

THE  
TEST



HSIA YEN

# THE TEST

*A Play in Five Acts*

*by*

HSIA YEN

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
PEKING 1956

TRANSLATED BY YING YU

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

TIME: 1953.

PLACE: *An industrial city.*

CHARACTERS:

TING WEI, *manager of Hsin Hua Electrical Machinery Works.*

CHENG YU-CHING, *his wife.*

TING SUNG, *his daughter.*

YANG CHUNG-AN, *deputy-manager.*

HSUEH WEI-TEH, *foreman of a workshop of the Works.*

HSU TA-MIN, *deputy-foreman of same.*

CHIEN PEI-CHIH, *chief engineer of the Works.*

YU CHIA-HUA, *secretary to the manager of the Works.*

WANG HUI, *wife of Yang Chung-an.*

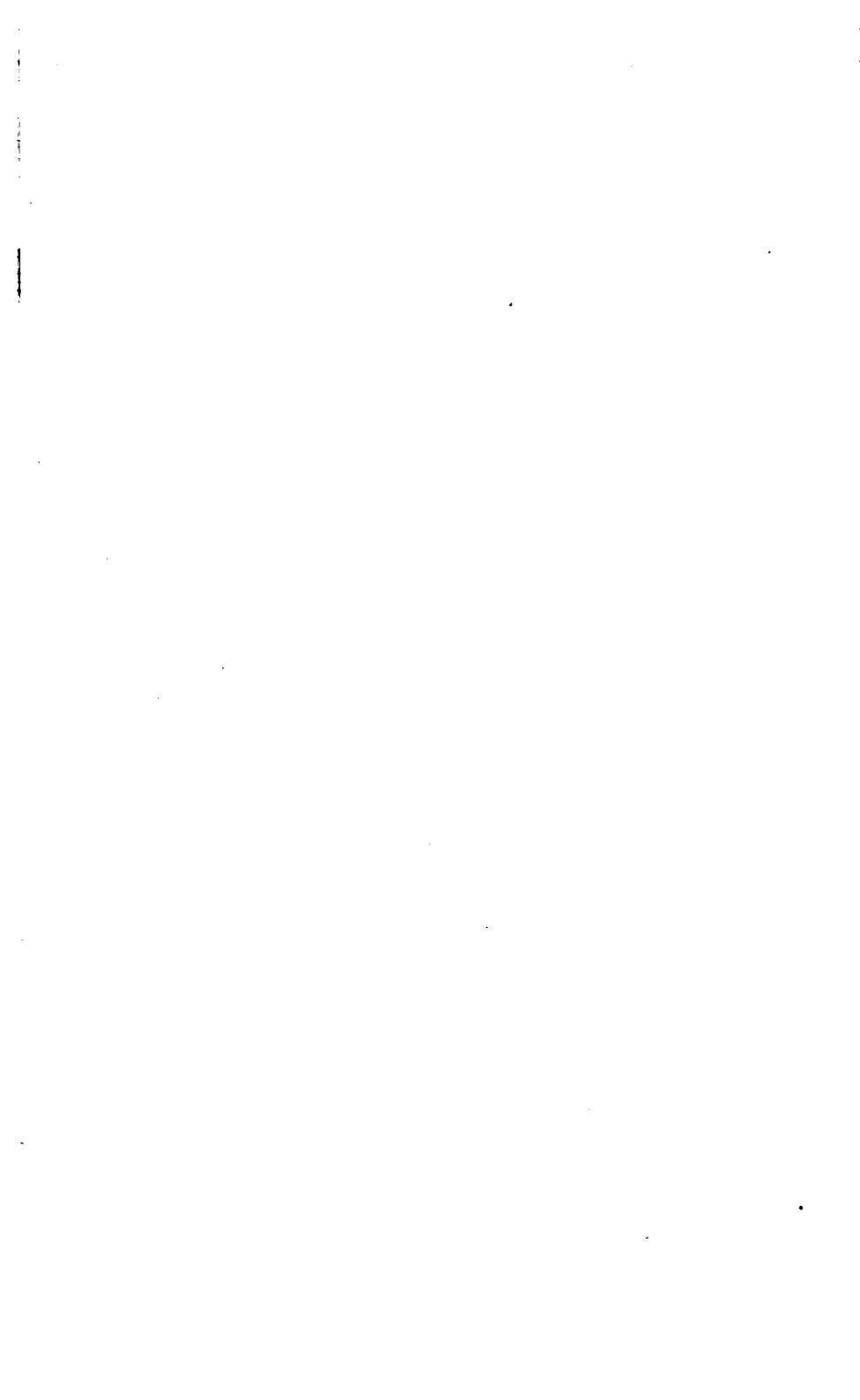
FANG KE, *secretary of the Works' Party Committee.*

