
Challenge
AT CHANGSHA

BY
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The characters in this book are all imaginary, but the background against which they live is composed of actual military events. This story is dedicated to the people of China, whose ancient wisdom and courage remain undaunted after so many trials. A great many sources have contributed material to this volume. However, I am particularly grateful to Dr. W. W. Pettus of Yale-in-China, who told me much of Changsha and its people.

Challenge
AT CHANGSHA

Saturday December 20, 1941

A Japanese expeditionary force of more than 100,000 men today left Yochow, its base at the juncture of the Yangtze River and Tung Ting Lake in Central China. It marched south, along the lake, toward Changsha, a hundred miles away.

The infantry unit consisted of six divisions—including the veteran Third, Fourth, Sixth, and Fourteenth—and two added brigades. It was provided with ample air and artillery support.

In the initial phase of the operation, no Chinese opposition was encountered.

Sunday December 21

"Hen yo Li! Hen yo Li!"

It was the ultimate praise, and Ho Yang did not bestow it lightly. He usually sought only to display an authoritative restraint, as became his years. But the argument over the tea bowls had warmed him so gradually that he was scarcely aware of his own enthusiasm.

And now, as the Silver Pheasant Teahouse reverberated with the afternoon discussion, he mingled his voice with the others in a chorus of *"Hen yo Li! That has plenty of Li!"* It was the one apt way to acknowledge that a sharp point of logic had been driven into the dissension.

Li was what mattered. It meant propriety and correct behavior and devotion to the ancestral rules. But, in a higher sense, it meant reasonableness, principle, human justice. It meant that which was right. So that always, in a dispute, one asked, "What is the *Li* of the case?"

Ho Yang would have preferred to debate subtler things. He remembered the time when the Silver Pheasant had been crowded with young and passionate disputants every evening, and he had had a decent opportunity to quote Li Po and K'ung-fu-tse. Now, because of the war, Changsha was almost altogether bereft of young men, and only the graybeards gathered, drank their tea, smoked water pipes and

cigarettes, and played chess. Of what benefit was it to grow old and gain wisdom, if there were no young men on whom to shed it? It was like trying to shoot firecrackers in the rain.

For a few minutes, though, he had laid aside the dull garment of futility. The old men talked about themselves, about the Japanese, and about the atrocious tea brewed by Ah Mo, the Silver Pheasant's proprietor. This had been the best part of the contention, Old Ho thought, for he did not approve of Ah Mo, anyway. Obviously, anyone who placed the "Ah" before his name, so that all men would call him "friend," lacked a proper sense of humility. This made it all the more entertaining to pierce Ah Mo occasionally with a keen word, wounding his tradesman's pride until the other elders laughed aloud at him.

Amid the laughter, Ho Yang reined himself quickly, choking his amusement. He was ashamed. Once, in this very shop, he had brought the professors and the pupils together, and set them searching in the ancient writings. Now he sat and berated the proprietor of the house. Why? Perhaps it was because he was lonely.

From the safety of his fort of silence, he looked about the room. He unobtrusively scanned each little square table and its occupants. He looked down quietly at the earthen floor. He watched the great black kettles boiling away on the charcoal stove. Ho Yang was old, and he was alone. And when he looked across the table at his son, Ho Lung, his aloneness seemed to be intensified.

"Father, is something the matter?"

"No, Lung. Nothing."

"But you chilled suddenly."

"It is all right. Didn't I bring you here once when you were just a boy?"

"Yes, Father. Several times."

"Do you remember how different it was then? There was something quiet and confident about us in those days. And here we are now, all chattering like birds, even I."

"I like it better this way, Father."

"Why?"

"Because now you talk about things I can understand and see some point in. Back in the old days, it was *Li, chungyung, yin* and *yang*, over and over, until I didn't care how the argument went."

As befitted such an instance of youthful disrespect, Ho Yang re-

mained silent. He turned from Ho Lung and prepared to rejoin the conversation of the elders. But Lung was not to be put off so easily.

