



A BATTLE FOR LIFE

BY PA CHIN AND OTHERS

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*A full record
of how the life of steel worker, Chiu Tsai-kang,
was saved in the Shanghai Kwangtze Hospital*

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1957

FOREWORD

On May 26, 1958 at midnight, Chiu Tsai-kang, a steel worker of the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works, was burned by molten steel. The affected area extended over 89 per cent of his body, 20 per cent being third degree burns with the muscles and bones involved. According to Western medical authorities, a patient with such severe burns would be likely to die. But due to the affectionate concern of the Communist Party, to the great efforts made by the medical staff and to the widespread support of society at large, Chiu Tsai-kang is still alive. After being treated for more than five months his wounds are now completely healed and covered by grafted skin. On November 23 he was transferred to the Sino-Soviet Friendship Hospital in Peking for further treatment. Three months later the function of his joints was restored and he could walk without the aid of crutches. During his stay in Peking, Chiu Tsai-kang was able to attend and speak at the National Conference of Active Young Builders of Socialism. On March 19, 1959 he returned to Shanghai to convalesce.

During the course of treatment which saved this steel worker's life, the Kwangtze Hospital received enthusiastic support and commendation from people in all walks of life. A very deep impression was made on some foreign friends who visited the hospital, by this marvel of healing. Dr. J. S. Horn, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, after checking the record of the treatment, said:

"I consider the treatment to be outstandingly good. I have never seen a burned patient who received such excellent treatment and minute care." Professor De Rudler, Director of the Surgical Department of Geneva University in Switzerland, after personally examining the patient, said: "The treatment given is excellent. You observe the change of symptoms more thoroughly and carefully than we do." Later in talking with Professor Fu Pei-pin he again remarked: "In your country where flies and mosquitoes can be exterminated, anything can be done." A French correspondent Monsieur Robert Clarke said: "The fact that Chiu Tsai-kang whose burns extended over more than 80 per cent of his body was saved is regarded internationally as a rare occurrence." Again he reported: "In France, a certain locomotive engineer who was no more than 50 per cent burned died, notwithstanding the fact that fifteen workers volunteered to offer their blood and skin for transfusion and grafting."

The saving of Chiu Tsai-kang's life proves a truth, namely, that only under the leadership of the Communist Party, can the life of such a severely burned patient like Chiu Tsai-kang be snatched from the jaws of Death. It proves that only by observing the principle of thorough co-operation between the whole medical staff, and carrying out the mass line in place of allowing individuals to work alone, can the established "medical authority" of capitalist countries and the international medical records be shaken, thus effecting cures which our predecessors considered impossible.

Such marvels should no longer be regarded as "accidental" in China today. Following Chiu Tsai-kang's case the Kwangtze Hospital later saved sixteen patients with

severe burns, sent there from other places. Among them was an army officer by the name of Teng Ming-chi whose burns covered 94 per cent of his body, 10 per cent being third degree burns, who did not arrive in the hospital until seven hours after the accident occurred. Owing to the fact that a summary of their experiences under the leadership of the Party had already been made by the medical workers who had saved Chiu Tsai-kang, Teng Ming-chi recovered steadily and satisfactorily after he once entered the hospital. Instances from other places in the country prove that even smaller and less adequately equipped hospitals are quite capable of saving critically burned patients just as the Kwangtze Hospital did. Since May 1958 when the saving of Chiu Tsai-kang's life caused a furore in the whole country, hospitals in cities like Tzupo, Chinchow, Hsuanhua, and some medium and small-sized hospitals in the Tungchow District of Peking and the Yushihpao mining area, have all saved the lives of critically burned patients. For instance, Chin Hsueh-chih, a chemical worker of Peking, was burned over 85 per cent of his body, 60 per cent being second degree and 20 per cent third degree burns. Benefiting by the experience of the Kwangtze Hospital, the Tungchow District Hospital finally succeeded in curing Chin Hsueh-chih.

Success in saving Chiu Tsai-kang's life reflects a new spirit among our working class and the broad masses, a new human relationship — a communist relationship — which has been developing quickly among the Chinese people through the Party's education and since the great Rectification Campaign. Only by the integration of this kind of spirit with modern medical technique can such successes in medical work be achieved.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

A BATTLE FOR LIFE

by Pa Chin

1

HOW WE DEvised NEW METHODS OF TREATMENT

*by the Committee for the Treatment of Burns of the
Kwangtze Hospital*

24

WE WILL CONTINUE TO LEAP FORWARD!

by Hsieh Chung-feng •

32

THE PARTY GAVE ME A SECOND LIFE

by Chiu Tsai-kang •

35

A BATTLE FOR LIFE

by Pa Chin

1. "The Masses Are the Hero of the Drama"