MA HSIAO-PAO, *leader of a production team.*

HO FU-CHING, *deputy-foreman of another workshop.*

CHU FAN, *clerk.*

MESSENGER.



## ACT I

*It is a Sunday in March, 1953. Late afternoon.*

*The scene is a sitting room (also used as a study) in a two-roomed flat in a block of flats, with a big window at the back. The room is simply furnished with a desk and an old-fashioned easy chair under the windows and a bookshelf and a little tea table to the right. On the left, a second desk stands against the wall, smaller than the first. It looks like a school-girl's desk. There is a little round table and chairs in the foreground.*

*The curtain rises on an empty stage. The evening sun comes through the curtains, to fall obliquely on the desks.*

*A girl is heard singing, off stage, in a clear, sweet voice. Footsteps.*

*The train is running,  
The wheels are singing,  
Food and timber,  
And metals without number,  
Are rushing to the cities.*

*She comes in with a spray of full blown peach blossoms. The singing is kept up:*

*Load more, run faster,  
Run faster, load more,  
Carrying ores to factories,  
And machinery to villages;*

*as she puts the spray in a vase. A man comes in after her, carrying his coat on his arm. He puts it down on the back of a chair.*

TING SUNG, the girl, is fifteen years old. She wears a white blouse, a pale-green woollen sweater and a navy-blue skirt. She has two short pigtaails. She looks a robust, straightforward, warm-hearted girl.

The man, TING WEI, is her father. He is in his early forties, of medium height, with heavy eyebrows and large eyes. He is clean-shaven, but his chin still looks blue.

*The girl sings again:*

*Smoke-stacks rise like a forest,  
Molten iron is boiling,  
New records keep on being made,  
Our workers' brains are best.*

TING [*sitting down and lighting a cigarette, interrupts her*]: Where's your mother got to all of a sudden?

SUNG: She's taking brother back to the nursery.

[*Takes some little bottles of insects and specimens of plants out of a string bag.*]

[*A MESSENGER comes in with a note, which is immediately grabbed by TING SUNG.*]

MESSENGER: Department Head Li just left this note.

[*Exit.*]

[*TING SUNG opens the note.*]

SUNG: Let me read it to you. It's nothing confidential. [*Pushes her father back into his chair, leans on it and reads.*] "Comrade Ting Wei: Just dropped in, but found that you'd all gone to the park. Glorious weather for a Sunday, isn't it? I came to let you know that your request for a transfer to a factory job is granted. The City Party Committee's official notification is on the way. If the training school winds up soon enough, we shall expect you to report for duty at your new post within the next week."



[TING WEI *snatches the note away and reads it eagerly, his face flushed with excitement.*]

TING [*speaking to himself*]: Run a factory!

SUNG: You run a factory?

TING [*looking at her and thinking it over*]: What's wrong with that? Think I'm not capable of doing it, eh?

[*But the girl has gone back to her own desk, where she is busy sorting out her specimens.*]

TING [*to himself*]: Application approved! Quick work!

SUNG [*to father, complainingly*]: I told you to use the net but you *had* to go and do it with your hand! Now look what you did. Such a beauty and you crushed its wings!

