

On Weishan Lake

BY CHIU HSUN





On Weishan Lake

By CHIU HSUN

895.13
C 47
417

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1962



Illustrations by
MAO CHEN-YAO and LIU WEN-HSIEH

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Contents

MORNING	I
THE NEW HOME	6
HOHUA	11
LEARNING TO PUNT	15
AN INCIDENT	19
PUNISHMENT	24
YATOU'S COMPLAINT	28
"GO HOME!"	31
MOTHER	34
GUEST ON A FLOATING HOME	38
ON THE LAKE	43
CATCHING FISH	47
THIEVES!	51
THE FISH STEW	56
UNCLE CHAO	60
LEGENDS OF THE RESIST-JAPAN ISLE	66
TO THE RESIST-JAPAN ISLE	71
YOUNG PIONEERS	75
A TALE OF THE OLD GUERRILLAS	80
DIVING	85
FORWARD!	89
FLOOD	93
DIVIDING UP THE PROPERTY	97
LOOKING FOR THE CATTLE	102
NIGHT BY THE LAKE-SIDE	105
"MOO -"	109
HSIAOCHU	113
KITH AND KIN	118
CONTINUING TO ADVANCE	123
FLAG	127

Morning

In China, there is a lake by the name of Weishan. Twenty kilometres from the lake lies Apricot Village, and in that village there lives a boy called Erhou.

Early one morning, full of go as usual, Erhou jumped out of bed rubbing his nose with his fist. When he saw his mother was not yet awake, he quietly picked up the whip which he had rigged up the day before and slipped barefooted out into the street.

Erhou had something unusual in mind. He was so happy that he felt like turning a few somersaults.

Erhou was going to herd cattle near Weishan Lake!

He had grown tired of life in the village where there were few places to play, except in the west barnyard and at the mouth of the East River. He was tired of playing the boys' games, including daring each other to go to the graveyard at night to gather pine cones. Besides, his mother kept telling him not to climb trees or ride the yellow calf and warning him that if he got hurt climbing walls or house-tops she would not let him into the house!

If he went to Weishan Lake his mother would not be able to nag at him any more. He would join the "railway guerrillas".* He had read the story of Lao Hung in a picture-book and would recognize him anywhere. With his bushy whiskers, Lao Hung would burst from the rushes and shout at the Japanese: "Hand over your rifles

* A Communist-led guerrilla band which was active during the War of Resistance Against Japan. Its base was at Weishan Lake in southern Shantung Province. The valiant deeds accomplished when fighting the Japanese invaders are described in the novel *Railway Guerrillas*, and also in a picture-book. Lao Hung is one of the guerrilla leaders.

and you'll be spared!" and the Japanese would fall on their knees in the water and beg for mercy!

But in Erhou's imagination, the important thing was that soon after he reached Weishan Lake he would become a strapping fellow with a deep voice and short hairs on his upper lip, making him look like a grown-up. He was going to work, you know, and on truly heavy jobs too.

Now Erhou was on his way to ask Hsiao chu, his brave comrade-in-arms, to go with him to the lake.

The village was hushed and silent. The moon had not yet set. The shadow of the trees played on the moonlit street. The branches of a few apricot trees hung over the wall by the roadside. Unfortunately, the tiny green fruit all grew on the higher branches inside the wall. Not a single apricot was to be found on the lower ones. Then came a rustling sound from the magpies' nest on top of the old pagoda tree. Perhaps the white-crowned birds had wakened from their sleep!

Erhou turned into a lane. Standing on a big stone, he thrust his head into the window of a house and called in a low voice: "Hsiao chu!"

Hsiao chu's granny sat up shakily on the bed. Despite her bad hearing she could tell it was Erhou.

"Now what the devil's that boy fooling around so early for?" she muttered, groping under the quilt for her grandson.

Imagine her surprise when she found he was not there!

