

Taking the Bandits' Stronghold

A Model Peking Opera
on a Contemporary Revolutionary Theme



Taking the Bandits' Stronghold

A Model Peking Opera on a Contemporary
Revolutionary Theme

Adapted by the Peking Opera Theatre of Shanghai

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1968

Printed in the People's Republic of China
Distributed by Guoxi Shudian (China Publications Centre)
P.O. Box 399, Peking

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung

Without a people's army the people have nothing.

“On Coalition Government”

The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them.

“Be Concerned with the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work”

SCENE ONE

ADVANCING IN VICTORY

Winter, 1946. A snowy forest in the Peony River area, in northeast China.

(A small detachment of the PLA in full battle kit, a red flag at their head, is advancing swiftly.)

CHAO-CHIA: We've come to a fork in the road, 203.

SHAO: Halt the march!

CHAO-CHIA: Form ranks!

(The men form ranks; Kao Po hands Shao a map.)

SHAO *(looks at map, examines terrain)*: Chao-chia.

CHAO-CHIA: Here.

SHAO: We'll rest here.

CHAO-CHIA: Right. Li Hung-yi, stand guard.

(Li exits.)

CHAO-CHIA *(turns and calls)*: Supply chief. We'll rest here.

(A voice responds. Horses neigh. The men stamp their feet to warm up, and knock the snow from their clothes.)

SHAO: Are you tired?

SOLDIERS: No.

SHAO: Good. Comrades Yang Tzu-jung and Sun Ta-teh are scouting up ahead. We've arranged to meet them here. That Eagle has really hidden himself deep in the mountains. We've been marching through the snow for

days, but there's still no sign of him. We must be prepared for a long struggle.

SOLDIERS: Right.

SHAO: Comrades, the regimental Party committee picked us thirty-six men and sent us as a small detachment into this snowy forest to carry out Chairman Mao's directive **"Build Stable Base Areas in the Northeast."** In other words our job is to rouse the masses in the Peony River area, wipe out the bandits, strengthen the rear, and coordinate with our field armies in smashing the U.S.-backed Kuomintang attacks. It's a task of great strategic importance. We must do as Chairman Mao teaches us: **"Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and surmount every difficulty to win victory."**

SOLDIERS: We'll definitely fulfil our mission.

LI (*enters*): Report. Comrades Yang and Sun are back.

(*The two enter and salute.*)

YANG: Report.

SHAO: You scouts have had a tiring job.

YANG: We went out in disguise, according to orders, but it took a long time before we could find any of the local people. Finally we rescued a boy — a mute — who had fallen into a ravine. Thanks to his father's directions, we discovered a little hamlet called Black Dragon at the end of a small gauge railway used for hauling timber. Our investigations there put us on the trail of the Eagle.

SHAO: Excellent.

YANG (*sings*):

This section is infested with bandits,

They call themselves "First Regiment of the Fifth Peace Preservation Brigade."

Every station on the line they've plundered,

Last night they pillaged Black Dragon.

*The little hamlet is charred and dead,
Another victim of the Eagle's crimes.
From there the bandits went to Chiapi Valley,
And probably have returned to Tiger Mountain.*

SHAO: We're on the Eagle's trail, comrades. We must follow up. Chao-chia, we'll spend the night in Black Dragon. Comrade Yang.

YANG: Here.

SHAO: We need more information. Take Comrades Sun, Tung and Li (*The three men step forward as their names are mentioned.*) and do some more scouting. Don't let a single clue to the bandits escape you.

YANG: Right. We're off. (*He departs with the other three scouts.*)

SHAO: Comrades! (*Sings.*)

*Our responsibility to the people is heavy,
We must support the front and strengthen the rear;
No matter how dangerous the mountains and cliffs,
We're determined to bring the sunshine in.*

(THE LIGHTS DARKEN. CURTAIN)

SCENE TWO

PILLAGE OF CHIAPI VALLEY

Dusk. The edge of the village Chiapi Valley.

(Eagle, Big Pockmark, Flatnose and other bandits are gazing towards the village.)

BIG POCKMARK: We've picked up a lot of loot on the way back to our stronghold, Excellency. This village is more or less right on our doorstep. We ought to leave it alone this time.

