

第一部 韶华胜极

Part 1: Dreams of Spring and Fallen Petals

1 桃花

桃花难画，因要画得它静。我乡下映山红花是樵夫担上带着有，菜花豆花是在畈里，人家却不种花，有也只是篱笆上的槿柳树花，与楼窗口屋瓦上的盆栽也会开花，但都不当它是花。邻家阿黄姊姊在后院短墙上种有一盆芷草花，亦惟说是可以染指甲。这不当花是花，人亦不是看花赏花人，真是人与花皆好。桃花是村中惟井头有一株，春事烂漫到难收难管，亦依然简静，如同我的小时候。

1. Peach Blossoms

Peach Blossoms are incredibly difficult to draw. It is not their shape nor their colours which are difficult to capture, but a certain peacefulness, an air of calmness and simplicity. My hometown is filled with all kinds of flowers. Farm fields with canola flowers and soybean flowers, mountains with red azaleas often picked by woodcutters and passersby, bamboo fences intricately intertwined with hibiscus flowers and willow trees, even windowsills are covered in potted flowers. There are two types of flowers in the world, the ones which stand quietly outside the banal vulgarity of everyday life, and the common, restrained and taken for granted, only to be picked and torn apart for a specific purpose. The lady next-door, A'huang (阿黄), had the latter. She grew garden balsam on the small dyke in the back garden and would pluck their petals and grind them down into nail polish. None of the flowers compared to the subtle tranquility of peach blossoms. Near my home, next to the well, stood the only peach blossom tree in the village. It was left to grow in peace and would bloom the most vibrant and vivid flowers, transcending the ordinary standing alone; pure, peaceful and quiet. In a lot of ways my childhood and peach blossoms are similar. We both share a misunderstood simplicity and peacefulness.

小时候，我乡下每年春天，崂浦庙的庙祝来挨户募米一升，给一张红纸贴在门上，木刻墨印，当中画的崂浦大王，冕旒执珪而坐，两边两行小字，风调雨顺，国泰民安，上横头印的庙名，下横头印的崂县廿二都下北乡檀越。我家是下北乡之下填写胡村，檀越之下填写胡门吴氏，即我的母亲。这其实岁月安稳，比现在的贴门牌来得无事。

When I was a child, every spring, the Tupu Temple's attendant (who's usual duties included attending to the incense and candles) would go around the village, door-to-door, asking for one *sheng* (升) of rice.¹ In exchange, the attendant would give each donating family a red wood block painting to paste on their door. The wood block painting was intricately illustrated. In the center, Tupu Temple's symbol: the jade sceptre bearing King sitting on the throne, adorned in the traditional *mian* (冕) with precious jade tassels hanging from the front.² To either side, the characters 'may the wind and rain be propitious, may the country prosper, and the people enjoy peace' 风调雨顺，国泰民安 were inscribed. To the top of the piece was the name of the temple, and to the bottom was our town and house: Region 22. Lower North Administrative Division. There was additional space at the bottom to fill in the almsgiver's details—under Lower North Administrative Division the attendant wrote Hu Village (胡村), and under donator he filled in 'Mrs Wu (吴) from the House of Hu (胡)'.³ I miss the days of peace and stability, when families would paste good wishes and seasonal greetings on their doors, rather than the *menpai* system of today.⁴

¹ *Sheng* is a traditional unit of measurement in China equivalent to about a litre. Although the exact volume of 'one sheng' has changed throughout time, leading many scholars to refer to *sheng* as the 'Chinese litre'. Zhu Ruixi, Zhang Bangwei, Liu Fusheng, Cai Chongbang, and Wang Zengyu, *A Social History of Middle-Period China* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 129. — Trans.

² In ancient China, men of highest nobility were also known as jade sceptre bearers or *Zhigui* (执珪), they would don a traditional rectangular crown known as the *mian* (冕). Yuri Pines, "Chu Identity as seen from its Manuscripts: A Reevaluation," *Journal of Chinese History* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–26. Griet Vankeerberghen, "Rulership and Kinship: The 'Shangshu Dazhuan's' Discourse on Lords," *Oriens Extremus* 46, (2007): 84. — Trans.

³ Hu Lancheng is not explicit about whether it was his mother or the temple attendant which filled out her family details. Early 20th Century China had low levels of literacy, especially amongst women. It is more likely that the almsgiver wrote in the details. Paul J Bailey, *Gender and education in China: gender discourses and women's schooling in the early twentieth century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 172. — Trans.

⁴ In 1937, Jiang Kai-shek (蒋介石) and the Kuomintang government (国民党) introduced a policy known as the "Baojia system" (*baojia zhidu* 保甲制度) whereby families were forced to place address plates outside their homes specifying the number of inhabitants, names, ages, marital status etc. Here, Hu Lancheng compares the peace and stability of his childhood, with the instability of his time. Mo Tian, "The Baojia System as Institutional Control in Manchukuo under Japanese Rule (1932-45)," *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 59, no.4 (2016): 531–554. See also: Christian Daniels and Jianxiong Ma, *The Transformation of Yunnan in Ming China: From the Dali Kingdom to Imperial Province* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020): "Bureaucrats assigned each household a house number (*menpai* 门牌) irrespective of status wealth and recorded number of the household members, the amount of normal harvest..." — Trans.

胡村人皆姓胡，上代太公是明朝人，贩牛过此，正值大旱，他遗火烧尽畝上田稻，把牛都赔了，随即却来了好雨，禾秧新苗，竟是大熟年成，全归于他，他就在此安家了，我爱这故事的开头就有些运气。胡姓上代有胡瑗是经师，故堂名用五峰堂，猛将明朝有胡大海，但我不喜他的名字。我喜欢宋朝胡铨，金人以千金购求他弹劾秦桧的奏疏，现在祠堂里有一块匾额「奏议千金」，即是说的他。此外我爱古乐府羽林郎里的胡姬，但是胡姬不姓胡。

