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# THE SONG OF YOUTH

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
PEKING 1964

## Foreword

The first half of the 1930s was a dark period for China. The country was in the throes of a desperate national crisis. The Japanese imperialists, after occupying China's four northeastern provinces on September 18, 1931, encroached further into Chinese territory. Step by step they attacked Shanghai, Chahar and Suiyuan, occupied east Hopei and schemed to seize all five provinces of North China. . . . The country was threatened with destruction, but the Kuomintang government adopted a policy of capitulation and signed various agreements ceding sovereign rights to Japan. It also sent forces numbering hundreds of thousands, sometimes a million, against the revolutionary bases and the Red Army, which had been set up by the Chinese Communist Party and were resolutely opposing Japanese aggression. Subsequently it sent troops to pursue and intercept the Red Army on its northward march to resist Japan, and in White territory arrested and killed countless Communists and young patriots. Then, led by the Chinese Communist Party, young people who loved their country launched a hard, determined struggle. In the winter of 1933, when the Japanese set up a puppet government in Hopei and Chahar and the whole of North China was threatened, Peiping students, with the rousing slogan "People of China rise up to save the country!", launched the historic December the Ninth Movement, the glorious prelude to the Chinese people's resistance to Japanese aggression.

These events are the background to the story of *The Song of Youth*. Undaunted by machine-guns and bayonets, imprisonment, tortures or even execution, innumerable fine young men and women put up a stubborn fight against the enemy. When one fell, another rose to take his place. Some died smiling, confident that the country had a bright future; more marched forward in the blood-stained footprints of the fallen. . . . At

last in 1949 China was liberated, the dream of so many who had laid down their lives came true, and China started to build socialism on a stupendous scale. The flowers of victory were so lovely that we who lived to see them could not but recall those who had shed their blood to nurture these flowers. That is why, in 1950, I started writing this novel. I was deeply stirred by all I had seen and heard of the heroism of the revolutionaries.

During the years my book covers, I was a student unable to continue my studies or find a job. I knew from my own experience how hard was the lot of intellectuals in old China, and that the only way out for young people was to follow the Communist Party and take part in the revolution. With this in mind, I created the character of Lin Tao-ching. This novel is a young intellectual's protest against the old society.

~~Light is stronger than darkness, nobility stronger than baseness; unselfishness must triumph over selfishness and happiness over sorrow . . . we must live like real men.~~ That is what I have tried to express in my writing. If this book enables friends abroad to better understand why the Chinese revolution succeeded and how dauntlessly the Chinese people — especially the youth — struggled on, I shall feel well rewarded.

Yang Mo  
Peking, May 1963

## PART I



## Chapter 1

Early one morning the Peiping-Shenyang express was speeding over the vast, jade-green countryside. Luxuriant crops, silver streams, light brown mud houses and upright telegraph poles flashed past the passengers seated by the carriage windows. Gratefully inhaling the fresh morning air, they watched the fields until, tiring of the sight, they turned away, some yawning while others looked around for something new or interesting inside the train. Before long the attention of quite a few was caught by some unusual luggage: a small bedding-roll to which were tied a fiddle, a bamboo pipe and a flute, each wrapped in fine white silk. Nearby was a balloon guitar, a moon-guitar and a small reed-organ. . . . Some passengers surmised that these must belong to a dealer in musical instruments. Actually the owner was no merchant but a schoolgirl of eighteen, who was keeping a steady eye on her dainty belongings. She was wearing a short white muslin gown, white cotton stockings and white canvas shoes, and in her hand was a plain white handkerchief — in short, she was dressed from head to foot in white. Travelling alone, she was sitting perfectly still in one corner of the carriage and looking out of the window. Her face was pale, but her large black eyes were brilliant. Soon this solitary, attractive but simply clad girl had aroused the interest of her fellow passengers, particularly of the men, who began to exchange remarks and hazard guesses about her. She remained quite oblivious, however, as if totally detached from her surroundings. For a long time she sat like this, lost in her thoughts.

Her unusual air, strange beauty and apparent fondness for music occasioned considerable curiosity, and she soon became the central topic of conversation.

"D'you think she's been crossed in love?" whispered a student in Western clothes to his companion.

“That stack of instruments would fetch a good ten to twenty silver dollars at least,” announced a fat merchant approaching the student with a calculating look on his face. “What can a young lady want with all those? Does she sing in the streets for a living, do you suppose?”

The student did not deign to answer, but after one look at the merchant turned away. Thereupon he rejoined his companions, not however without first ogling the girl in white.

When the train stopped at Peitaiho the girl got off, carrying her instruments which appeared to be almost all the luggage she had. The passengers continuing their journey watched her with puzzled, sympathetic eyes as she walked along the platform.