EAGLE: Who cares? Chief of staff, go and grab me some of those paupers. We'll put them to work building more fortifications on Tiger Mountain. Men or women — take them all.

BIG POCKMARK: Yes, sir.

(He leaves with the bandit gang. Flatnose starts to go too, but Eagle stops him.)

EAGLE: How many days is it since Tuft Cheek went off to find Luan Ping?

FLATNOSE: Exactly ten. I'm getting worried.

EAGLE: What for? I hear Chiang Kai-shek has already arrived in Shenyang and is taking personal charge of the fighting. He'll be launching a general offensive towards northern Manchuria very soon.

FLATNOSE: Can we really look forward to such a day?

EAGLE: Don't you remember what Commissioner Hou said at the conference in Peony River City? The Americans are pretending to be working for peace talks between the Kuomintang and the Communists, but actually they're transporting soldiers north for Chiang Kai-shek. They want to wipe out all the communist troops north and south of the Great Wall in three months. Our time has come.

FLATNOSE: Fine. We'll be able to work off our anger at last.

EAGLE: The first thing we'll do when we get back to Tiger Mountain is expand our forces.

FLATNOSE: If Tuft Cheek can find Luan Ping and get his hands on Horse Cudgel Hsu's Contacts Map, the whole Peony River area will belong to us.

EAGLE: I hear Commissioner Hou is looking all over for that map. We mustn't let him get it.

FLATNOSE: Don't worry, Excellency. Tuft Cheek and Luan Ping are sworn brothers. It won't fly away. When the Kuomintang army returns, you'll be made general of all northern Manchuria.

EAGLE: Ha! Ha! Ha! (*Sings.*)

Though three times the regime has changed,

I'm still the master of Tiger Mountain.

FLATNOSE: First it was Marshal Chang, then the Manchukuo of the Japanese, then the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-shek, but none of them could do without you.

EAGLE: Aha! (*Sings.*)

Chiang and the Yanks have launched a civil war,

I'm going to take over the whole northeast.

(*He swaggers off with Flatnose in the direction of the village where flames glow and crying and shouting are heard.*)

(*Li Yung-chi enters carrying a hunting rifle and some game.*)

YUNG-CHI (*sings*):

*Flames leap to the sky and people shout,
Mothers call for their sons, children for their mothers;
Again the bandits murder and plunder,
I'll have it out with them though I die.*

(*Bandits enter pulling young men and women whose arms they have tied. Yung-chi fights with the bandits while the young people are beaten by the bandits and dragged off.*)

(*Yung-chi's wife is pulled on, followed by mother who is holding the baby. A bandit captain snatches the infant from the old woman and throws it over the cliff. Yung-chi attacks bandits furiously. His left arm is hurt in the struggle.*)

(*Eagle enters and shoots at Yung-chi. Yung-chi's wife flings herself to cover him and falls dead. Exit Eagle and the other bandits.*)

YUNG-CHI (*heart-broken and enraged*): Baby's ma . . . Baby's ma . . .

MOTHER (*tragically*): Baby's ma . . .

YUNG-CHI (*sings*):

*Disaster, like a bolt from the blue,
Burns like fire in my breast;
My wife, lying in a pool of blood,
My baby, dead at the foot of the cliff.
I swear that I shall get revenge — Eagle!
I'll hack you to pieces to repay this debt.*

(*He starts to run after Eagle. Bandits swarm on, overcome him and tie him up.*)

MOTHER: Yung-chi!

(*Yung-chi struggles wildly.*)

(CURTAIN)

SCENE THREE

ASKING ABOUT PAST BITTERNESS

Afternoon. A remote mountain valley. High mountains can be seen in the distance. Sunlight filters through the trees. In a small log cabin in the foreground bowls and chopsticks lie in disarray on a table.

(Chang Pao, *disguised as a boy*, is clearing the table. Hunter Chang stands outside, looking around, then he goes back inside, *quickly*.)

PAO: That man and woman were very rude, pa. They ate the bit of venison we'd just got.

CHANG: We can't stay here, Pao. We've got to leave.

PAO: Why?

CHANG: Do you know who they were?

PAO: He said he was in the PLA.

CHANG: Huh! Eight years ago, when the bandits dragged me away, I met him in their lair on Tiger Mountain. His name is Tuft Cheek. He's a bandit.