The people of Hu Village (胡村) are all surnamed Hu (胡). There is a tale from the Ming Dynasty about our ancestor. He was a cattle trader and during a long drought, while walking through the farms he accidentally dropped some kindling on the ground setting fire to the rice fields. To atone for his wrong-doing and compensate the villagers, he gave them his entire herd. Incredibly, not long after, the spring rain arrived and grain seedlings began to sprout, bringing about years of good harvest. The villagers accredited such fortune to him, and he was able to start a family and settle down happily. I love this story as it represents the changing fortunes of life, and the importance of goodwill, good nature, and a little bit of good luck. Another was Confucian Classics teacher Hu Yuan (胡瑗). He was the descendant of the Huxiang Confucian school of thought (湖湘学派) founding father Hu Hong (胡宏).⁵ Hu Hong was also known as Wufeng (五峰) and in honour of the exceptional scholar, Hu Yuan called his house 'The Great Hall of Wufeng'. There was also the Ming Dynasty General Hu Dahai (胡大海), although his name is common and less deserving of mention. Perhaps the greatest Hu ancestor was the public official Hu Quan (胡铨). During the Song Dynasty, Hu Quan was a government official and adviser to the Emperor. When the neighboring Kingdom of Jin sent an envoy asking for peace between the two regions, Hu Quan suspected treachery and warned the Emperor against trusting Jin. The Emperor along with Chancellor Qin Hui (秦桧) disagreed. Imploring them to see reason, Hu Quan wrote a written letter to the Emperor exposing the phony peace deal and the true intentions of Jin. Eventually, word of the letter reached the Kingdom of Jin. Desperate to read the contents of the letter, the people of Jin paid one thousand pieces of gold for a copy.⁶ Today, atop our ancestral temple, is a large plaque with the characters

⁵ Gu Yan, 顾燕. *Zhongguo jiapu tanghao* 中国家谱堂号溯源 [Chinese Family Trees and Household Names]. (Beijing Book Company, 2015). — Trans.

⁶ Grand Chancellor Qin Hui (秦桧) utilised the crime of literary inquisition as a tool to control politics during the Song Dynasty, he accused Hu Quan for his politically sensitive writings which were said to be inciting war between the Song and the Jin Dynasties. Charles Hartman, "The Misfortunes of Poetry Literary Inquisitions under Ch'in Kuei (1090-1155)," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 25, (2003): 25. — Trans.

‘奏议千金’ representing ‘Emperor’s letter: words worth their weight in gold’ in honour of Hu Quan. Of course, although her surname was not Hu, I also love the *yuefu* poem ‘Yu Lin Lang’ (羽林郎) about the famous beauty Hu Ji (胡姬).⁷ The poem beautifully illustrates the contrasting love affairs of the sexes — *‘men ardently lust for their new wives, women remember the love of their first husband for their whole lives’*.

胡村溪山回环，人家分四处，倪家山，陆家奥，荷花塘，大桥头。叫倪家山陆家奥，想是往昔住过这两姓的人，可是现在都不知道了。我家住在大桥头，门前一条石弹大路，里通覆卮山群村到奉化，外通三界章镇到绍兴，田畈并不宽，但人家迤迤散开，就见得平旷阳气。

Hu Village is surrounded by winding mountains and streams, split into four main regions, Nijiashan (倪家山), Lujia’ao (陆家奥), Hehuatang (荷花塘), and Daqiaotou (大桥头). I guess, like Hu village, the people of Nijiashan and Lujia’ao were surnamed Ni (倪) and Lu (陆), however I am not sure if that is still the case. My family lived in Daqiaotou, which was connected by a stone cobbled road to the neighboring villages in the Fuzhi (覆卮) mountain region and went all the way to Fenghua District (奉化). Though the fields were narrow, they were dispersed along meandering roads, intersecting the sunlit open pastures of each village. The road eventually connected to the main road, where travelers could go as far as Sanjie Town (三界镇), then onto Zhangzhen Town (章镇镇), and finally arrive at the city of Shaoxing (绍兴).

胡村出来十里，有紫大山，传说山上有兵书宝剑，要真命天子纔能取得，我虽幼小无知，听了亦觉天下世界真有王气与兵气。紫大山我只望望见，去要隔条江，这江水即刻溪，晋人王子猷访戴安道来过，李太白亦来过。我家门前的山没有这样大，只叫南山，则我去拾过松枝。每见日色如金，就要想起人说有金鸡在那山腰松下遨游，是一只母鸡领了一群

⁷ Yuefu (乐府) also known as Music Bureau Poems is a genre of Chinese poetry. Here Hu Lancheng refers to the Han Dynasty poem ‘Yu Lin Lang’ by Xin Yannian 《羽林郎》辛延年. The poem is about village beauty Huji 胡姬. For more information about Yuefu poetry see: Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology* (Columbia University Press, 2008). —Trans.

小鸡。绍兴戏里有掘藏，比印度的无尽藏菩萨更世俗，掘出的金元宝银元宝或捉得金鸡，皆只是人的好运气。

Ten *li* (里) away from Hu Village was the purple mountain.⁸ It is said high in the mountain, above the clouds, lies ancient treasures of the past. Folks say, amongst the treasure are almighty celestial weapons and mystical books used by famed warriors, master tacticians and even gods. According to legend, only he who is a son of god ordained by heaven was worthy of finding them.⁹ Although I was young and childish, I would listen to these tales wholeheartedly believing in the spirit of kings and the greatness of warriors. I enjoyed gazing up at the mountains and imagining tales of heroism. The best way to reach the purple mountain was by taking the mountain road which hugged the famous Shanxi River (剡溪). Many poets of the past either passed by or lived near the great river, leaving countless chants and fables. Li Bai (李白) once travelled down the river as did the son of great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之).¹⁰ The mountain adjacent to our home, Nanshan (南山), is nowhere near as great or famous, but nonetheless, occupied a special place in the heart of the village. It was quite beautiful. As kids, we would climb Nanshan and collect pine tree twigs. Every time I look upon the radiant sun it reminds me of the golden roosters which would occasionally perch themselves on the hillside, freely roaming amongst the pine trees followed by mother hens leading their chicks along the mountain path. It is true, like the tales of purple mountain, you can find all kinds of hidden treasures if you look hard enough. Our people have a the saying *juecang* (掘藏), which comes from the Shaoxing Opera and describes being as happy as digging up the treasure others buried in the ground. It is a saying about being naturally fortuitous — certainly more tangible

⁸ In the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), tax collectors, merchants, farmers, and townsmen required the establishment of a standard set of weights and measures that was universally operative and which they could trust. Today, one *li* (里) is equivalent to 0.5 kilometers, although the exact distance has changed overtime. Michael Loewe, *The Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 145. — Trans.

⁹ The original text refers to *Bingshu* 兵书 which incapsulates many historical Chinese books on war, weaponry, and tactics. The most famous in Western culture is Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. Here, Hu Lancheng is referring to precious books of war and tactics more generally rather than specific scholarly books. For information on *Bingshu* 兵书 see: Endymion Porter Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Harvard-Yenching Institute: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 555. —Trans.