The little station was very quiet. The momentary hum and bustle which accompanied the arrival of a train passed like the white smoke of the locomotive, leaving the place once again silent and deserted.

With her luggage in her hands, the girl stood looking round in all directions, but apparently no one had come to meet her. She found a porter and asked him to carry her things to Yang-chuang Village.

Her melancholy did not leave her as with head low she silently followed the porter. After a while they rounded a bend in the hills, and there, below the serene blue sky and beyond the vivid green of the fields, was a vast expanse of ocean stretching to the horizon. The girl halted and gazed at the sea, her eyes sparkling with awe and delight. “Oh!” she cried. “This is my first glimpse of the sea — how magnificent!” She stood as if rooted to the ground, spellbound by the sight of the calm deep and the gently rolling waves.

“Come along, miss! Come on! What’s keeping you?” The porter, unaware of her mood, had already reached the foot of the hill.

She appeared not to have heard, but remained transfixed, her eyes upon a lonely white sail in the distance.

“Hey, miss! What’s the matter?” The porter, growing impatient, called more loudly and at last succeeded in attract-

ing her attention. Rubbing her eyes and smiling, she ran down the slope to join him.

The porter was a talkative middle-aged man.

“What were you staring at up there?” he asked, unable to restrain his curiosity.

“At the sea. It’s so beautiful.” She looked round at him. “How lucky you are to live here! It’s so lovely!”

“What’s lovely about it? If we don’t catch any fish and go hungry, scenery doesn’t count for much. Tell me what you are doing here,” he continued, smiling. “Why are you alone? Are you here on holiday?”

She smiled back pleasantly and after a pause said, “I can’t afford a holiday. I’ve come to visit my cousin.”

“Your cousin?” The man’s eyes widened. “Does he work in the Police Bureau?”

“No!” She shook her head. “He’s a teacher in the Yang-chuang Primary School.”

“You don’t say! I know all the teachers here. Which is he?”

“Chang Wen-ching.” More animated now, she asked naively, “Do you know him? Is he in the village? I wonder he didn’t come to meet me. . . .”

Suddenly the man’s lips seemed sealed. Though the girl looked inquiringly into his dark, wrinkled face, instead of answering her question he walked on a few steps and changed the subject, asking:

“What’s your name? Are you from Peiping?”

“My name’s Lin Tao-ching,” she told him candidly. “Yes, I’m from Peiping. But don’t you know my cousin?”

Again the man lapsed into silence. After quite an interval he coughed and muttered something inaudible and the girl let the matter drop. So they made their way to Yangchuang Primary School, where the porter took his money and left her, and the girl slowly mounted the stone steps at the gate.

The school was housed in the large Temple to the God of War at the edge of the village. Leaving her luggage at the gate, Tao-ching walked in. She looked into all the classrooms in the temple halls, but not a soul was about. Reflecting that

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everyone might be on the beach, she went back to the gate to wait.

90/101 Dusk was gathering and smoke was curling from every chimney in the village. Cicadas were chirruping lustily from the coppice outside the temple. Tao-ching listened to them as she waited, looking out anxiously from time to time. Still no one appeared, and with her luggage to watch, she could not stray far. When darkness had fallen an old man came lurching down the road. As he caught sight of her he called out:

"Who are you looking for?"

Tao-ching eagerly raced down the steps to greet him with the question: "Is Mr. Chang Wen-ching a teacher here?"

"Oh, you're looking for Mr. Chang, are you?" His face was red and his voice slurred from drinking. "Well, he's not here any more."

Tao-ching was taken aback. "Where has he gone?" she asked. "He said in his letter that he'd be staying here during the holidays. What about his wife, then? She teaches here too. . . ."

"Can't tell you, I'm sure." The old man lurching drunkenly up the steps, stumbled through the gate and slammed it behind him.

Tao-ching had written to her cousin telling him when she expected to arrive, and his disappearance plunged her into a dilemma. She did not know what to do. Standing alone on the steps, utterly at a loss, she stared blankly at the dark trees from which the cicadas were shrilling as loudly as ever. The sea, out of sight, kept up a steady murmur as it pounded insistently against the cliffs. She knocked at the gate a couple of times, but there was no response. Most likely the old drunkard was asleep. Her heart ached and tears welled into her eyes. She stood there in her loneliness a long, long time.

100/101 A bright moon rose and its silver rays filtered like gossamer through the lacy tree-tops to caress the lovely face of the solitary girl. Leaning against the stone tablet at the gate, she lowered her head and gave way to painful sobs.