PAO: Oh!

CHANG: He doesn't remember me, but I remember him, all right. Wrap up our pelts, quick. We're going to your uncle Ta-shan's, in Chiapi Valley.

PAO: Right. (*Gets some belongings together*.)

CHANG: Those two fur traders who came through here a few days ago said the Communists have reached Shantung Province already — our old home; they're helping the poor to take power. I wonder if it's true.

PAO: They're good men, those two, pa. They wouldn't lie. If they hadn't carried me out of that ravine, I would have frozen to death.

CHANG: Right. We must ask more about it.

(Chang ties the furs into a bundle, and Pao gets the pelts out. Shadows appear on the window.)

PAO: Somebody's coming, pa.

(Chang covers Pao's mouth with his hand.)

CHANG: Hush!

(They listen cautiously. Yang, Sun, Tung and Li enter, muffled in hoods and capes which hide the red star on their caps. They look carefully around.)

YANG *(sings)*:

With the help of the local people

We've been following a suspicious pair,

But here in the mountains we've lost the trail —

(Gazes around.)

Isn't this where Hunter Chang lives, Old Sun?

SUN: Yes. We came here together last time.

YANG: Right. *(Sings.)*

We'll revisit the hunter to solve our problem.

You and Li scout on ahead, Comrade Sun. Report back here if you discover anything.

SUN and LI: Right. *(Exit.)*

YANG: Tung, stand guard.

TUNG: Right. *(Exits.)*

YANG *(walks up to the cabin)*: Anybody home?

(The hunter comes out tensely.)

CHANG *(examines him)*: Who do you want?

YANG: Don't you recognize an old neighbour? I'm the fur trader who was here a few days ago.

CHANG: Fur trader?

(Pao comes out. Chang tries to stop her but he's too late.)

YANG: Your father doesn't remember me, little brother, but I'm sure you do. Wasn't I the one who brought you home that day?

(Pao wants to speak, but stops, nods.)

YANG (has observed and guessed the truth but doesn't let on): A clever child.

CHANG (quickly): He's a mute.

YANG: Ah, I see.

CHANG (observes Yang carefully, recognizing him): Ah, you're Master Yang.

YANG: Yes.

CHANG: Please come inside. (They all go in.) Have a seat.

(They sit down.)

YANG (pointing at Pao): No ill effects from that fall?

CHANG: Nothing serious. (Quickly changes the subject.)

You said we're both from the same province and that you're a fur trader. But today you seem to be a soldier. What are you, after all?

YANG: I'm not a trader. (Throws back his hood and reveals his cap with its red star.) A member of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

CHANG (still sceptical): You're also in the PLA?

YANG: Yes. Have you seen any of our men before?

CHANG (guardedly): No . . . never.

YANG: We didn't have a chance to talk much, last time. I really am from Shantung Province, like yourself. Things are a lot better than when you left to come north of the Great Wall.

CHANG: That's fine. But what are you fellows doing all the way up here?

YANG: Fighting bandits.

CHANG: They are very strong.

YANG: We've got a big force not far behind. Let me tell you — our PLA has won several big victories in the northeast. The whole Peony River sector has been liberated. We've smashed most of the bandits. Only Eagle and his gang are left. They've buried themselves deep in this mountain forest, but we're going to finish them off too, and soon.

CHANG: Wonderful.

YANG: Eagle has wreaked havoc in this district. You two must have suffered great wrongs.

CHANG (*bitterly*): We do indeed.

YANG: Tell me about it.

CHANG (*not wanting to mention the painful past*): It happened eight years ago, why talk about it?

PAO (*bursts out*): Pa —

CHANG (*startled*): Pao, how could you —

YANG (*sympathetically*): It's all right, child. The Communist Party and Chairman Mao will right your wrongs. Speak.

PAO: I will, uncle, I will. (*Sings.*)

*Disaster struck one snowy night eight years ago,
Eagle killed my grandma and took off my ma and pa;
Uncle Ta-shan raised me in Chiapi Valley, my pa came back,
But my ma threw herself off a cliff and died;
Afraid I'd fall into those devils' hands,
Pa dressed me as a boy and said I was mute;
We hunted in the mountains during the day,
At night we thought of grandma and ma;
We looked at the stars and looked at the moon
And longed for the time when the sun would come,
When we would be able to speak out freely,
When I could dress as a girl again,
When we could collect our debt of blood,*

*If I only had wings I'd take my gun
And fly to the summit and slaughter those wolves.*

(Chang listens in misery.)