¹⁰ The original Chinese texts refers specifically to the short story by Liu Yuqing *Visiting Dai on a Snowy Night* (王子猷雪夜访戴). The story depicts Wang Huizhi crossing the Shanxi River to visit his friend Dai Andao on a cold snowy night. The short story is beautifully translated in Richard B. Mather, *Shih-Shuo Hsin-Yü. A New Account of Tales of the World* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 419. —Trans.

than the Indian ten boundless treasuries of a bodhisattva¹¹ —and means regardless of whether you happen to dig up precious gold and silver *yuanbao* (元宝), or catch yourself a golden rooster it is propitious.¹²

胡村进去十里有下王村，下王出财主人家，雕刻一张床费三百工，起屋一块砖要一工，子孙稍稍不如从前了，亦人进人出仍骑马坐轿。传说一家有穀龙，仓里谷子会只管溢出来，其后因用钉钯开穀伤了龙，遂龙去穀浅。下王我去过，那里的溪山人家果然齐整。下王人家做亲，嫁妆路上抬过，沿村的女子都出来看，虽是他人有庆，这世上亦就不是贫薄的了。

Ten *li* into Hu Village one will find Xiawang Village (下王村). It was home to the local ‘moneybags’ and probably one of the richest families in the region. They were known for their decadence. When building their house, they went to extraordinary lengths to ensure every detail was exquisite, assigning an individual worker to mould every brick, and paying three hundred days’ worth of labour to carve a single bed. Today, they are not as wealthy as previous generations, however they travel in horse and cart all the same. It is true that family fortune does not last forever, just like the tale of the rice dragon. It was said that —unbeknown to the farmer — a dragon dwelled in the barn. During this time, the yearly harvests were bountiful and grain stocks were overflowing. The farmer, while rummaging around in the grain stocks, struck the pile of grain with his rake and injured the dragon hidden within. Once revealed, the injured dragon disappeared from the barn and never returned. Forthwith, the farmer’s years of good harvest and plentiful grain were no more. I visited Xiawang a couple of times before, there was a sense of completeness I had come to expect from people who lived near Xishan (溪山); they were without want. I remember watching the joining of families in the wedding ceremonies, the bridal parties that would stroll merrily down the

¹¹ The term 十無盡藏 is often translated as the ‘ten boundless treasuries of bodhisattva’. These include 信 belief and faith, 戒 the commandments, 慚 shame of past misdeeds; 愧 blushing over the misdeeds of others etc. William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms: With Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (London: Routledge, 2004) —Trans.

¹² Yuanbao (元宝) or Sycee was a type of gold or silver ingot currency used in imperial China. In China today, gold sycees are a symbol of wealth, good fortune, and prosperity. Thierry François and Joe Cribb, “A Catalogue of Sycee in the British Museum, Chinese Silver Currency Ingots c 1750-1933” *Revue numismatique* 6, no.36 (1994): 364-368. — Trans.

cobbled street carrying the bridal dowry, and of course, the lavish young ladies that would all come out to watch the pomp and circumstance. In that moment of celebration, it was difficult not to get intoxicated by the romantic realisation that our world is not as impoverished as it may seem.

下王再进去三十里是芦田村，在山冈上，那里已是四明山，因有竹木桑茶之饶，亦出财主人家，那家与我家倒是亲戚。芦田王家的小姐名叫杏花，她到杭州读书，轿子经过我家门前大路上，在路亭里歇下，我那时幼小，只会看看她，大家女子新打扮，我亦心里爱意。不止我如此，凡是胡村人看着她皆有这种欢喜，竟是阶级意识全无，他们倒亦并非羡慕或起浪漫想头，却因世上何处有富贵荣华，只好比平畴远畎有桃花林。

If you continued walking past Xiawang Village, about thirty *li* down the road, you would reach Lutian Village (芦田村). It sits in the mountainous area and forms part of the famous Siming Mountain (四明山). Not dissimilar to Xiawang, the people of Lutian were traditionally very wealthy — thanks in kind to the abundance of bamboo, wood, mulberry trees and tea which grew in the region. One of those wealthy families were our relatives. Lutian Village was also home to the Wang (王) family and their beautiful daughter Xinghua (杏花). Xinghua studied in Hangzhou (杭州) and would sometimes pass by our cottage carried on a sedan chair.¹³ When the bearers would rest by the roadside *luting* (路亭),¹⁴ she would take a break inside, sitting daintily on one of the shaded benches. During these precious moments, my heart would skip a beat when I saw her. Her make-up and flowing dress; my young and immature self was in love. It was not just me of course. Everyone in Hu Village who managed to catch a glimpse of Xinghua seemed to take a liking to her. Although, it was not her beauty which captivated their interest, nor a sense of jealousy or the feelings of romance, rather the subconscious realisation of social class. The realisation that Xinghua's wealth and status were so close yet so far away from the humble people of Hu Village. It is true that no matter where you are in the world, only some will be lucky enough to enjoy wealthy

¹³ Sedan chairs or Litters were a popular mode of transport amongst China's richer classes. They were for one or two passengers, consisting of a large box carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers. Zhi Dao, *History of Transportation in China* (Deeplogic, 2019), 129. — Trans.

¹⁴ Luting is a kind of roadside pavilion and is one of the traditional Chinese wooden monolithic buildings. The pavilion is built with a roof and often has benches inside for villagers to rest in the shade. For more information see: Ronald G. Knapp, *Chinese Bridges: Living Architecture From China's Past* (Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 232: "Analogous to roadside pavilions called *lu ting* - some square, others rectangular, but all distinct - that provide resting opportunities for the villagers." — Trans.

and luxurious lifestyles — just like how not far from the simple and level farmland are beautiful peach blossom forests.