She asked Erhou whether he had seen Hsiao chu. She said he was still sleeping beside her when she woke up at midnight. Maybe he had stolen off, she thought, to help the militiamen keep the night watch. Then she scolded Erhou, saying that he must have already got Hsiao chu away on some mischief and purposely called to put up a show of innocence.

Erhou said nothing. He thought perhaps Hsiao chu had got up at midnight and had gone off on his own to drive the cattle to the lake.

"I'll go to the cattle pen and see," he said to himself.

Erhou jumped down from the stone, and walked just a few steps when White Neck, a small dog, appeared suddenly before him. Standing on his hind legs he affectionately put his fore-paws on Erhou's chest. Then he ran around the boy, whining and sniffing to show his welcome. His coat was spattered with dew-drops. Shaking his head he suddenly sneezed and the dew-drops fell on Erhou's bare feet.

White Neck was Hsiao chu's pet dog. He was an intelligent, brave hunter. As he was Hsiao chu's constant companion, he surely knew where Hsiao chu was. Erhou therefore let White Neck run before him and he followed.

Leaping over a fence White Neck turned into the firewood yard near the cattle pen.

The yard once belonged to a big landlord and had been strewn with firewood and hay for scores of years. The huge haystacks were infested with weasels, hedgehogs, foxes and snakes. The old folk said that two old tenant farmers had been beaten to death by the landlord there. . . . Now it was used for storing the firewood and hay of the production brigade of their agricultural co-operative. It had a very ghostly atmosphere and few people liked to go there.

Now it looked even more cold and dismal than usual under the pale moonlight. A few squat shrubs stood there in solitude. Some crickets chirped, then quietened down.

Erhou, following White Neck, leaped in without a thought. Rushing up to a haystack, White Neck pawed the hay frantically. The leaves of the dry grain stalks rustled. Suddenly a bundle of stalks seemed

to move. Holding his breath Erhou picked up a big piece of stone and made ready to throw. . . .

An opening appeared in the haystack. But instead of a goblin someone with tousled hair peered out.

It was Hsiao chu!

Why on earth had he come to hide himself in such a horrible place in the dead of night! Before Erhou had time to shout Hsiao chu made a sign to stop him, and Erhou quickly became silent. In Erhou's eye Hsiao chu was a great hero whose word was to be followed to the letter. At a wave of Hsiao chu's hand, Erhou crept into the haystack, followed by White Neck.

The stack had been hollowed out into a cosy little cave and a cotton-padded jacket was spread on the hay-strewn ground.

"Did you sleep here?" asked Erhou.

Hsiao chu nodded.

"When did you come?"

"After granny'd fallen asleep."

Erhou was on the point of saying something more when Hsiao chu signed to him to stop. Cocking their ears they listened attentively. From the cattle pen came successively the sounds of an opening door, the shuffling of an old man's tread, the falling of the fodder-mixing rod on the ground and the cattle shuffling with their hooves. Then they heard the old cattle tender, who was known to the children as "Grandad", muttering to himself, and coughing, as he went to the well to draw water.

"Let's get going!" said Hsiao chu in a low voice.

After a little he pursed his lips and said mysteriously:

"Wants to give us the slip, see? Nothing doing!"

"Who?" Erhou asked hurriedly.

"You still don't know?"

It was not that Erhou did not know. He had simply forgotten. Had not Grandad said, only the day before, that he would not let them go to the lake with him to make trouble? Now Erhou saw why Hsiao chu had hidden there for the night. He ought to thank him. Crouching by Hsiao chu's side he huddled close to his friend.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Erhou.

Hsiao chu shook his head and crushed an insect that had crawled up his thigh.