In time of difficulty one tends to recall the past, and as Tao-ching wept she thought back over the train of events that had made her leave her parents and home, had brought her to this deserted copse by the seaside where there was not a soul she knew, and caused her heart to overflow with bitter sorrow.

## Chapter 2

In a remote mountain village in Jehol there lived a family of two, Old Li and his granddaughter, Hsiu-ni. Old Li was ill and stayed on the *kang* all day long while Hsiu-ni went out to gather firewood or cultivate a little patch of land to support the two of them. She was a comely, sturdy and capable girl of twenty-one, to whom all the young men in the village were attracted. She was unmarried, however; for at the age of eleven she had been sent away as a child-bride, and when she was fifteen her betrothed had died and she returned home. This experience had left its mark on her, and with her grandfather to care for she was in no hurry to marry. The ailing old man and the girl were dependent on each other, and he was so fond of her that when his married daughter, who lived in another village, sent him rice-flour cakes or salted eggs, he would keep the greater part of the precious gift for her. The plot Hsiu-ni cultivated belonged to a landlord, and after the rent had been paid each year hardly anything remained to them but stubble only sufficient for a few days' fuel. Anxious to provide her aged grandfather with a bowl of hot rice gruel, after her work in the fields she would take her axe to the hills to cut firewood. She also took in sewing, which she would do by lamplight in the evening. The villagers had nothing but praise for this fine, hard-working, simple girl and thought what an excellent wife she would make for some young man! But the year she was twenty-one, misfortune befell her. Their landlord, Lin Po-tang, came from Peiping to collect his rents that winter, saw Hsiu-ni's beauty, and became determined to make her his concubine. He was well

over fifty and had already had a number of concubines — some from brothels — the more charming of whom his wife Hsu Feng-ying had driven away. Now he became enamoured of healthy, unsophisticated Hsiu-ni, and must have her at any price. He was accompanied by soldiers who had been despatched by Tang Yu-lin, the military governor of Jehol, to quell any resistance by his tenants while he collected rents. Hsiu-ni and her grandfather were powerless in the face of such brute force, and she was carried off to the home of one of Lin Po-tang's lessees in the village where she was installed as the landlord's concubine. She wept bitterly and tried to kill herself, but all her resistance and protests were in vain; for Lin Po-tang, grinning as he stroked his moustache, had his way with her.

Two months later, when Hsiu-ni was with child, Lin took her to his home in Peiping. That same night her old grandfather tottered by the aid of his stick to the Paiho River near the village and jumped in.

As for Hsiu-ni, residence in Lin's household in Peiping changed her from a bright, intelligent girl into a witless creature who would go all day without uttering a word and who, except when eating or doing some job, would look blankly at the wall. When Lin's wife saw that Hsiu-ni was pregnant she did not treat her badly during the first few months, for none of her own children had lived, and she wanted a child for the Lin family.

With the birth of her child Hsiu-ni's spirits revived a little, and she lavished all her love on the chubby baby girl. A smile on the pretty infant face could ease her mental anguish, make her forget her humiliation for a while, and give her courage to go on living. Late at night, when Lin had gone to another concubine, Hsiu-ni liked to get up quietly to change her baby's diapers or nurse it and kiss its bonny cheeks. Then, choking with emotion, she would murmur:

"Grow, my treasure, grow! As long as you're alive I've something to live for." Tears that had long since run dry coursed anew on to the baby's tender face. For her child's sake Hsiu-ni would live on.

When the baby was a year old her merry prattle and her tiny fingers patting her mother's cheek made Hsiu-ni's face light up with happiness, but one day Hsu Feng-ying sent for Hsiu-ni and, taking the child from her, said sternly:

"This is Mr. Lin's daughter — I'll look after her. Get out, you shameless beggar!"

Hsiu-ni was stunned and, weeping bitterly, dashed her head wildly against the wall. She vainly struggled to get hold of the child in Hsu Feng-ying's arms who stretched out her little hands and cried for her mother. Lin Po-tang, who had tired of her, kept out of the way. And Hsiu-ni was seized by his brutal servants and bundled into a car which was waiting at the gate to take her away.

Hsiu-ni's child was given the name Tao-ching by Lin Po-tang. At first he and his wife were quite fond of her, but when she was three and Hsu Feng-ying gave birth to a son, the little girl's troubles began. Beaten for the least offence, she slept with the servants and was not allowed in the main rooms unless specially required. She spent her time playing in the streets with the waifs who went about collecting cinders from the garbage heaps.

One winter day Hsu Feng-ying, in a good humour, called Tao-ching in and soon noticed how fidgety the child was as she stammered out replies to her questions. Surprised, she drew Tao-ching to her and asked what was the matter.

