around to get my criticisms, I'll add one for you."

The crowd roared with laughter, frightening the two hens under Aunt Chen's arms into frantic squawking.

As he watched this lively crowd move down the road, Tiehan felt tremendously gratified. Surrounded by tears and anger while he was growing up, he had never seen poor people so happy before.

Liu Xiang came into the village toting a carrying-pole that bounced and squeaked, the load so heavy the baskets almost scraped the ground. The manure in each basket was piled

* A brick platform, heated in winter from underneath, and used in the day to sit and work on and at night as a bed. It usually takes up one whole side of a room in a northerner's house.

to a peak and was held in by branches stuck around the rim of the basket.

Tiehan clapped and cheered. "Hey, Uncle Liu, you must have rolled out of bed pretty early to collect all this manure!"

Sweat running down Liu Xiang's face had crystalized into beads of ice on his stubby beard. "Earlier than you think," he grinned. "This is my second trip."

"Gee, you're really putting yourself out!"

"Now that the world belongs to us, I'm bursting with energy. Why shouldn't I go all out? I'm going to work to double my crop this year and see the grain bins overflowing."

"That's the way we poor peasants should feel. The road ahead is so clear we can just let loose and run. Nothing can get in the way of our good life. You should have your wife fix some good meals so you can work even harder."

Liu Xiang put down his heavy load and brushed off his sweat. "You know the old saying, morale soars in happy times. Ever since land reform, my wife's sickness and depressions have disappeared. Why, yesterday afternoon she pushed the millstone all by herself. Ground up more than two pecks of corn. Isn't it amazing how much strength she has? In fact, that's the way most folks feel. Take Zhu Zhankui's father for instance. A few years ago the old man was so worn-out he couldn't go outside in the wintertime. Now he's so happy he refuses to stay inside. He hangs around the piece of land they got during land reform from morning to night. Never gets tired looking at it."

Tiehan, reminded of his duties, said, "We've got endless examples of how good our lives have gotten. When we report them to the leading comrades, they sure will be pleased. I must go tell Daquan to start writing them all down for his report."

"I wonder if Daquan's back home yet. I saw him in front