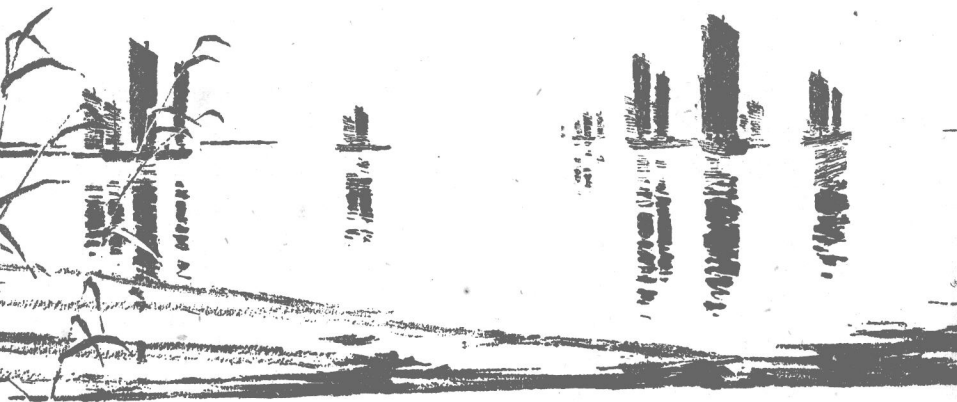
What a silly question! Of course Hsiao chu was not afraid. He was afraid of nothing.

Day was breaking.

Apricot Village awoke. The windlass over the well began to creak. The birds in the trees began to twitter. The morning breeze swept over the trees and through the village. The production brigade's bell rang sonorously in the damp morning air. . . .

"Come on! Let's look up Grandad and set out with him!" said Hsiao chu.

Cracking a newly made whip the two friends ran towards the cattle pen, talking loudly, with White Neck skipping and frolicking in front of them.



The New Home

Maybe it was due to Hsiao chu's vigilance that Grandad did not succeed in giving them the slip. Who could tell after all? The fact was that after Erhou's father, who was the production brigade leader, had repeatedly explained to the old man about the shortage of manpower, the latter did not utter a sound which indicated that he had agreed to the children's going to the lake with him. But in the presence of their parents and the leader of the brigade he threatened to larrup any boy who did not keep quiet and do what he was told. Then, with a dogskin cape flung across his shoulders he started out for Weishan Lake, driving some 40 cattle, with Hsiao chu, Erhou and another boy called Yatou tagging behind.

The lake, so goes a fairy tale, is a fairy's magic mirror that has fallen down to the earth. In a certain poem it is said that the lake is the eye of the earth; that is why it glistens and is so green. When the boys came to the side of the lake they realized that it was even more beautiful than a magic mirror or an eye. . . .

When the children set eyes on the lake they were amazed. The sky and the earth became suddenly broader and bigger. There was

so much water that it seemed as if all the water from the wells, rivers, jars, bowls and ink-bottles had been gathered into one great pool. There were vast patches of reeds stretching away to the horizon. They had all sorts of leaves, some big, some small, and some just right for making whistles. You could cut a full load of fodder in no time. All over the pasture, far and near, were scattered a large number of sheds. Here and there, cattle and sheep were grazing. Some lads carrying loads of grass dashed forward from the bank of the lake, singing cheerfully. A girl dressed in red came along. She was driving a donkey with a load of grass on its back. A little white dog trotted behind her.

The wheat fields behind them were green; the reeds before them were green. The water and the islet in the lake were green.

Not far off was a mat shed. A little old man was sitting in the sun, a lad was cutting his hair. Another fellow was fondling a calf. As Grandad approached, the old man stood up, all smiles, and said:

"Welcome, old pal. Why, you look the picture of health. Here, drink a glass of wine."

They halted, drinking the water handed to them by the old man. It tasted a bit salty and fishy, and a layer of white deposits was on the bottom of the bowl. But the boys found it sweet and cool. The old man said to Grandad: "So you've changed the veteran generals for the younger generals this year! Whose children are they?"

Erhou was vexed. They had names of their own and should be treated as grown-ups, he thought. The old man should have asked: "Which production brigades do these members belong to? What are their names?" Erhou at once found the old man most detestable, and poured his half bowl of water to the ground.