TING: But you didn't get a thing yourself with your net, for all that running about and sweating! I may have used my hand, but I *caught* a butterfly the first time I tried. [*Looking at her.*] These butterflies look all the same to me. Why do you want so many?

SUNG: All the same! Not a bit of it. This is the powdery kind, with oval wings. And this one has got two little feet attached to the rear wings. It's called a Phoenix. [*Retorts like the spoiled child she is.*] How on earth can you say they're the same?

TING: Oh, I didn't know there was so much learning to it.

SUNG: Well, there is, I can tell you. See?

[*Finding her absorbed in sorting out her specimens, he returns to his own desk, opens a book, and starts to read. But only for a minute, for the girl, suddenly feeling hungry, goes off and comes back with a plate of biscuits, some of which she hands her father.*]

TING: You shouldn't eat with such dirty hands.  
You've just been touching insects.

[SUNG obviously feels caught out in this, and starts wiping her fingers on a little handkerchief.]

TING: Sung-sung.

SUNG: H'm?

TING: Let's have a look at your algebra book.

SUNG [*laughs*]: You still can't work out algebra problems, I see!

TING: Can't I? I finished all twelve problems last night.

SUNG: Then what do you want my exercise book for?

TING: Oh, just to check up the answers, that's all.

SUNG: You're kidding me. There's nothing easier than working out quadratics. Substitute the answer you got for  $X$  and see if it works out. [*The naughty girl again.*] I know you haven't been able to work out your  $X$ 's and that's what's bothering you, isn't it? Well, well, try again before I give you your lesson tonight.

TING [*with a wry smile*]: You're a bad girl.

SUNG [*as if it had suddenly occurred to her*]: But Dad, why should you study mathematics too? Even mother's been laughing at you. She said it's like taking up the violin at the age of eighty. A silly old man's funny ideas.

TING: You don't know what you're talking about. Mathematics are the key to every branch of science. And, mind you, they're just as important to you as to anybody else. You've got to study them and study hard, whatever you want to be in future, a biologist or, if your mum gets her way, a singer. Mathematics render the most important service to all branches of technology. They help one systematize knowledge and sort out one's ideas. If you

don't get a firm grounding in maths when you're a youngster. . . .

SUNG [*pouting*]: But I just can't learn maths. At the last exam. . . .

TING [*teasing her*]: You didn't pass, eh?

SUNG: Who told you that? I got a 4.

TING: Work harder and get a 5 next time.

SUNG: Yes, but. . . .

[*Voices can be heard off stage.*]

TING: That's mother back.

SUNG: Who's she talking to, I wonder? [*Opens the door and exits.*]

[CHENG YU-CHING enters with YANG CHUNG-AN. Dressed in the grey uniform of a government worker, she is a woman in her early thirties, of medium height, rather plump. YANG is under forty, liverish, getting fat, rather excitable, accustomed to speaking at the top of his voice.]

CHENG: Look who's here!

TING [*taken completely by surprise. His eyes light up, and he rushes forward and warmly grips the newcomer's hand*]: Hello! If it isn't Old Yang!

YANG [*gripping TING's shoulders and holding him at arm's length for a long, searching scrutiny*]: You've hardly changed at all, only —

TING: You are getting fat.

YANG: 10 stone 5. Just right. You haven't changed a bit, you look exactly the same. But you've put on some weight, Yu-ching. [*To TING.*] I met her at the door. If she hadn't spoken first, I wouldn't have dared to. . . .

CHENG: I'm getting on. It's a good many years.

TING: Don't say she's getting fat. After a few visits to the theatre recently, she's been seriously considering returning to the stage. That's where she thinks she belongs.

CHENG: That's pure slander. [*To her daughter.*]  
Aren't you going to say hello to Uncle Yang? Don't you recognize him?

YANG: Sung-sung! [*Pats her head.*] How time passes! You've grown quite a young lady already. D'you remember I used to carry you about in my arms? [*Laughs.*]

[*The blushing girl can't for the life of her remember who he is.*]

YANG [*very much at home now, pulls up a chair and sits down*]: Have you been here all these years?