"Father," he said, "I didn't mean to hurt you. Yet how can I prevent myself? You won't even discuss my problems. You walk so firmly in the ancient ways that you cannot hear me."

"An upstart son is not to be heard. You do not need to talk any more."

"Just the same, I am going to. You have taught me to be a speaker, and not a listener only. I may not be able to march with the rest, but at least I can say something."

"You are always talking about that foot, Lung. I have done my best to show you that a foot is not a man. It is not how you walk but how you live that matters."

"Yes, you've said that before. You even used to tell me that a man with a clubfoot needn't have a club soul. Very well, I grant it. And since I don't have marching feet, I have a marching tongue. And I want to talk about the war, about the New China, about the Generalissimo. And all I ever hear is your wisdom from the Five Classics and the Four Books. I think you want me to have a lame mind as well as a lame leg."

"That isn't true. Chinese minds have been walking on the classics and the books a long time."

"Yes, but things have changed."

"Things never change."

"*T'a-men mo yo Li! T'a-men mo yo Li!*" came a cry from the other side of the shop.

"You hear them?" Ho Lung asked loudly. "Now they've begun to talk about the Japanese again. And what do they say? Do they mention the war or the cruelty, the bombs or the bullets? No. All they can say about the Japanese is, 'They have no *Li*.' What kind of comment is that?"

Ho Yang smiled. "My son, it is the only comment. *Li* is the important thing, and the Japanese do not have it. What else is there to say about them?"

"That's all I ever hear! Can you stop a shell by telling it that it has no *Li*? When the enemy is pushing a bayonet into your middle, can you pause and talk to him about philosophy? One Japanese with a rifle could kill Confucius ten thousand times!"

Ho Yang attempted to smother his flaming anger. He said, as quietly as possible, "That is not true."

"Besides," Ho Lung persisted, "what is *Li*, anyway? It's just a word. You can make it mean anything you like."

"*Li* is reason. Acting logically, even when angry, is *Li*. Seeking right instead of riches, that is *Li*. Confucius has aptly said, 'The superior man knows what is right. The inferior man knows only what is profitable.' Thus the superior man has *Li*."

"Yes, yes, I've heard that so much I'm sick of it!"

"Lung, I despair of you. The white devils have ruined you."

Just as Young Ho was about to make a hot answer, Ah Mo came by the table. It would have been improper to make a public spectacle of their disagreement, so he paused; and after the pause he was able to resume with less temper.

"Father, these twenty years I have tried to be a dutiful son. But I must tell the truth; when I don't understand things, I say so. And when you say that you still blame everything on the white devils, I don't understand that. The men from Japan have torn the country to shreds and burned the wreckage, but you still blame the white devils from the other world."

"Why not? It was only a year or two ago that I sent you to their school, after you had begged me so much. That school—"

"Yale-in-China."

"Yes. Right here at our doors, they have built a world of their own. And so I sent you. And what happened? Within a few weeks, you were calling yourself George Ho."

"It is the custom."

"It is the custom for a boy to call himself by his name, and your name is Ho Lung."

"They have different ways. They give the family name last, the individual's name first."

"It shows an unholy disrespect for the family."

"They believe that our way shows an unholy disrespect for the individual. It is the man himself who is important."

"It is the family which is important."

"You see, Father? What hope is there for us? The more we talk, the further apart we grow."

"The white devils have done this to us."

"Now you're talking like a Boxer, Father!"

"Perhaps I was a Boxer once."

Ho Lung scoffed at this. "Everybody knows you weren't. Even if you had been, all that was more than forty years ago."

"Confucius lived twenty-five centuries ago. Has time changed his truth?"

"But, Father, if you would only give me a chance! Why must we cling forever to the past? Take a look at the present. The Japanese have come down from Yochow twice and ruined our city; now they're on their way again, everybody says. They tear up our machinery, destroy our industries, trample down our crops. Look at yourself. You used to have a good silk business: is there anything left of it? Why, you are going to be poor in your old age, after working a whole lifetime. And you have the men from Japan to blame. Yet you keep on cursing the white devils."