胡村是太平军前后兴旺过，彼时丝茶桐油输出外洋大盛，胡村份份人家养蚕采茶，还开设油车打桐油，所以上代太公多有莹田，子孙春秋祭祀不绝，且至今村里粉墙瓦屋，总算象样，还有倪家山的上台门与陆家奥的下台门，都是上代建造的大院落，称为众家堂前。我祖父手里开茶机，彼时猪肉一斤廿文，我家账房间及老司务的福食每天用到一千文，这种世俗的热闹至今犹觉如新。胡村的大桥即是我祖父领头捐款建造的，桥头路亭里有石碑，上刊着胡载元，底下还有一排姓名。凡起屋上梁，造桥打桥脚，皆要踏正吉时辰，往往天还未亮，灯笼溪山人影，祭告天地的爆仗，散给百工的酒食，都是祥瑞。我小时听堂房哥哥梅香讲起这些，大起来所以对现代工业亦另有一番好意思。

Around the time of the Taiping Rebellion (太平军 1851 to 1864) Hu village flourished.¹⁵ This was largely due to the highly profitable foreign export of silk, tea, and tung oil (桐油).¹⁶ As a result, the people of Hu Village started cultivating silk, planting tea, and operating oil carts for the transport and manufacture of Tung oil. The wealth of our forefathers is evidenced in the elaborate memorial grounds where they are buried. Generations past and present, have continually visited the resting places of those who have gone before them, making offerings to the gods, and showing their respects. Nowadays, the opulent remnants of the past can be found all around Hu Village. The whitewashed walls of tile-roofed cottages, and the beautiful Taimen (台门) buildings of Nijiashan and Lujia'ao village, stood like beacons of a more prosperous time.¹⁷ Attached to each family Taimen were impressive ancestral courtyards. These ancestral courtyards or *zhongjatangqian* (众

¹⁵ Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 3. “Over the thirteen-year course of the insurrection, from 1851 to 1864, twenty million people lost their lives, and Qing imperial and Taiping rebel armies fought in and over almost every province of the Chinese empire.” — Trans.

¹⁶ Despite Hu village's ‘flourishing’ during the Taiping Rebellion, the Chinese economy was severely damaged in the 1850s and 1860s. However, tea and silk were consistently the most important commodity and accounted for 50% of China's exports before 1895. Furthermore, the price of tung oil continued to rise, accounting for over 10% of China's foreign exports by 1936. Tim Wight, *The Chinese Economy in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: MacMillan Press, 1992), 130-131. — Trans.

¹⁷ Taimen (台门) are traditional courtyard dwellings found in Shaoxing near the home of Hu Lancheng. They are famous in China for their intricate design and architecture. Yang Ningfei, 杨宁飞. “Shaoxing Taimen jianzhu xiaji qushu jieneng jishu jixi” 绍兴台门建筑夏季祛暑节能技术解析.” 建筑节能 [Summer Heat Energy-saving Technology for Shaoxing Taimen Buildings] *Construction Conserves Energy* 1, (2013): 65-66. — Trans.

家堂前) were especially important fixtures in our village, the ancestral hall a place of solace, where people would go to worship their ancestors.

My paternal grandfather started running a teashop and bought a tea twisting machine to knead the tea leaves. At that time, a *jin* (斤) of pork cost twenty brass *wen* (文),¹⁸ and our family coffers were swelling to the point of matching that of the local quartermaster (司务) who would spend around a thousand *wen* on food per day.¹⁹ These bustling and energetic ways of life have reawakened in recent times. In fact, it was the generous donations of my grandfather that led to the construction of Hu Village's main bridge. His contribution is immortalised on the bridge pavilion, where a stone tablet still stands today. On the tablet the characters 'In honour of Mr Hu Zaiyuan' 胡载元 are inscribed at the top, with the other donators' names carved below. When I was young, my older cousin, Brother Meixiang (梅香) told me all about how the bridge was built. He told me that regardless of whether workers were putting up the wooden beams, or building the bridge piers, they would always take advantage of auspicious times of the day. Often before light, the mountains and rivers were lit up with lanterns as the shadows of workers flickered in the darkness. Brother Meixiang said that sometimes the workers would light firecrackers as lucky offerings to the gods, and one day all one hundred workers were granted ample food and drink. These wonderful tales of firecrackers and food from the gods probably explains why I have always taken an interest in the craft of workers. They have always carried with them a certain aura of auspiciousness.

其后丝茶桐油外销起了风浪，胡村亦衰败下来，但胡村人比下沿江务农人的泥土气另有一种洒脱，因为经过约八十年的工商业，至今溪山犹觉豁达明亮，令人想着外面有天下世界。

Not long after, the steady waves of the booming export of silk, tea and tung oil, the market turned stormy and turbulent. Although we were luckier than others. The farmers who lived near Xiayan

¹⁸ *Wen* (文) are round coins with square centre holes, ranging in diameter from approximately 19 mm to 28 mm. Coins developed in China about 2,600 years ago, and a multitude of Chinese words have been used over the millennia to refer to various types of coins. In southern China during the 19th century and early 20th century the most common word for the lowest-denomination brass coins, was *wen*. Marjorie Kleiger Akin, "The Noncurrency Function of Chinese 'Wen' in America." *Historical Archaeology* 26, no.2 (1992): 58–65, 58. — Trans.

¹⁹ In the Qing Dynasty the quartermaster was in charge of military lodgings and food expenses. Usually the soldiers would give part of their wages to the quartermaster and the quartermaster would organise the food supply. Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty* (London: IB Tauris Publishers, 2006), 95. — Trans.

(下沿) river had their land completely washed away. The region had enjoyed around eighty years of business and the people had grown optimistic and hopeful, and with that came dreams of a better life, a life outside the village walls. This would mark the beginning of Hu village's downfall.

所以胡村人又会说又会讲，梅香哥哥即讲故事一等，还有我的四哥哥梦生亦戏文熟通讲。四哥哥带我到舡里，讲给我听有五个人下渡船，士农工商俱全，外加一女子，但渡船里只有一个座位，就大家比口才，赢的得坐，我今只记得商人的与女子的，那商人道、

无木也是才，有木也是材，去了木，加上贝，是钱财的财，
钱财人人爱，我先坐下来。

轮到女子，女子道、

无木也是乔，有木也是桥，去了木，加上女，是娇娘的娇，
娇娘人人爱，我先坐下来。

后来却还是那务农人得胜。而除了钱财人人爱，娇娘人人爱之外，我想就是民间的这种沾沾自喜，斗智逞能的可爱了。

The people of Hu Village were skilled orators and storytellers. Meixiang was amongst the best, and then of course there was my older brother Mengsheng (梦生). Mengsheng told stories eloquently and theatrically like he was performing lines from the great *Xiwen* plays (戏文).²⁰ When we were young, he took me down to the fields adjacent to the river and told me the story of the five people who wanted to cross the river by ferryboat. Amongst them were four men: a scholar (士), a farmer (农), a craftsman (工), a merchant (商), as well as a young woman.²¹ There was only one seat in the ferryboat so they had a battle of wits to decide who deserved to sit. I can only remember what the merchant and young woman said.