A battle to save life has recently been waged at the Kwangtze Hospital in Shanghai. This battle is not yet over, but it has already caused a great sensation in the whole city. The producers of the local film studio came over to make a film of it. The writer of the scenario was in the hospital gathering material, and in talking to a young doctor he asked incidentally, "When I write the scenario, which person should I make the hero?" The doctor was the assistant secretary of the Party branch of the medical department, who had taken an active part in this battle. After a moment's thought he replied, "Really I can't say, but if you want to write this story correctly, you'd better mention everybody, by that, I mean all the people." He was correct when he said, "Every time I talk about this case I can't help leaving out some people and facts, but the basis of the story and most worthy of mention are the masses. The Party linked up the hearts of all these people like a string of pearls, connecting them together into one whole and it was this whole that saved the life of our comrade Chiu Tsai-kang."

Nevertheless the writer of the scenario did finally find one outstanding character for the film. In going in and out of the hospital everyday he heard the name of one

person being constantly repeated, that name was Chiu Tsai-kang, more intimately called, "Lao Chiu." This patient attracted numberless people to his side, who encircled him and offered him all available resources. So many people cared for him and loved him! The writer knew that if he could interpret the drama which was performed in the Kwangtze Hospital through the character of this one man, it would surely move the heart of every audience.

I believe that this film will be well made because I discovered that the writer of the scenario also came to love his hero. One evening when I met the writer in the hospital, both of us stood on the veranda outside the window of the isolation ward. The light was very bright in the room and the doctor was dropping a new kind of medicine on Lao Chiu's right leg. Lao Chiu lay on the bed and was in such pain that his whole body trembled. My heart was very sad indeed. As I looked at the writer I noticed that he was almost weeping. Later the doctor gave a sedative injection and Lao Chiu gradually began to fall asleep. When the writer and I were leaving the hospital we stood again outside the window of the patient's room for a while. The lights were low inside now and the patient was lying silently on the bed.

A joint consultation of medical and surgical specialists was held that evening on the roof garden outside the isolation ward and the consultation was not concluded until midnight. This was already 36 days after Lao Chiu's admission to the hospital. His condition appeared to be worse this day. His right leg had become seriously infected. The polymyxin applied hitherto could no longer control the bacillus pyocyaneus which had developed a strong resistance to polymyxin. On the same afternoon a

new kind of bacteriophage had been given a trial. This kind of medicine was made experimentally by the professors and students of the No. 2 Medical College specially for Lao Chiu. It was very effective when it was tested in the tube, destroying a culture of the bacillus pyocyaneus from Lao Chiu's body. But the doctors were not certain whether it would be effective when used clinically. These twenty-four hours were a critical period for Lao Chiu. When the doctors who participated in the consultation were leaving, not a smile appeared on any face. Everybody seemed to pin his hope on "tomorrow."

The day after, I went to the hospital again and found that the bacteriophage had really taken effect and that the patient's condition had improved. So Lao Chiu passed another crisis. When doctors and nurses talked about him then, smiles again appeared on their faces. Another victory had been won. They had good reason to be overjoyed.

2. A Critically Burned Steel Worker

This bitter struggle for life commenced in the small hours of May 26, 1958. About one o'clock that night an ambulance pulled up before the doors of the Kwangtze Hospital on Juichin Road. Three stretchers were carried down and taken into the emergency office. Three patients were escorted by Dr. Li and nurses on duty at the clinic of the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works, who were all steel workers burned by molten steel about one hour earlier. One case was fairly light but the other two were serious. The faces of the two critically burned workers were

swollen to an enormous size and large sections of their bodies were deeply scorched. The skin on their lower limbs was charred and they were unable to move their hands which were lifted high up over their heads. The taller one of the two most badly burned men was grinding his teeth continually. However, he not only refrained from yelling out with pain, but encouraged his two fellow-workers to try and bear their suffering in the same way. He was the 29-year-old Chiu Tsai-kang, a member of the Communist Party and also an excellent team leader who worked at a Bessemer converter.

The doctors on duty found that the condition of the patients was so critical that they immediately telephoned to the surgeons' quarters and called up all the resident doctors. As soon as the patients had been carried into the operating room, all the doctors went about their tasks swiftly, administering anaesthetics and plasma, cleaning, dressing and bandaging. It was already 4:30 a.m. when they finished their first-aid measures. After the patients left, a strong smell of charred flesh remained in the operating room.