"The white men have tarnished our ancient ways. Besides, Lung, you should not swear at the Japanese so much. Such an attitude violates *chungyung*."

"What!"

"You are straying from the middle course. You must remember *chungyung*. You are partly right, and I am partly right; the Japanese and the white devils are partly right. And everybody is partly wrong. That is *chungyung*. You are young yet; you will learn it some day."

Young Ho held himself intact as long as possible. Then his inner turmoil had to have release. "You and your *chungyung*! If a bomb kills you, I suppose you and the bomb are both partly *right*!"

"That is possible," Ho Yang said.

Ho Lung got up quickly and went to pay Ah Mo for the bowls of tea.

"It is young Mr. Ho, isn't it?" Ah Mo asked.

"Of course it is. You know very well who I am."

"And how is your father?"

"My father is full of tea."

He paid and went back, dragging the useless foot. He could feel the concentration of Ah Mo's eyes on him, but he heeded it very little. He was long accustomed to the stares of the curious. He did not like Ah Mo, who was too good to everybody. Still, Ah Mo was to be endured. At least, he did not go back to antiquity for all his knowledge.

Ho Lung looked at his father, wondering. Old Ho appeared to

have aged rapidly in the last few years. He was over sixty, and there was much white in his hair. A few months before, he had begun letting his slight beard grow, and it now gave him a look of quiet dignity. It was precisely that look which Ho Lung did not like in his father.

The old man wore a long black gown and a little black hat, to complete his offensive portrait. He eschewed all European dress, and Young Ho was certain that, if he could have found clothes more ancient or more Chinese, he would have worn them. He walked out slowly, and Lung followed him at a proper distance.

Lung himself wore an old pair of American shoes, which he had acquired during the brief period he attended high school. He had an Occidental jacket, too, which he proudly thought established his defiance of convention. But when they left the Silver Pheasant few of the elders looked up at them. They were much too busy exchanging the gossip of the day and deciding the *Li* of things in their amateur law court. Old Ho and Young Ho entered the street.

The two beggars were in their usual places beside the teahouse. San, the blind boy, sat against the building, while his sister Lan stood by him. She punched him on the shoulder with a little stick, and San at once held out his hand and cried:

"Alms to rebuild the temple! For the love of Buddha, alms to rebuild the temple!"

Ho Yang brought a coin out of his gown and tossed it into San's hand. San grasped it firmly, with a thousand thanks. Lan bowed low in gratitude. Lung winced at the irony of the ceremony.

"Why do you persist in treating them like this, Father?"

"They cry for alms. I give a coin to them. Do the white devils teach you something different?"

"The white people have nothing to do with it. But these beggars should be taken care of, not allowed to sit in the street and shout at everybody. Besides, you know they're lying. Ten thousand beggars are going to rebuild the temple—only they never say which temple, and none of the temples ever gets rebuilt."

"We will see."

The old man walked back to the place of the beggars, the young man following. "What is your name?" the old man asked.

"My name is San."

"And yours?"

"I am his sister, and they call me Lan."

"San and Lan, eh? Do you beg here most of the time?"

"Yes, sir," the girl said.

"Aren't you too old to be in the public streets?"

"I am fourteen. San is twelve. Nobody bothers us."

"I see. Now about the temple. San is always crying that he will rebuild it. What temple is that?"

San grinned widely. "The temple of *Shu*," he said.

Ho Yang smiled. "What is the matter with his eyes?"

"I don't know," Lan replied. "A veil has shut him off from the light."

"Has he always been blind?"

"No, sir. Once he saw; but then the curtain grew over his eyes. Now he lives in the darkness."

"And rebuilds the temple of *Shu*?"

"Yes." Lan smiled, too.

Ho Yang pressed another coin into San's hand. "When you rebuild the temple, put in a pillar for me."

"I will," San said.

As the two men walked down the street the young one asked, "What's all this about rebuilding the temple of *Shu*?"