The Merchant spoke first:

²⁰ *Xiwen* is a type of play popularised in the last Southern Song Dynasty (1127 – 1279). The plays were characterised by a full narrative and story which was performed through speech and song. The style re-emerged in China during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. The most famous *Xiwen* today is the Story of Pipa (琵琶记). Jin Fu, *Chinese Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16. — Trans.

²¹ The four men reflect the four occupations in ancient china, which are commonly understood in terms of ancient social class. The Simin (四民) or four classes of ancient china were split into gentry scholars, peasant farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and merchants and traders. Victor Cunrui Xiong, “The Four Groups (Simin 四民) and Farmer-Merchant Antithesis in Early Imperial China,” *Chinese Historians* 8, no.1-2 (1995): 86. — Trans.

‘Without the wood (木) the character is *cai* (才),
Add the wood (木) and the character is *cai* (材),
Take away the wood (木), add money (贝),
And the character is *cai* (财).’

The merchant with the money is loved by all,
Let me sit, time lest we stall.

The young woman responded:

‘Without the wood (木) the character is *qiao* (乔),
Add the wood (木) and the character is *qiao* (桥),
Take away the wood, add a young lady (女),
And the character is *jiao* (娇)

The beautiful young woman is loved by all,
Let me sit, time lest we stall.

In the end, the farmer won the seat. In addition to the parts about the rich merchant and beautiful lady being loved by all, the onlookers were all pleased with the contest. The display of verbal prowess and witty terms of endearment reflected the true spirit of the people.

胡村人家的宅基好。克鲁泡特金着「田园都市手工场」，想要把都市迤迤散开在农村里，中国人家可是向来农村里也响亮，城市里也平稳。胡村亦不像是个农村，而绍兴苏州城里亦闾巷风日洒然。上海样样好，惟房子都是开港后外国人来了仓促造起，有些像玩具模型，但如杭州，虽然成了现代都市，亦依然好风景，单那浣纱路的马路，就新润可人意。为人在世，住的地方亦是要紧的，不但金陵有长江龙盘，钟山虎踞，是帝王州，便普通的城市与乡村，亦万姓人家皆在日月山川里。秦始皇时望气者言东南有天子气，大约就是这样的寻常巷陌，闾巷人家皆有的旺气。阳宅风水之说，我不喜他的穿凿与执念，但亦是民间皆分明感知有旺发之气的这个气字，在诗经里便是所谓兴。

The houses in Hu Village were all built on solid foundations, as the rivers and mountains brought good *fengshui* (风水). Peter Kropotkin (1842 – 1921) in his work *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* advocated for the decentralisation of industry, the possibility of agriculture, the

power of small industrial villages as well as the important distinction between brain work and manual work.²² He endorsed decentralisation, and the disbursement of the people from overpopulated cities to rural farmlands. Unlike the Russian scholar's observations, villages in China have always resonated with the people and occupied an important part of Chinese life — the cities are harmonious, peaceful, and stable. Hu Village is not a stereotypical 'village', just as Shaoxing (绍兴) and Suzhou (苏州) are not stereotypical 'industrial cities'. They are characterised by old town alleyways and traditional courtyard residences, not dissimilar to the Hutong (胡同) found in Beijing. They are different to European cities, as they encompass a beautiful blend of tradition in a way which was both impressive, natural, and unrestrained. Like Shaoxing and Suzhou, Shanghai is another charming city. After the trading port was opened, foreigners rushed in, hastily building houses resembling toy models. Although Shanghai was modernising, it retained its traditional charm and scenic beauty. This was especially true in Hangzhou where one could walk down the bustling Huansha Road (浣纱路); there the West Lake meets the city creating a stunning amalgamation of history and modernity.

The places of human civilisation have always been crucial to our existence. One of the greatest cities was the ancient capital of Jinling (金陵).²³ The Six Dynasty (220 – 589) capital is known for the poised tigers which dwell in the Zhongshan (钟山) mountain to the south-east, and the coiled dragon which occupies the Yangtze river to the west. No matter whether it is the great fortresses of the past, or less imposing cities and villages of today, the people have always lived amongst the rivers and mountains. Even during the reign of First Emperor of Qin (秦始皇), the devotees of *fengshui* named Wangqi Geomancers (望气者),²⁴ were able to read the energy of

²² Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, (Social Theory, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1901) — Trans.

²³ Jinling (金陵) is the historical name for the city of Nanjing and was the capital of several dynasties. In Romance of the Three Kingdoms it was famously called "a dragon coiling and a tiger crouching" (龙蟠虎踞) 'by an astute observer who could interpret the sacred lay of the land; the phrase symbolizes both the royal prerogative of the place as well as its strategic importance.' David B. Honey, "Before Dragons Coiled and Tigers Crouched: Early Nanjing in History and Poetry." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no.1 (1995): 15 — Trans.

²⁴ Wangqi (望气) is a process of combining Yin (阴) and Yang (阳) as well as a number of external forces to predict an individual's fortune. Experts in Fengshui (风水) are secretive about the exact principles and methods involved in Wangqi but it is a specialised component of Fengshui, focusing on divination and the reading of energy.

the land to detect that ordinary streets and alleyways were the source of the people's prosperity and good fortune. In accordance with principles of Yin (阴), Yang (阳) and *fengshui*, it is said that there is always an optimum balance, in both physical and mental positioning known as a *Yang Zhai* (阳宅).²⁵ I believe the path to *Yang Zhai* is not through forced interpretation, nor is it through the never-ending process of personal reflection and existential discovery, but rather a state of being which can be felt through intuition. Fortune and prosperity cannot be forced; only when *qi* (气) flows naturally through our bodies, with balance and stability, can our lives be blessed with fortune.²⁶ The concept of *qi* has taken on many forms and is just like the idea of *Xing* (兴) found in the ancient Book of Songs (诗经).²⁷

诗经以国风居首，而国风多是兴体、「关关雎鸠，在河之洲」，兴也，这个兴字的意思西洋文学里可是从来没有的。而至今亦中国民间随处有童谣与小调。外国亦有儿歌与流行歌，可是中国民间的完全两样。

The Book of Songs begins with '*the lessons from the states*' and is commonly referred to as Xing-style poetry (兴体诗). The idea of *Xing* does not exist in the western literature. It is not only a certain technique of poetic expression but also reflects feelings of prosperity, fortune, happiness, and joy. Each verse in the Book of Songs begins with a natural image, which is contrasted with the human situation around which the poem centres.²⁸ This is beautifully reflected in the first poem *Guanju* (关雎):

Jin Shenjia, 金身佳. *Zhongguo shenmi wenhua fengshui* 中国神秘文化: 风水 [Chinese Mystical Culture: Fengshui] (*Hunan meishu chubanshe* 湖南美术出版社, 2010) — Trans.