TING: Not exactly. I stopped here for about a month when I came south with the People's Liberation Army. Then I got switched to the Revolutionary College, and worked there for two and half years. I only came here last year. Still the old line, education. The Cadres Training School, you know.

YANG: Fancy being in the same place without knowing it! It all comes of doing different sort of work.

TING: But tell me all about yourself. Since you came south with the army, you stayed. . . .

YANG: Yes. After the take-over of the factory, I was appointed military representative. Then deputy-manager.

TING [*elated*]: So you are running a factory too!

YANG: Why, don't I look it, or what?

TING: Oh yes, every bit of it. Yang, what a bit of luck that we old pals should come together again!

CHENG: Excuse me. I'll go and make some tea.  
[*Exit.*]

YANG: I only learned you were here yesterday, and wanted to come right away. Lucky today's Sunday. Well, old man, when will you be reporting for duty?

TING: What's that?

YANG: What! Don't you know? Or are you only pretending?

TING: No, no. You mean. . . .

YANG: The appointment's already announced. You're to be manager of our factory. So you see we'll be together again. [*With real joy.*] It's taken a weight off my mind, to know that you are coming.

TING: No, really. What are you talking about?

[CHENG YU-CHING *enters with a teapot and thermos, and fills the tea bowls.*]

YANG: I'm not like you. I don't like pulling people's legs. [*Speaking to CHENG.*] I see he hasn't given up his old habits.

CHENG: Well, he is getting middle-aged now; you can't expect him to drop his old ways. [*Laughs.*] During one of the mass movements, he was criticized for not being serious enough for a person on the staff of the training school. Not half serious enough. In fact, he's rather frivolous. At home he loves to joke with Sung, making faces and all that sort of thing.

YANG: Bravo! One of the cheerful revolutionaries.

TING: But to come back to the factory, old man. The one you've been talking about is. . . .

YANG: The Hsin Hua Electrical Machinery Works. Makes generators, motors, transformers. . . .

TING: So that's it. How's production going?

YANG: You don't need to worry about that, old man, as long as I'm on the job. I heard about the City Party Committee deciding to send a manager along last month. I was a bit worried at first, wondering who it would be. You know the sort of person I am. I was afraid that I might not get along with the new chap. So you can imagine how pleased I was yesterday, when the official notice came and it turned out to be you! It's really splendid! An old comrade-in-arms, an old colleague—what more could one want? The factory is all right. Don't

worry about that. I have been feeling my way there for three years now and I think I have just about got my bearings.

TING: Of course there couldn't be anything better than to work with you again. But I don't know the first thing about it. I'm not . . . er . . . psychologically prepared. Could you tell me a little.

. . .

YANG: What's the hurry? I'll be making a detailed report in a day or two and after that I'll get the heads of the various sections to report to you.

TING: Oh come on, brief me a bit now, there's a good chap. You know I can't bear waiting.

YANG: Righto. Can't sleep unless you've got to the bottom of things, eh? But where shall I begin?

TING [*picking up the DEPARTMENT HEAD's note from the desk and handing it over to YANG*]: You see, it was only five minutes before you came that I knew about the decision at all. My official notice hasn't come yet. They must have sent it to the school. The department head just says it's a factory job. [*Pauses.*] Factory! And I didn't even know what factory it was. Now, your factory—how big is it?

YANG: Well, compared with some of the new ones in the Five-Year Plan, it isn't particularly big, but still, we've got more than a thousand workers. We're one of the specially important factories, you know. The City Party Committee itself gives a lot of attention to us, and indeed takes a direct hand in our affairs.

TING: But what about production?

YANG: It's far better than it was, I can tell you. At the take-over, it was a wreck. Everything was in a mess. Things didn't begin to change till there'd been several big campaigns—you know, the ones to root out corruption, waste and bureaucracy,

to run things democratically and to organize production. Now look at me, old man—I've gone grey in the last three years. Not an easy job, I can tell you.