The old one was distressed. "I taught you *Shu*. Can it be the blind beggar remembers and you have forgotten?"

"I remember. It is reciprocity. It is treating another man as you want to be treated. But a temple—"

"Don't you understand, Lung? When I was generous to San, I was really generous to myself. In that way, we make *Shu* strong again, so that all men will be decent to one another. Then perhaps all will follow the rule of *Shu*, treating others as they want to be treated. What temple could be more holy than that?"

Ho Lung shrugged his shoulders. He did not understand his father. Neither did he understand the pair of beggars, San and Lan, and the strange temple they were going to rebuild. But all this could be stored up for a later thinking. Now there was the more urgent, more painful problem of trying to keep up with his father, who had two good legs and two good feet.

"We should get that girl off the street."

"Why, Father?"

"She said she was fourteen. She looks even older. It is not safe.

"Oh, nobody would hurt her."

"If she has a home, she should stay in it. She is pretty, and it is not right that she should be in the street, with only a blind brother."

"Suddenly you are worrying about others' troubles."

"Something might happen to her. I feel it. It is wisely written, 'When joy or tragedy is about to befall, it can be known beforehand.'"

They both looked back at San and Lan, still begging at the entrance to the Silver Pheasant Teahouse. Lung then turned to look again at his father. He wondered if the old man was getting childish; but perhaps, except for Old Ho, he would be begging for his own bad foot as San begged for his useless eyes.

How Lung yearned to cut a figure before the women and the other young men! To run through the streets shouting, to leap onto a horse lightly and gallop away, to swagger and have soft maiden glances thrown shamelessly at him—these were the prerogatives of a man. The cursed foot had stolen them from him.

Yet maybe the foot was not entirely to blame. It could have been his face as well, for it was not handsome. The nose was too broad and flat, no doubt of that; the children had once claimed he bore himself like a dish. And sometimes he thought the ears jutted too far out, too. Lung sucked gall in these reflections, until he fancied the foot was as big as a table, the nose not there at all, and the ears like spread wings. It would have been delightful to hide himself.

A tempest of noise blew him from his preoccupation. In front of him, his father increased his speed, almost running. Lung, by exerting himself, caught up, and they reached the intersection together, where a crowd had gathered. There was a bedlam of talk. As Old Ho characteristically stepped into the center of the tumult there was a moment of silence.

"What happened?" he asked. The noise tide swelled again, but he shouted it down, repeating, "What happened here?"

From one voice and another, Ho Yang gathered in the story. A rickshaw had collided with a pedestrian and had knocked him down. The coolie contended the stroller had walked into his vehicle; the walker insisted the runner had smashed into him. Every second saw new adherents to each opinion, and within a few minutes there was a veritable army on each side. And by the time Old Ho and Young Ho arrived, battle was threatening.

Lung stood on the crowd's border and watched the efficient man-

agement of his father. Ho Yang brought the bruised pedestrian and the babbling coolie into the middle of the mob, silencing the talk with a raised hand. He turned to the pedestrian, dusted him off and told him:

"*T'a pu Han, nyi pu K'au!*"

The rickshaw puller immediately grinned. The reluctant pedestrian allowed a slow smile to capture his face. The gathering laughed a little and dispersed. Old Ho looked immensely satisfied.

In spite of himself, Lung was rather pleased, too. His father might be officious, but he did solve the problem.

"I heard you, Father. Why didn't you tell them the truth?"

"I did tell them the truth. I simply told the pedestrian that he didn't look and the puller didn't shout."

"Yes, I know. I heard you. But how did you know whether one looked or the other one called? We were far down the street when the accident happened."

"Did I have to see it to know? One didn't call, one didn't look. It was everybody's fault, it was nobody's fault. To decide otherwise would violate *chungyung*."

"Oh, are we back there again?"

"Certainly. The middle course is what matters. You must remember Confucius has told us that—"

"Oh, damn Confucius!"

Lung left his confused and sputtering father and went over to take a look at the rickshaw. It seemed to have sustained no damage, but the operator was still examining it, inch by inch, with a professional touch.

