

WRATH OF THE SERFS

— A Group of Life-Size Clay Sculptures

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Foreword

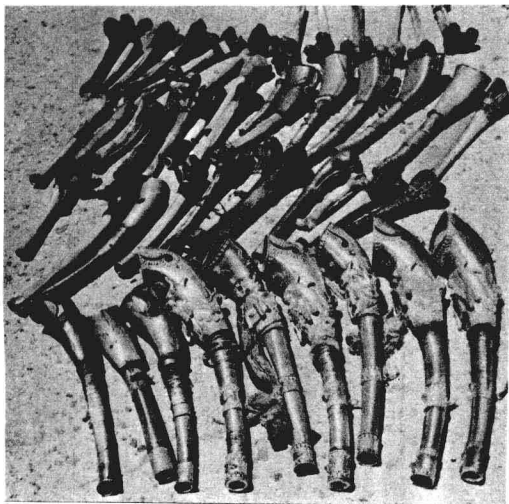
LOCATED on a plateau in southwest China, Tibet is a beautiful place rich in natural resources. It is the home of 1.6 million industrious and brave people of the Tibetan and other nationalities.

Old Tibet was a theocracy with feudal serf system, the lamasery and nobility exercising a dictatorship combining political and religious rule. Three kinds of estate-holders—the reactionary local government, the lamaseries and the nobility—at the head of which was the Dalai Lama, owned all fields, hills, forests and almost all livestock. The serfs and slaves, on the other hand, who made up 95 per cent of the population, owned no means of production nor had they any rights or freedom whatsoever. Numerous *ula* services (a type of unpaid conscript labour exacted from the slaves by the three estate-holders), crushing land taxes, levies and usury were like pythons strangling the serfs and slaves. The three estate-holders savagely slaughtered and tortured the serfs at will, committing unspeakable crimes against them. The old local government of Tibet, the *kasha*, colluded with foreign imperialists to brutally suppress the revolts of the serfs in order to prolong the criminal estate-holder rule.

“Where there is oppression there is resistance.” The million serfs never bowed before the serf-owner class despite its knives, rifles and torments. History records the rebellion in 1918 of serfs in Thridug County of northern Tibet. Their leader was a woman whose name was Hor Lhamo. The uprising serfs advanced the slogans “Down with the officials! Abolish all *ula* services!” and assailed the county government, killing its chief. In less than half a century before Tibet’s liberation the serfs rose in large-scale revolt more than a hundred times. Wave upon wave they advanced in unyielding struggle for their emancipation, hitting hard at the reactionary rule of the serf-owners.

Long years of extremely reactionary dictatorship under the serf-owner class had kept Tibet poverty-stricken and backward, stagnant and in utter decadence.

Horns for religious ceremony fashioned from serfs’ and young girls’ arm and thigh bones. They are relics of atrocities by old Tibet’s reactionary rulers headed by the Dalai Lama.



Bowls from the household of the Dalai Lama. They are made from the skulls of murdered serfs.

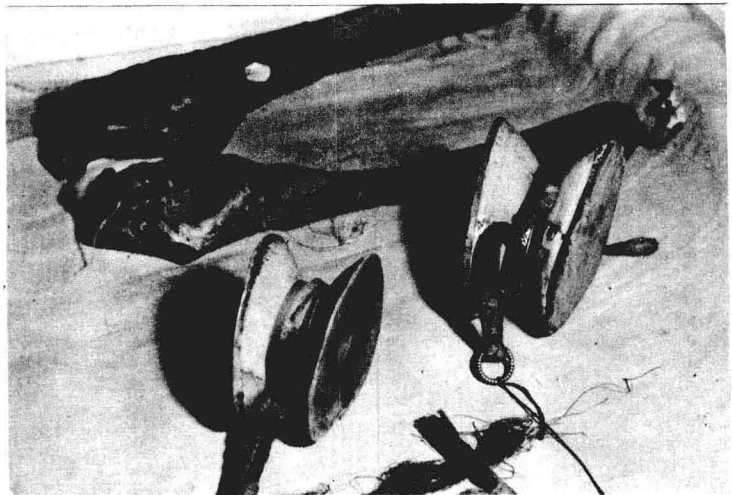


Tibet's new page in history was turned with its peaceful liberation in 1951. But, in 1959, the Tibet traitor clique headed by the Dalai Lama brazenly staged an armed counter-revolutionary rebellion, which, however, the Chinese People's Liberation Army put down at the request of and in co-ordination with Tibet's million serfs. The sweeping democratic reform movement that followed put an end to the thoroughly reactionary, dark and savage feudal serf society. The reactionary estate-holders' rule was abolished and the million serfs stood up. In 1965 the Tibet Autonomous Region was formally established. With the wise leadership of Chairman Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Communist Party, the people of the Tibetan and other nationalities took a social leap of several centuries in little more than a decade and began speeding along the bright socialist road.