Soon after daybreak the head of the organizational department of the Party committee of the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works arrived at the hospital. The Party organizations of the hospital and of the steel works were in full agreement with that all available forces must be used to save the lives of these burned men. Accordingly a joint consultation of specialists was held that morning. All the noted surgeons in Shanghai were invited. The condition of the patients was indeed most critical. Comrade Chiu Tsai-kang's burns extended over 89 per cent of his body; another young worker's burns even surpassed

his, being as much as 91 per cent.¹ According to the world's highest medical authorities, burns extending over 75 per cent of a person's body are regarded as likely to prove fatal. The burns of these two patients were not only extensive but also deep, even involving their muscles in many places. Therefore all the experienced surgeons frowned, shook their heads, and expressed their utter inability to save the lives of these men. One of them said, "It is only a matter of three or four days." Another suggested, "At most three days." Still a third one said, "Whether medicine is used or not is immaterial, for in spite of all efforts the patients will die." Everybody seemed to agree on one conclusion "death." In this way the joint consultation was concluded in a very pessimistic and hopeless atmosphere. On the basis of mortality statistics in international medical literature it seemed that these badly burned patients were doomed to die.

But the Party organization of the hospital would not agree to such a pessimistic view. The secretary of the general Party branch and the assistant secretary of the medical department branch immediately summoned the doctors treating the patients for a talk, and following that a meeting of all the responsible doctors was convened. The problem was analysed from a class viewpoint, and it was stressed that in capitalist countries it was impossible to obtain the full use of all resources to save the lives of burned workers, but that in our socialist country it was possible to mobilize everything available

¹ This worker, Liu Sse-hsiao, died on the eleventh day after his admission to the hospital. His loss saddened the staff, but they had kept him alive eight days longer than had been thought possible, and this made them more determined than ever to save Chiu Tsai-kang — Ed.

to save them. For this reason we should not always accept the medical statistics of capitalist countries and allow them to influence us. The Party secretary called the attention of the doctors specially to the following points: First, that they must try to rid themselves of their blind reliance on established bourgeois medical experience, and they must try to think, speak and act in bold new ways. Secondly, they must follow the mass line and depend more upon the power of the people. Finally he said, "The Party will do everything possible to save these steel workers who have created vast wealth for the nation."

Following this the entire body of workers of the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works sent in a letter of thanks written in bold characters. They urged the whole medical and nursing staff of the Kwangtze Hospital to do their utmost. This letter represented the voice of five thousand steel workers. They had written, "Use all available powers to save our critically burned comrades!"

These loud voices helped to unlock the closed minds of the doctors, swept away the doubts they had, and aroused their enthusiasm. The masses were inspired to action. The whole hospital proceeded with full confidence to join in the battle to save the lives of these workers.

3. "The Furnace Cannot Go On Without Me"

After the patients' admission to the hospital a special treatment group was organized with four surgeons in charge, namely, the head and assistant head of the surgical department and two young doctors. When they accepted their assignments they were not very confident,

especially the assistant head surgeon who simply believed in his own past experience, in the statistics of international medical literature, and in the medical equipment and resources of the hospitals in capitalist countries. Therefore when he first heard the talk of the vice-superintendent, who was the secretary of the general Party branch, he had some inner feeling of resistance. He thought to himself, "This is simply coercing people to try and do the impossible! But since I have accepted the assignment I'll do what I can. At any rate, the patients will die either in the shock stage or later." With such downhearted feelings he entered the ward to see his patients.

After he walked in he found that Chiu Tsai-kang had already regained consciousness after the anaesthetic. The burns on his back were especially bad and he lay on an ordinary bed, his hands still lifted high above his head and bandaged very tightly. His breathing was very fast and he could only endure the pain by clenching his teeth firmly. When he heard the doctor ask him, "How do you feel?" he spoke with great effort in a low and indistinct voice, "Comrade doctor, please tell me if my eyes are hurt."

"Your eyes are very good," said the doctor.

"Then why is it that everything I see is blurred?"

The doctor stretched out two fingers in front of the patient's eyes, asking, "Can you see them?"

"Yes, I can, they are two fingers."

Again the doctor stretched out four fingers, asking: "Can you see them?"

"Yes, now there are four fingers."

The doctor smiled and said, "You see very clearly. Your eyes are very good, they're not a bit burned."

The patient felt quite relieved and said, "In that case I can go back to the furnace. I don't mind having some scars on my face and being ugly to look at." He recalled the words of a Soviet expert, "You Chinese workers are really wonderful. Simply with a pair of eyes you can tell when steel should come out and yet the quality of the steel is always assured." He intended to laugh but his whole body began to tremble, and he immediately clenched his teeth again in agony.

The doctor looked at the patient with compassion and thought inwardly, "You cannot live more than three days, why do you think of such things?" As he frowned and was about to walk away the patient suddenly opened his eyes wide and said: "Doctor, let me implore you to save me. It isn't boasting when I say that I am very important and the furnace cannot go off without me. I can leave my family, wife and children, without anxiety, but what about the furnace?"