"Is anything broken?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"That's good. Was the man hurt?"

"Only bruised a little—and for a while his temper was broken; but now it is healed."

"That's fine. How about your own temper?"

"It's all right," the man said, with a broad grin. Then he went on looking at one of the wheels.

"Do you have a fare?"

"Not right now."

"Then you can take me home."

"How about the old man?"

"He'll come later. Maybe he wants to walk."

"All right."

"What's your name?"

"Tehyi. I work this street most of the time; but I get around, all over town."

"All right, Tehyi. Let's go."

Lung got into the rickshaw and sat down. Tehyi looked back and grinned; then he stepped between the shafts, picked them up and began his methodical trot. He was slender and rather tall, and there was little of him but muscle. He did not pant or even become heated. His pace was as natural to him as walking would have been to another.

In a few minutes, he reached Lung's door. Lung paid.

"Tehyi, what do you think about the middle course?"

Not understanding, Tehyi simply grinned.

"How about reciprocity? And the Book of Mencius? And the Li Ki? And the works of Li Po?"

Tehyi went on grinning, perhaps a little more broadly. He turned the rickshaw around.

"We must get together some time and read the Analects to each other. We would acquire *Jen*, true manhood, as we read."

Tehyi was now ready to go. He looked back once more and, with a final grin of apparent great happiness, began to trot away. Lung laughed a little, but tired of the sport and went into his father's house.

The grin stayed a long time on Tehyi's face. It may have been he feared the look of the young master was following him; or perhaps his face was so susceptible to grinning that the expression required several minutes to wear off. Whatever the reason, he was still grinning when he passed Old Ho, who was walking home. He wanted to propose a transaction, but was a little afraid of the old man's severe mien. So he grinned on past him, hurrying back to the tea shop. There was probably more custom there.

The anger pains still bit Ho Yang, although he tried to deny their presence. He carried a fire in his bosom, and he was hard put to extinguish it. His son had awakened the sleeping wrath.

What was wrong with the boy? He had tried to give Lung the best of knowledge. He had shown him the meanings of Buddha and Lao-tse and K'ung-fu-tse; he had been determined that the boy should

have a good heart and a good mind, so that the bad foot would not prove such a handicap. After all, some men have been made philosophers through their physical deformities: by becoming reconciled to their own shortcomings, they learned to live in the imperfect world.

But it had not been so with Lung. He had never become reconciled to anything. He had always been ready for the newest outlandish experiment. He was dissatisfied with the old pattern of filial devotion. Even as a child, Lung had not enjoyed playing *Shih*, the young one representing the dead and reading the responses in the sacrificial rites. And when everybody else performed *sao mu*, visiting the graveyards and "sweeping the tombs," Lung was likely to run away for the day.

Ho Yang now counted over his efforts to save his son. He had sent him out to the white devils' school, Yale-in-China, thinking a true knowledge of the other world and its men would cause Lung to dislike them. But it had not been so; it had drawn him away from his father and into strange paths. Instead of the language of the *Ju*, scholarly and correct, Lung enjoyed the *pai-hua* of the streets. He loved to laugh, to ridicule; and, now that he was almost a man, he was a greater scoffer than ever. Ho Yang had always hoped to be able some day to call him *Chuntse* ("cultivated gentleman" in the Confucian ideology). But now he despaired: his son would live among the coolies, the rickshaw pullers, and the white devils. He would leave the tomb of his father unswept.

"Mr. Ho! Mr. Ho!"

The old man emerged from his reverie and looked up. A woman stood in front of him.

"Mr. Ho! Mr. Ho!"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Do you remember me, Mr. Ho?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm Lin Mei."

"I still don't remember you."

"It has been a long time, I guess. I met you once when I was with my husband."

"Oh!" The procedure was in extremely bad form. It was bad for a woman to go shouting in the streets. It was exceptionally bad for a woman like this one, who was very big with child. But he did not want to ignore her entirely.