²⁵ Fengshui incorporates Yin and Yang. The concept of Yang Zhai (阳宅) is the optimum balance and its often referred to as 'sitting theory'. Michael John Paton, *Five Classics of Fengshui: Chinese Spiritual Geography in Historical and Environmental Perspective* (Brill: Boston, 2013): 135, '*The site is the pivot of yin and yang and the standard for human relationships. Only the learned and illuminated worthy will be able to understand its Way...siting is the basis of human life. Man has a site for his family dwelling. If it is peaceful then the family will prosper and enjoy good fortune generation after generation. If it is not peaceful then the clan will decline and become insignificant. This is also true of the siting of graves in relation to rivers and mountain ridges.*' — Trans.

²⁶ *Qi* or *Chi* is an energy force which flows through nature. *Fengshui* aims to realise the environment and utilise the flowing energy to bring balance, harmony and good fortune. Bonaiuto Marino, Elena Bilotta, and Angela Stolfi. "Feng Shui and Environmental Psychology: A Critical Comparison," *Journal of Architectural & Planning Research* 27, no.1 (2010): 23. — Trans.

²⁷ The Book of Songs is also known as The Book of Poetry, Book of Odes and is sometimes translated into Shijing (诗经). It is the oldest compilation of Chinese poems, containing works dating as back as 800 – 600 B.C. For translated versions of the poems see: Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

²⁸ Zheng Zhiqiang, 郑志强. "Shijing: xingtí shi zongkao" 《诗经》兴体诗综考 [A Comprehensive Study of Xing-Style Poems in the Book of Songs], *浙江社会科学 Zhejiang Social Sciences*, (2008): 99-105. — Trans.

Guan-guan go the ospreys,
On the islet in the river.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:
For our prince a good mate she.

Here long, there short, is the duckweed,
To the left, to the right, borne about by the current.
The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:
Waking and sleeping, he sought her.²⁹

No matter where you go in China, all of the people have held onto these ancient songs; forming today's children's folk rhymes as well as the traditional *Xiaodiao* (小调).³⁰ Foreign countries tend only to have nursery rhymes and popular songs, whereas China's culture of song and poetry is completely unique.

我小时总是夜饭后母亲洗过碗盏，纔偶而抱我一抱，抱到檐头看月亮，母亲叫我拜拜，学念、「月亮婆婆的的拜，拜到明年有世界」，这真是没有名目的大志，那时还是宣统，而明年果然有了民国世界。可是念下去、「世界大，杀只老雄鸡，请请外婆吃，外婆勿要吃，戒橱角头抗抗咚，隔壁婆娘偷偷吃咚哉，嘴巴吃得油罗罗，屁股打得阿唷唷。」却又世俗得滑稽可笑，而从来打江山亦果然皆是这样现实喜乐的。

When I was young, Mother would always wash the cups and plates after dinner. Occasionally, she would give me a big hug, wrap me in her arms, and carry me to the edge of the house eaves where we would gaze at the moon. She would call me her little prayer Baibai (拜拜), as she taught me say 'To Mother Moon we pray, pray that next year the world will stay'. This was said in fun, rather than some lofty premonition or special omen for what was to come. At the time we muttered those words, it was still 1911 during the reign of the last emperor Xuantong

²⁹ James Legge, *The Book of Poetry: Chinese Text with English Translation* (Shanghai: Chinese Book Co, 1931). — Trans.

³⁰ Xiaodiao are a specific kind of genre of Chinese folk song. For more information see: Li Huan, "“Dirty Theatre” and Reform Before and After 1949 in Hunan Province, China," *Asian Musicology* 16, (2010): 94: *The majority of the xiaodiao... originated from folk songs popular in the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu since the Ming Dynasty (1328-1644). Historically, xiaodiao were also despised because they were often sung in brothels and teahouses and were especially associated with flirtations and sensualities between merchants and prostitutes. Thus, both tune types were considered as low class because of their folk origins.* — Trans.

(宣统) (1906-1967).³¹ As expected, the world would change massively next year, bringing about the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China. Mother and I continued gazing at the moon, reciting the words:

*The world is large and uncanny,
Kill the old rooster and give it to Granny,
If Granny does not want it; no loss,
Guard the kitchen cupboard like a mafia boss,
The young vixen next door sneaks in and has a feast
Her mouth eats, cheerful and covered in grease,
Smacks on the bottom for the disturber of the peace.*

Even though the words were a little crass, they were said in tongue and cheek, in a way which was comical and funny. It is the kind of speech used outside political circles where there is more freedom of expression and where people use speech to share joy and happiness.

又两岁时学语，母亲抱我看星，教我念、「一颗星，葛伦登，两颗星，嫁油瓶，油瓶漏，好炒豆，豆花香，嫁辣酱，辣酱辣，嫁水獭，水獭尾巴乌，嫁鹌鹑，鹌鹑耳朵聋，嫁裁缝，裁缝手脚慢，嫁只雁，雁会飞，嫁蜉蚁，蜉蚁会爬墙」，正念到这里，母亲见了四哥骂道、「还不楼窗口去收衣裳，露水汤汤了！」现在想起来，母亲骂得竟是天然妙韵。

There was another time I remember with fondness. When I was around two or three years old, Mother would help me learn how to speak through rhyming word association games. She would wrap me in her arms and take me to gaze at the stars. While looking at the stars we would say:

*See one star, Gelun rises far. See two stars,
Two oil jars, oil jars leak.
Roasted beans eat, bean jelly sweet.
Spicy chili paste, paste spicy no waste.
Two otters swim, tails, birds watching prim.*

³¹ The Last Emperor of China (末代皇帝) was called Puyi (溥仪) and reigned under the name Xuantong (宣统). At the age of six, "Imperial Edict of the Abdication of the Qing Emperor" (清帝退位詔書) was signed and he was forced to abdicate. Brian Power, *The Puppet Emperor: The Life of Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China* (London: Peter Owen, 1986). — Trans.

Two pigeons sing in clef, pigeons' ears are deaf.

Two dressmakers sew, their movements slow.