TING: No, I can see how tough it must have been. You're wonderful! But tell me, where did you learn the secret? [*Thumps him affectionately on the shoulder.*]

YANG [*laughing, with great satisfaction*]: Praise from an old comrade is praise indeed. My hair has not gone grey in vain. But, you know, not everyone sees it your way. Work's full of difficulties these days. You're checked from above and criticized from below. You're expected to outdo yourself every time. No sooner do you fulfil production targets when they demand that you carry out what's known as balanced production. And everything has to be done democratically. I wouldn't call myself a particularly un-democratically-minded person—far from it! But all the same, at the last Party conference I came under rather strong fire. So before you come, old chap, you *must* be what you said erh "psychologically prepared." [*Laughs.*]

TING: But you get criticism and expression of opinion everywhere. That's as it ought to be. . . .

CHENG [*enters with a plate of biscuits and pours out another round of tea*]: Help yourself. Just biscuits. Comrade Chung-an, how is my old friend Young Wang?

YANG: You mean my wife? Well, she's not so young as she was, getting middle-aged. What do you expect of a mother of five?

TING: Five?

YANG: Yes, three boys and two girls. Four of them in the three years we've been here.

CHENG: Four in three years?

YANG: Number Four in January, '52, a boy, and Number Five in December, same year, a girl.

CHENG: Where is she working?

YANG: In the factory, too. Still the old line. In charge of education and recreation on the trade union committee. Far too many kids for a job like that. So I said, "You'd do better to clear out, stay at home and be a model mother." But she won't listen to me. She chooses to stick to her job.

TING: Four children in three years!

YANG [*with a wry smile*]: If only our production figures rose like that—doubled in a year!

[*Exit* CHENG YU-CHING.]

TING: But didn't you say that production was going well, that the targets were all reached? . . .

YANG: By ordinary standards it would be all right. Even with our old equipment and old staff, production has risen steadily from year to year. I dare say it would be quite all right for other factories, but the snag is, ours happens to be an electrical machinery works.

TING [*to whom everything is new*]: What difference does that make?

YANG: Electrical machinery is one of the focal points of production in the first year of the Plan. [*Takes out a notebook from his pocket, and turns over the leaves as he speaks.*] It is earmarked for the biggest increase over last year's figures. To be specific, generators 119 per cent and motors 41 per cent. Of the eighteen main products of the factory, these two are to have the highest percentages of increase.

TING: Certainly not an easy matter.

YANG: No, it isn't. But apart from the size of the jobs, the chief difficulty lies in personnel. Of



course in appointing you manager, the City Party Committee shows that it's really giving the factory a lot of attention. However, I did a little stock-taking and found that not a single addition had been made to the original team of five sent along to take over the factory; that is, not a single reinforcement to the management in three years. And of the others that came with me, there's not one left, either. Some were switched to other jobs, the rest have gone under.

TING: Gone under?

YANG: That's it. Two of them, to be exact. You probably remember Young Chiang. He worked under you in East Shantung. Well, he went under during the campaign against corruption, waste and bureaucracy.

TING: Oh yes, I seem to have heard about him. [After a pause.] But surely, fresh youngsters must've come forward?

YANG [shakes his head]: Fresh from school. No good.

[It is getting late. The stage looks darker.]

TING [suddenly recalling something, casts a glance back-stage and calls out]: Ching! [No answer. Turns to his daughter.] Go and get your mum.

YANG: Still the same old way—"Ching!"

TING: Well, what do you expect me to say? To address her as Comrade Cheng Yu-ching would sound like giving directions in an office. To call her Sung-sung's mother would smack of feudalism. And to call her "sweetheart" or "my love" is too much for a middle-aged man.

[CHENG YU-CHING enters and TING WEI speaks to her in whispers.]

TING: This is a rare occasion. I want you to stay to dinner. Let's talk over old times over a bottle of