After a short rest Grandad told the boys to lead the cattle off to graze. He told them to see that the oxen did not eat too much as it was their first opportunity to enjoy such nice juicy grass. Then he added: "Don't scamper too far away and come back early." That was it! As soon as the word was given the boys made off towards the lake.

Let Grandad take a rest. He was old. The tramping had made him pant and cough. . . .

But Grandad did not rest. Having smoked a pipe he started to build a mat shed. When the little old man offered to lend a hand he declined. Knowing his odd temper the old man did not insist. Grandad was known far and wide for his matchless skill. He excelled in all sorts of farm work, was an expert mason, carpenter, blacksmith, and a first-rate craftsman in wicker-work. When he was young he even did needlework and embroidery. Naturally he always looked on other people's work with some disapproval. He always found fault with the work others did for him, no matter how well it was done, and often did it all over again himself. Now, having chosen a suitable site, he planted the poles and began to fix up the matting he had brought with him. He worked with great care and precision, as if he were building a great mansion which



would last for generations. And behold! In a little while, a first-rate mat shed, better than all the other sheds around the lake, took shape. The poles were set so firmly that not even the strongest wind would budge them, and the matting was laid so well that it would not leak in the heaviest downpour. There was even a window that could be opened or shut at will by working a rope attached to it. It would be good if they could have stuck up the advertisement for tea with a big horse on it which Grandad had brought home more than ten years before, or the bill presented to him the previous year by a dramatic troupe when it came to perform in their village. Either of these would certainly have looked very nice.

Having built the shed, Grandad started building a stove with pounded clay. The women in the village all knew that a stove built by Grandad would draw well and give more heat for less fuel than one built by anyone else. After adjusting the cooking vessel on the stove he dipped his hand in a puddle and, using his hand as a trowel, smoothed the wall of the stove till it became glossy. After that he set up a handsome chimney at the back of the stove. It was a stove that the most discriminating old lady could find no fault with.

"Now I'll sink a well," he muttered to himself.

Did you ever watch a well being sunk? In Apricot Village, to sink a well, specially made short-handled shovels, wooden frames, buckets and ropes were needed, and sometimes dynamite too. A dozen men or so often had to work for a fortnight before water could be reached. Grandad had sunk many wells before. But here there was no need for him to show off his skill. A few diggings with the shovel were enough to produce an abundance of clear water.

First he sank one for use by men, then another big one for the cattle. After eating so much tender grass, like men who have eaten the delicacies of a banquet, they would of course want a cup of "tea"!

Grandad was now tired and sat down to smoke a pipe. After thinking a little, he hopped up again and began to dig a hole beside the bunk for use as a wash basin. He levelled the ground around the hole so that one could squat there comfortably and wash oneself. Next he went to examine the post for tethering the cattle and took the salt from his pocket for them to lick when they returned.

The boys came back with the cattle, whose bellies were bulging with the grass they had eaten. The calves frisked about cheerfully. The oxen rolled out their thick tongues, munching slowly like children who were loath to swallow all their sweets at one go.

The boys were beyond themselves with joy when they saw their new home. In the twinkling of an eye Erhou made a little clay figure bending in front of the stove as if tending the fire. He put a blade of grass in its hand for a chopper. Then they went into the "room" and flopped on the floor, riding on each other, rolling about, somersaulting and yelling all the while.

"Aren't you afraid of soiling your clothes?" said Grandad. "Fetch some hay and spread it on the floor."

"Where can we get it?" asked Erhou.

"Haven't you got hands? You can gather it easily enough!" So saying, Grandad made a round of the place, returning with a large bundle of hay. The boys spread it on the floor, fluffing it up and making it soft. Then they tumbled on it, and White Neck also came to join in the fun.

What a nice home! There was no better home in the world! A handsome palace with the rolling Weishan Mountain in the distance and the broad green lake at the back. It was spacious, tidy, sunny and airy. All around the meadow stretched endlessly away like a green carpet. Above drifted patches of white cloud, and through the window the sun shone brightly.