YANG (*furious, sings*):

*Pao's tales of the bandits' crimes
Rouse me to the utmost rage;
Oppressed people everywhere suffer alike,
They want vengeance, blood for their blood;
Destroy the Eagle and liberate the people.
Rising as masters, they'll see the sun;
Work with their saviour, the Communist Party,
And bring a new life to our land,
Good days will come to this area too,
Just like our old home in Shantung.*

CHANG (*with emotion*): You've said what's in my heart, Old Yang. (*Sits down by Yang.*) But beating the Eagle won't be easy. Though the regime has changed hands three times, he flees to his Tiger Mountain, every time he smells any danger. That stronghold is protected by nine groups of twenty-seven bunkers. There, he can attack, he can defend, and he can slip away. Nobody can touch him.

YANG: It's a tough problem, all right. They say it's impossible to fight your way to the top.

CHANG: That's right. There's only one direct path, and it's very steep. "One man can hold it against ten thousand," as the old saying goes. And it's very carefully watched. They've got guard posts at every stage. How can you fight your way up?

YANG: How did you manage to escape when the bandits held you a prisoner?

CHANG: There's a dangerous trail down the back of the mountain. It's full of cliffs and dense brush. No one dares to use that trail, so it's unguarded. Eight years

ago, that's where I came down. If I hadn't been lucky enough to grab the branch of a tree, I'd have been dashed to pieces.

YANG: You've given us some very useful information. As long as we all stand together, there's no mountain top we can't conquer.

CHANG: Right. I'll be glad when you take this one. You mustn't blame me for being suspicious. A man and woman were here a while ago. The man plainly was a bandit, but he also said he was in the PLA.

PAO: My pa saw him eight years ago on Tiger Mountain. His name is Tuft Cheek.

YANG: Tuft Cheek, eh? What did he talk about?

CHANG: He called the woman sister-in-law. He said her husband Luan Ping was his sworn brother.

YANG (*bursts out*): Luan Ping?

CHANG: The woman seemed to be Luan Ping's wife. Tuft Cheek had a big argument with the woman. He wanted her to give him some map or other.

PAO: A Contacts Map.

CHANG: That's right.

YANG: Contacts Map?

(*Tung enters and patrols outside cabin.*)

TUNG (*calls*): Platoon Leader.

(*Yang opens door.*)

TUNG: Sun and Li have come back.

(*Sun and Li enter. They go into cabin.*)

SUN (*greets Chang*): How are you, neighbour?

LI: In the forest northeast of here we found a bloody glove and the body of a woman. (*Gives glove to Yang.*)

SUN: We searched all around, but the snow had already blotted out any footprints. We couldn't tell where the murderer had gone.

YANG: Have you seen this glove before, Old Chang?

CHANG (*examines glove*): Yes. It belongs to Tuft Cheek.

YANG: He must have killed her and stolen the Contacts Map. But what does this have to do with Luan Ping?

TUNG (*pulls Yang aside*): Wasn't that bandit you caught in Nine River Confluence called Luan Ping?

YANG: Right. That's the man. This murder is a complicated business, comrades, and Luan Ping is mixed up in it. Tung, I'm going after the murderer with Sun and Li. You go back to 203 and report. Tell him I suggest we interrogate Luan Ping and dig out the story of the Contacts Map.

TUNG: Right. (*Trots out.*)

YANG: This is urgent, neighbour. We've no time to chat. Here's a bit of food for you and Pao. (*Hands his ration bag to Chang. Sun and the others hand theirs to Pao.*)

PAO (*moved*): Uncle....

YANG: It isn't safe for you two here. Better go into hiding. When our troops arrive things will be different. Goodbye for now.

CHANG: Where are you going?

YANG: After Tuft Cheek.

CHANG: Wait. He's sure to be heading for Tiger Mountain. That trail has always been hard to follow, and in this snowstorm a stranger could never find it. Pao and I will show you the way.

YANG: Thank you. Old Chang.

(CURTAIN)