Two wild geese shy, spread wings and fly.

Two ants crawl, up the wall.

We were suddenly cut off when Mother saw my older brother. She would tease him about his chores and shouted: “*Take in the washing, drying on the windowpane, they will get wet in this torrential rain!*” Now that I think of it, even when Mother was shouting at him, she was effortlessly able to keep the rhyme going.

这一颗星，葛伦登，到蝼蚁会爬墙，简直牵扯得无道理。但前些日子我偶又看了宋人平话《崔宁辗玉观音》，在话入本事之先，却来讲究春天如何去了？王荆公说春是被雨打风催去了，有词云云，但苏小妹说不是雨打风催去，春是被燕子衔去了，有词云云，而这亦仍有人不以为然，说也不是雨打风催去，也不是燕子衔去，春是与柳絮结伴，嫁给流水去了，如此一说又有一说，各各有词云云，一大篇，亦都是这样的牵扯可笑，但那说平话的人弹唱起来，想必很好听。红楼梦里的明明是真事，却曰、「满纸荒唐言，一把辛酸泪」，便是汉高祖亡秦灭楚，幸沛置酒，谓父老曰、「游子悲故乡」，他亦做人到得那里是那里，像一颗星葛伦登的惟是新韵入清听。

The rhyming game we played from ‘*see one star, Gelun rises far*’ all the way up to ‘*two ants crawl up the wall*’; these words had no real correlation or special meaning. Over the last few days, I have been reading popular Pinghua (平话) stories from the Song Dynasty.³² I particularly enjoy the tale of the beauty Qu Xiuxiu (璩秀秀) who was born into a poor family. Out of desperation, Qu Xiuxiu’s father sold her to the King of Xianan County (咸安郡王) where she was to live as a slave. The King let her serve with the jade craftsmen Cuining (崔宁). Qu Xiuxiu and Cuining fell in deeply in love and eloped. The story encapsulates themes of love and spring and references several poets who wrote about the fading of spring. The more memorable is when Wang Jinggong (王荆公) sees the wind blowing petals onto the ground:

³² Pinghua (平话) are popular stories which began in the Tang and Song Dynasties. They often involved a single narrator who would recite stories without accompaniment. Wenwei Du, “Xuetou: Comic Elements as Social Commentary in Suzhou Pinghua Storytelling,” *Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 18, no.1 (2020): 33–44. — Trans.

*Spring days, spring winds,
Sometimes Good.
Spring days, spring winds,
Sometimes Evil.
The spring winds make the flowers bloom,
The spring winds make the petals fall.*

He continued by writing how the wind and rain combine to hasten the passing of Spring. On the other hand, Su Xiaomei (苏小妹) exclaimed that it was not the wind or the rain rather: ‘*the colours of spring fade when the swallows start collecting mud to build their nests*’. There will inevitably be those that disagree, but I believe it is neither wind, rain nor the swallows which signify the fading of spring. The fading of spring is elusive and subtle and no words or turn of phrase can do it justice. For instance, I could say “*spring is born like the furry catkins on willow trees, and fades like flowing water*”, phrase after phrase, all sharing a similar structure. In a way, it is no different to the rhyming game we would play as kids, only the *Pinghua* stories would have to be sung and played in a way which was musical and euphonious. Perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated than in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦) where the true account of the book’s inception is revealed when the poet says appositely:

*Pages full of idle words
Penned with hot and bitter tears:
All men call the author fool;
None his secret message hears.*³³

Another example is the tale from Sima Qian’s (司马迁) *Records of the Grand Historian* (史记) about Gaozu (高祖) the Great Emperor of Han (256-195 B.C.).³⁴ Gaozu was born in a small village in Pei County (沛县) and rose to prominence. He left the village at a young age and went on many long crusades to establish the Han Empire; battling the rebels who continued to attack from all sides. After suppressing the rebellion of Qingbu (黥布), Gaozu led his army

³³ Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone* translated by David Hawkes (Penguin: UK, 2012), 3. — Trans.

³⁴ Sima Qian, Watson Burton. *Records of the Grand Historian* (New York: Renditions-Columbia University Press; 1993). — Trans.

through Pei County where he finally returned to his hometown. There he had a mighty feast, inviting all his family and old friends. It was a jovial celebration. Once he was filled with wine, Gaozu began teaching the children to sing:

*A great wind came forth,
the clouds rose on high
Now that my might rules all within the seas,
I have returned to my old village
Where will I find brave men
to guard the four corners of my land?*³⁵

He continues by singing about the pain of being far away from one's hometown, and how no matter where you go only one place is home. He sings unencumbered, remembering the songs and rhymes from his childhood; in a way, not so different from the songs and rhymes my mother and I would sing: *'see one star, gelun rises far, see two stars, like two oil jars'*.

我母亲不会唱歌，而童谣本来都是念念，单是念亦可以这样好听，就靠汉文章独有的字字音韵具足。中国没有西洋那样的歌舞，却是舞皆从家常动作而来，歌皆从念而来，无论昆曲京戏嵯县戏申曲、苏摊等，以及无锡景、孟姜女等小调，乃至流行歌，无不这样。经书里说「歌永言」，又说「一唱而三叹，有遗音者矣」，这样说明歌唱，实在非常好。

My Mother was not a gifted singer, although the children's folk rhymes she would sing were more like chanting and would have a certain musical charm. Utilising the unique tones of each word she was able to chant them in rhyme and rhythm. China does not have the kind of songs and dances found in the West. Chinese dances came from the daily lives of the people and the songs were created by singing and chanting in harmony. This was true for all traditional operas and songs. Kunqu Opera (昆曲), Beijing Opera (京戏), Shengxian Opera (嵯县戏), Shanghai

³⁵ The *Song of Great Wind* as translated by Burton Watson. Here Gaozu reflects on a life of war and wants nothing more than a peaceful life in the hometown he so cherishes. Sima Qian, Watson Burton. *Records of the Grand Historian* (New York: Renditions-Columbia University Press; 1993); John Minford, and Joseph S.M Lau, *An Anthology of Translation: Classical Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 415. — Trans.

Opera (申曲), Suzhou Opera (苏滩),³⁶ as well as famous *Xiaodiao* songs like *The Scenery of Wuxi* (无锡景) and *Lady Meng Jiang* (孟姜女), all came from the folk chants of the people. The beauty of poetry and song is best stated in the ancient *Jingshu* (经书)³⁷ where it says, ‘*poetry is the expression of earnest thought; singing is the prolonged utterance of that expression*’.³⁸ It would also be remiss not to mention the Four Great Books of Song. Amongst the thousands of scrolls compiling the first book *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* (太平御览) there is a part which reads ‘*sing we all exclaim in awe, songs and melodies generations adore*’.³⁹ The beauty of song has long played a vital role in Chinese life.