Hohua

At noon the next day, when the cattle had returned to rest after grazing their fill, Hsiao chu clapped Erhou and Yatou on the shoulders and the three boys set out towards the lake.

As they proceeded the weeds grew thicker and thicker. The cattle's hoofprints filled with water as soon as they were made. Sometimes they found a few shells on the beach. Further ahead were clumps of reeds where the water fowls, at least a thousand of them, sang joyously. On the lake an old man cast a net from a small boat. As he drew it slowly in the live fish wriggled and twisted like so many golden stars. . . .

Suddenly White Neck barked in the grass.

Erhou sprinted forward. "Hen's eggs!" he shouted excitedly.

A couple of snow-white eggs shone in his hands. Why on earth should hens come here to lay eggs?

"They aren't hen's eggs," observed Hsiao chu. "Maybe they're swan's eggs!"

"Yes, they're swan's eggs," said Erhou brusquely. "Surely, they must be!"

He gave the bigger one to Hsiao chu and slipped the other into his pocket.

"Can I have a look?" asked Yatou.

Although Yatou was a boy, his mother, being afraid that he might not grow up, had given him a girl's name.* (The name "Yatou" means slave girl.)

* In the old days, this was a common superstition.

"It bites!" said Erhou. "Can't let you look. You might pocket it. Have you forgotten what happened to my quail?"

Yatou was silent. For in swopping a quail for something of Yatou's, Erhou had come off badly. This was something he could never forget. Yatou hung his head and looked at the grass, hoping to suddenly discover a pile of swan's eggs. He cocked his ears to listen for White Neck's bark.

A big river lay in front of them.

Now here was a river in the real sense of the word! Compared with it the Hsiaotung River in Apricot Village was a mere stream. In fact, it was the Great Canal, about which every Chinese schoolboy knows, from his geography textbook. Here it lay, stretching away from Weishan Lake like a dragon.

How nice it would be to go to the opposite bank and have a look! The grass over there must be more luxuriant, the water birds more beautiful and the swan's eggs more abundant. . . .

Suddenly a small boat with a girl in it appeared near the opposite bank. She was about ten years old and was very pretty, with her two beribboned plaits. She was barefooted, and wore a red blouse and a pair of green trousers.

"Let me ferry you across!" she shouted to the boys.

Without waiting for a reply she untied the boat and punted across obliquely with the current. The long pole was like a big tree in her hands but she wielded it with ease and dexterity. The boat quickly drew up. Jumping ashore, she said with a smile, "Come aboard!"

Hsiao chu and Erhou sprang forward. Yatou was a little afraid, but he finally managed to scramble aboard, clutching the side of the boat with one hand and pressing the other against his chest. White Neck rushed back and forth on the bank barking. Then,

with one bound, he shot into the boat like a ball and landed straight on Hsiaochu's lap.

Standing on shore, the girl gave a slight push to the stern of the boat and it was soon some five or six feet off the shore. Thrusting the pole into the water she vaulted neatly across, describing a semi-circle in the air, and alighted nimbly on the stern. She pushed the pole, and the boat slid forward swiftly, splashing up sprays of creamy foam. . . .

She ran back and forth along the narrow gunwale pushing her pole. She was as steady on her feet as Erhou was when he stood on the bed. The wind played on her red blouse, caressing her sun-tanned face. She was in high spirits.

"What's your name?" asked Erhou.

"Hohua," said the girl.

Soon they arrived at the opposite bank and went ashore.

They should have thanked the little girl, but although they could do so many things the boys had never learned the language of politeness. To say "thank you" seemed to them more difficult than climbing the tallest tree. Shyly, very red in the face, Hsiaochu tried in vain to say something. . . . Suddenly his fingers touched the precious egg. He took it out and offered it to Hohua.

"Here, take this!"