"I feel so itchy. . ." answered Tao-ching, who was seven at the time. Her nose was running and she looked ready to cry.

A rare wave of compassion swept over Hsu Feng-ying and, taking off the child's tattered jacket, she was horrified to find that the garment beneath was crawling with lice. In a fit of indignation, she thrust the infested clothing into the stove. Then, pleased with her own display of kindness, she looked searchingly at Tao-ching's face, which was chapped and purple with cold. Turning to her husband, lolling on the couch with a newspaper, she said:

"It strikes me that this imp's not at all bad-looking. If we send her to school, we'll get a good return for our investment when she grows up."

"An excellent ideal!" Lin nodded, stroking his moustache. "You always see further than anyone else, my dear. There's no truth left in the old saying 'An ignorant and uneducated woman makes a virtuous wife'. By all means let her study."

So little Tao-ching was sent to school, where she took to her studies eagerly and proved an apt pupil. She was unlike other children, and spoke so seldom that strangers thought her dumb, and never cried when her half-brother, who was pampered by his mother, tormented or hit her. Sometimes she just let him strike her; at others she lost her temper and hit back, although this always entailed severe reprisals. Her stepmother seldom beat her, preferring to twist her arm, pinch or bite her. One night, Tao-ching was asleep in the servants' quarters when the boy broke one of his mother's favourite vases and put the blame on his half-sister. Tao-ching, roughly snatched from her bed, realized what was afoot and gritted her teeth ready to bear the ordeal in store.

"Shameless little slut! You get bolder every day. I'll make you pay for that vase, see if I don't!"

Her leg was pinched and twisted and her arm was bitten, but Tao-ching was used to being treated worse than a dog. She neither cried nor begged for forgiveness, and not a tear fell from her unblinking eyes. The only one in the household who showed any concern for her was Auntie Wang, an old nurse who did what she could for the child behind Hsu Feng-ying's back. Naturally Tao-ching came to love Auntie Wang, turning to her when she was hungry or cold, and none but this motherly old servant ever saw her in tears.

When Tao-ching finished primary school and was admitted to a high school for girls in the Western Hills outside Peiping, there was a noticeable improvement in her stepmother's attitude. Tao-ching had grown into a tall, slender attractive girl. Her face was a shapely oval, her skin fair and flawless as translucent jade, and her long black eyebrows arched gently towards her temples. But her most striking feature was her

eyes, both sad and arresting. She had always been a quiet child who kept to herself most of the time, not caring much for company. This was not what interested Hsu Feng-ying, however, but the fact that the girl was blossoming into a beauty. She decided to give her the education considered requisite for a smart young lady who was to marry a wealthy and influential man.

On the day that Tao-ching left for boarding-school, her gratified parents saw her to the gate where a ricksha was waiting. Lin Po-tang clothed in a long silk gown stroked his moustache reflectively as he stood on the marble steps outside the gate. Then, smiling at Tao-ching who was seated in the ricksha, he said:

"Congratulations, young lady! Going to high school is equivalent to winning the degree of a *bsiu tsai*.\* Ha, ha, ha!"

Lin Po-tang, who enjoyed the reputation of an educationalist and philanthropist, had passed the second government examination in the Ching Dynasty and had become a *chu jen*, but before he could go to the capital for the final examination the Reform Movement of 1898 was started by Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao, and the Imperial University, predecessor of Peking University, was founded. Then Lin, anxious to keep abreast of the times, moved to the capital with his wife and enrolled in the newly-established university. Then came the republic and, trimming his sails to the prevailing wind, he became an educationalist as education was the fashion. Under the pretext of starting schools, he bought, at a nominal price, large tracts of land formerly bestowed upon Manchu princes by the emperor. Then visiting cards bearing the grandiose titles of *chu jen*, scholar of the Imperial University, Superintendent of Minan Orphanage and President of Wupen University, circulated freely among the "cream" of society. None of those who paid respect to the venerable and gifted Professor Lin Po-tang ever mentioned his brutal treatment of the unhappy Hsiu-ni.

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\* The title given to those who passed the first of the old government examinations.

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Lin Po-tang was quite well-versed in the Four Books and Five Classics and had also read books by the Western philosophers Kant and Montesquieu, but to him there was nothing higher than membership of the Hanlin Academy. That was why he compared his daughter's entry into high school with the degree of *bsiu tsai*.

Her stepmother followed up with advice, not giving Tao-ching a chance to answer her father. Plump enough to be troubled by the late summer heat, she was waving a small silk fan as she stood on the steps. She too felt a certain pride as she appraised her stepdaughter.