Looking at this immensely swollen face in front of him the doctor gently consoled the patient, "Comrade, don't worry and you will recover." As a matter of fact, he was thinking quite the opposite, "You will die. I can be of no more help." The doctor felt sad and was afraid of hearing the patient ask such things again. Therefore he left the ward and hurried away.

Later the assistant chief surgeon told people that he had been a surgeon for eleven years, had seen not a few patients die and consequently had become quite cold and indifferent. He was interested only in diseases as such and had no feelings for his patients as people. But what Chiu Tsai-kang had said impressed him deeply. Even after he left the patient's room he thought it over for quite a long while. Here was a man awaiting death who had to clench

his teeth to endure the searing pain of his whole body, but who constantly had the nation's steel production on his mind and who wholeheartedly desired to return to his furnace. In the past, he had read of people with such public spirit and unselfish character only in novels. He had regarded them as nothing but ideal, imaginary creations of literary writers. Now he has seen such a hero in the flesh with his own eyes. He was convinced that this man ought to live and that he was needed for the country's steel industry. He was determined to do his best to save him, but how? The more he thought the more he felt that he could not find a way out. When alone he secretly shook his head. But suddenly he recalled the analysis made by the Party secretary regarding "two kinds of social system, two attitudes, and therefore two different results." He felt as if he had seen a ray of light in the darkness. He said to himself, "Lao Chiu can endure pain of such magnitude, and in spite of his burns he is always thinking of going back to the furnace. He wants to live. Why should he not be able to live?" That moment, suddenly the doctor and the patient were drawn closely together. From then on, the doctor thought of the patient often and also tried to compare himself with Lao Chiu. The more he compared the more he felt ashamed of himself and the more eager he was to do his best for this worker. So, from the very first day the assistant surgeon learned something from his patient.

Later on, the assistant chief surgeon told the chief surgeon what Lao Chiu had said to him. The chief surgeon had studied in America. He was a good-tempered man, who didn't say very much, but he had experience and was successful as a surgeon. He did not participate

in the treatment of Lao Chiu from the very beginning. He told people that the first time he saw him was when the patient had just struggled out from the shock stage and was not yet able to speak. Apart from the fact that his condition was critical, the doctor had no other impression. He regarded Lao Chiu merely as a serious case like any other. When he learned that Lao Chiu was talking about his own importance he thought that the patient was rather conceited. Then the assistant chief said emotionally, "His way of thinking is totally different from mine. If I were burned by molten steel and was healed I would never go back to the furnace. But he is not like that. He thinks of going back to work even before he is healed. Here is the difference between workers and intellectuals. We always think of ourselves." This was the first time that the assistant chief surgeon had spoken this way and also the first time that the chief surgeon had seen his thirty-year-old colleague so excited. These words stirred the mind of the chief surgeon and for several days set him thinking too. The more he thought, the more he felt that his viewpoint had not been correct. Like the assistant chief surgeon and the other two young doctors, the more contact he had with Lao Chiu the more he felt the influence of this worker, and the more friendly he felt toward him the more he was determined to save him. The doctors realized very clearly that their minds and emotions were changing from day to day. On the one hand they were healing the patient, and on the other it looked as if they were healing themselves too. It was this chief surgeon who first volunteered to offer his skin when grafting began.

4. "Many People Were Concerned and Helped Him"

The battle to save a life had now commenced. On May 28, during the morning consultation of surgeons, a decision was reached to draw the masses into the effort. Forty-nine surgeons were called in and each one of them was asked to read two articles concerning the treatment of burns in foreign countries during the last few decades and then, by integrating these reports with their own clinical experiences, to make suggestions for treatment. That afternoon they met again to discuss methods of treatment and in the course of discussion, each of them offered his opinions without reserve and made concrete proposals. Finally they agreed on some new measures to be taken including fifteen recommendations.

This was a good Beginning. All the outmoded rules of the hospital were broken. Minds which had been tied down by subservience to foreign experience were now set in motion. People began to speak, to think and to act boldly. A new world opened in front of them. They knew that what they were doing now was something unprecedented which doctors in capitalist countries had not been able to do. They were engaged in a battle to save lives and as the scope of the battle became wider an increasing number of people were drawn in. Later on when a difficulty occurred in the course of treatment they solicited the opinions of many doctors both within and without the hospital, depending on the wisdom of the many to tide over one crisis after another.

The patient was now moved from the ward for serious cases to a strictly sterilized operating room, the bandages were removed and exposure treatment commenced. Air-conditioning in the operating room was strictly con-