Two human skins stripped from live serfs. Such practices were indulged in at will by the serf-owners.



Serfs' hands and forearms which were chopped off by the lamas during religious ceremonies in a lamasery of old Tibet. The prayer drums were also made of serf victims' skulls and skins.



With the aim of sharply exposing the evils of the old Tibet and warmly acclaiming the serfs' heroic and brave struggles, sculptors from the College of Fine Arts of the Central May Seventh Academy of Arts in Peking and a teacher from the Lu Hsun Art College of Shenyang co-operated with art workers of Tibet in producing the clay sculptures, *Wrath of the Serfs*. The work took eighteen months. The sculptures are arranged in four parts: the feudal manor, the lamasery, the *kasha* or the former local government, and the serfs' struggle for liberation. There are 106 life-size figures of men and women, with four reliefs and many murals as background. The images are not only artistic but amazingly life-like, the art workers using sculpture, relief and mural painting to produce figures and settings with strong artistic impact.

Preparation for the work included more than 5,000 kilometres of travel inside Tibet for the purpose of study and investigation. The artists listened to the angry condemnation of past sufferings by a hundred liberated serfs, asked for suggestions from former poor and lower-middle peasants and herdsmen and improved their works on this basis. The method helped to deepen the art workers' understanding of the significance of creating such works and strengthened their determination to be faithful spokesmen for the liberated serfs of Tibet. While working, they studied Chairman Mao's article "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" and made good use of the experience gained in creating the revolutionary model operas. They put forth great effort to insinuate the typical, impelling art images with the profound themes and their own strong class feeling by combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. The sculptures thus powerfully reveal the multifarious crimes of the feudal serf system, then enthusiastically eulogize the courageous struggle and strongly voiced eagerness for liberation of the million serfs. The group of sculptures brings greater understanding of the past untold misery of the people of Tibet, and of their struggle against it.

Part I

The Feudal Manor — Hell on Earth

UNDER the feudal serf system the masses of the serfs were mercilessly exploited and oppressed by the serf-owning class. The feudal lords exacted unpaid, hard labour from the serfs, who were bought and sold, used as mortgages or bartered at their owners' will. The life of the serfs was worse than that of draught animals as they struggled to live on from generation to generation.

The Plight of *Ula* Conscripted Labour

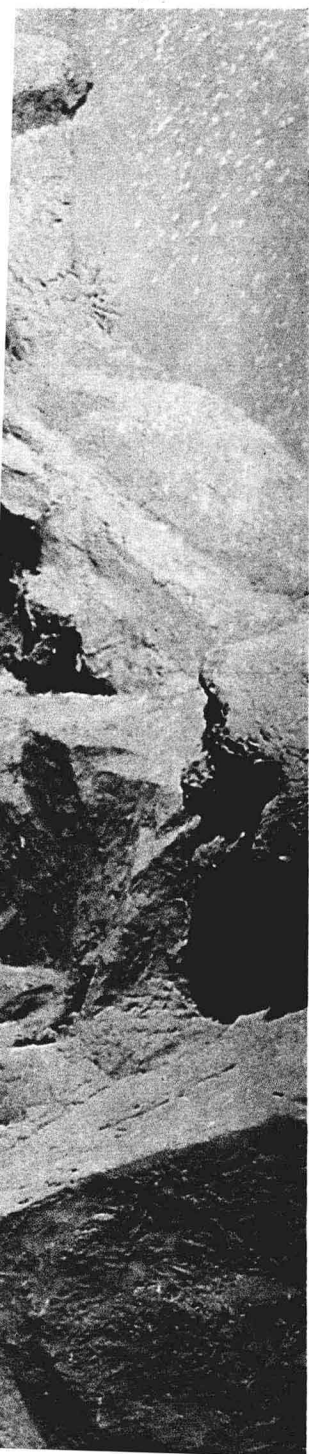
IN bitter wind and snow conscripted serfs trudge up a cliff on *ula* service. One carries his hated master up a steep mountain path; others stagger under heavy loads of butter, *chingko* barley and rice which they are forced to transport for their master.





Hate flashes from the eyes of the serf as he carries his master up the cliff.





A young woman serf, exhausted and starved, clutches a rock to keep from falling under her heavy load of *chingko*.



An old woman, bent under her crushing load of grain, tries to catch a little snow to moisten her mouth. She can only swallow her tears.



An old man has fallen under his load and bleeds from the mouth as his granddaughter kneels and cries. An overseer raises his whip to drive the old man on, but a fellow serf shields him.





Face of the protecting serf.