"Be a good girl, my dear, and study hard! Mother will find money for you to finish high school and go on to the university. If you go abroad for post-graduate study, you'll come back better off than a woman *chuang yuan*\* — and there'll be no limit to your fame and riches!" She turned with a snort to her husband and demanded: "What are you laughing at, you old fossil? I brought her up! When she starts earning money and gets rich, you shan't have a cent of it!"

Hsu Feng-ying sputtered as if angry, but Lin Po-tang chuckled and nodded in amusement. "Very well, my dear, it shall all be yours, every cent! Even what your future son-in-law earns. Will that suit you?"

Twelve-year-old Tao-ching looked with disgust at the pair she called her parents, and with tears in her eyes rode off silently in the ricksha.

Once in the high school, she felt like a bird freed from a cage, gulping in the sweet air of freedom. She liked to study and was especially fond of works of literature that helped to develop her fertile imagination or gave her a vision of a splendid future. She was brimming with bold ideals, and the more she read and studied the more active her mind became. Outwardly, however, she remained indifferent to her surroundings, being generally reticent and contemplative. Her best friend was a kind, warm-hearted girl called Chen Wei-

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\* The scholar who passed highest in the final government examination.

ju, who never failed to sympathize with her in her difficulties, and upon whose genuine affection and help she could count.

It was 1931. Two months before Tao-ching was to graduate she came back one afternoon after a visit home and sat for a long time in the school-room in unusually low spirits. Her friends eyed her curiously.

"What did your mother call you home for, Tao-ching?" asked one of them. "What's happened to upset you so?"

Wei-ju tugged at her <sup>207</sup>sleeve and patted her hair, quietly urging: "Tao-ching, tell me what's the matter?"

But her friend just sat there woodenly, not making a sound.

Some of the girls giggled and Tao-ching woke up with a start, rubbing her eyes and asking with a bitter smile, "What is there to laugh at? Stop <sup>210</sup>teasing!" She then rose and left the room.

Soon afterwards Wei-ju went for a walk with her along the bank of a river near the school. The two girls set out, one just in front of the other along a narrow path. They had walked for some time when Tao-ching, who was ahead, turned round and stared fixedly at her companion.

Her face was unusually white. "I've got to give up my studies, Wei-ju! . . ."

"Why? Is that why your mother called you home, Tao-ching?" The kind-hearted Wei-ju sounded more <sup>212</sup>disturbed and grieved than Tao-ching herself.

The latter did not answer, and they <sup>213</sup>walked on to some trees by the river, where they stopped to <sup>214</sup>lean against a weeping willow. Tao-ching stared absent-mindedly at the flashing gold of the stream, and after a long pause said half to herself:

"Our family is <sup>215</sup>bankrupt. My father went to court over some property; but he lost his case and is ruined. Without a word to my stepmother, he sold all the land he owned outside the Great Wall and walked out, taking his concubine with him. I'm all the property left to my stepmother."

"What do you mean? How can you call yourself property? You're not made of money!"



"My stepmother wants to make money out of me. She sent for me to <sup>persuade</sup> me to marry a wealthy old man so that she can go on living in ease and luxury. I refused — I've broken with her!"

On the verge of tears, Wei-ju grasped her friend's hand, saying, "What's to be done then?" Tao-ching quietly patted her hand and comforted her:

"Don't get excited, Wei-ju! I'm not going to give in. If the worst comes to the worst I'll kill myself!"

Soon after this, Hsu Feng-ying stopped Tao-ching's allowance, hoping by this means to force her into submission. But the girl remained firm. She thought of leaving school and finding a job, but the term had not yet ended and where could she go? Some warm-hearted schoolmates contributed enough money for her board, so that she was able to stay on for the last two months of the term.

When the holidays started, she could not but prepare to go home; and though her heart was heavy she had not lost hope. Much as she longed to enter a university, if her stepmother did not relent she would be unable to continue her studies. But would the hard-hearted woman change her mind?

She was in a quandary.

Tao-ching was as fond of music as she was of literature, and when she hired a ricksha to go home she took with her an assortment of instruments — a small reed-organ, a bamboo pipe, a flute, a moon-guitar and a two-stringed fiddle. Her precious Butterfly mouth-organ was in her pocket. No matter where she went, these instruments accompanied her, which was why her friends had given her two nicknames: a pleasant one, The Flute Fairy, and a not-so-pleasant one, The Music Shop. When alone, she would play one of her instruments, and anyone who then caught a glimpse of her never failed to marvel at the true happiness in her eyes, which were generally so wistful. At such moments her gravity gave way to a child-like innocence. At least, this had been true six months before.