初夏在庭前，听见夹公鸟叫，夹公即覆盆子，母亲教我学鸟语、「夹公夹婆，摘颗吃颗！」还有是燕语、「不借你家盐，不借你家醋，只借你家高楼大屋住——住！」燕子每年春天来我家堂前做窠，双双飞在厅屋瓦背上呢喃，我就在阶沿仰面望着跟了念。这燕子也真是廉洁，这样少要求，不惊动人家。后来我读书仕宦至出奔天涯，生活一直是这样俭约，我在人世亦好像那燕子。基督说「人子没有栖身的地方」，不免于人于己多有不乐，唐诗里「夫子何为哉，栖栖一代中」，还比他不轻薄，但亦不及这燕语清好。

Around the fourth lunar month, in the beginning of summer, a male bird would fly into our front garden. We called him Mr Jia (夹公) and watched as he flew in to eat the raspberry-like fupenzi (覆盆子).⁴⁰ As we watched him fly, Mother would teach me how to speak bird-language. They would say: “*Mr Jia and Mrs Jia, collect and eat the fruit!*”. Mother would also teach me how to understand the swallows. I would listen as they said: “*we don’t want your salt, we don’t want your vinegar, we just want a place to rest, on your house we want to build a*

³⁶ In the original text Hu Lancheng writes 苏滩. From contextual analysis the word he meant to use was 苏滩 which is a type of opera originating in Suzhou. — Trans.

³⁷ *Jingshu* (经书) is also known in western literature as the Confucian Classics, or the Four Books (四书) and Five Classics (五经). The five classics were namely the *Odes*, the *Documents*, the *Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*. (Yale University Press, 2001). — Trans.

³⁸ James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part I The Shu King, the Religious Portions of the Shih King, the Hsiao King* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879). — Trans.

³⁹ Peter Francis Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2018). — Trans.

⁴⁰ Fupenzi, is a type of raspberry found in Northern Asia and is commonly used in traditional Chinese medicine. Liu Yanze, Zhimin Wang, Zhang Junzheng, *Dietary Chinese Herbs: Chemistry, Pharmacology and Clinical Evidence* (Springer, 2015), 509. — Trans.

nest!” Every spring, the swallows would come to our house and build nests near main room of our house. They would always fly in couples, through our living room and up onto the ceiling, perching near the beams. I would watch them from the stairs and observe their habits. The swallows were honest, sincere, and pure. They just wanted a place to stay and demanded very little, they were polite and never startled anyone. In many ways my life on this earth is no different to the sparrows from my childhood. I would go on to study, take up an official government post and escape in exile travelling far away, but I always lived within my means; never asking for too much, migrating from place to place, building a nest wherever I went. I suppose Jesus was right when he said, *‘foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’*.⁴¹ There is unavoidability of unhappiness amongst the vicissitudes of life. The transience of mortal life was famously noted by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang in *I Pass Through the Lu Kingdom with a Sigh and a Sacrifice for Confucius*:

*O Master, how did the world repay
Your life of long solicitude?
Can this sacrifice I watch, here between two temple pillars,
Be the selfsame omen of death you dreamed of long ago?*⁴²

The words of the Tang Dynasty poet were not as frivolous as the words of Christ, but both were inferior to the pure and unconstrained words of the sparrow.

小时我还与邻儿比斗，一口气念「七簇扁担稻桶芯，念得七遍会聪明」，则不是母亲教的。又秀煜叔家的阿五妹妹，比我小一岁，与我两人排排坐在门坎上，听她清脆的念、「山里山，湾里湾，萝卜菜籽结牡丹」。牡丹怎会是萝卜菜籽结的？但她念得来这样好听，想必是真的。

When I was young, I would play with the kids from next door. There was one rhyme Mother never taught me which us kids all seemed to know, I gayly recited “*seven piles of shoulder poles, rice filled buckets and flowering rush, say it seven times and you’ll be smart*”. I would

⁴¹ Luke 9:58, Holy Bible: King James Version. — Trans.

⁴² Witter Bynner, Kanghu Jiang, and Hengtanguishi, *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology, Being Three Hundred Poems of the T’ang Dynasty*, (New York: Knopf, 1929). — Trans.

often play with A'wu (阿五), the daughter of our family friend Uncle Xiuyu (秀煜叔). She was one year younger than me so I would call her litter sister A'wu. We would sit next to me on the doorstep as I listened to her clear and mellifluous rendition: "*Mountains inside the hills, rivers are rivers still, radish leaves flower peony at will.*" My little ears would listen intently; even though radish leaves could never sprout peony, the way she sang the rhyme was so beautiful that you would almost believe it to be true.

我从小就是受的这样的诗教，诗书易春秋，诗最居先，如此故后来我读诗经晓得什么是兴，读易经及宋儒之书晓得什么是理气，读史知道什么是天意。而那气亦即是王气。

Since I was a child, I accepted the teachings of the Confucian Classics. The *Book of Songs* (诗经), the *Book of Changes* (易经), the *Book of Documents* (书经), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋经) all had a great influence on me. These ancient books of profound knowledge and prevalence have had a lasting impact on my understanding of all things. As the years went by, it was through the study of the *Book of Songs* that I began to understand the concept of *Xing* (兴) and through the pages of the *Book of Changes* and the Song Dynasty Confucian texts that I was able to grasp the idea of *qi* (气), understanding how it flows through nature. By studying the *Records of the Grand Historian* (史记) I was able to understand the will of Heaven—a will embodied in the great spirit of kings and the divine providence of emperors.

等我知人事已是民国初年。民国世界山河浩荡，纵有诸般不如意，亦到底敞阳。但凡我家里来了人客，便邻妇亦说话含笑，帮我在檐头剥笋，母亲在厨下，煎炒之声，响连四壁。炊烟裊到庭前，亮蓝动人心，此即村落人家亦有现世的华丽。娘舅或表哥，他们乃耕田樵采之辈，来做人客却是慷慨有礼义，宾主之际只觉人世有这样好。又有经商的亲友，不如此亲热，倒是条达洒脱，他们是来去杭州上海路过胡村，进来望望我们，这样的人客来时，是外面的天下世界也都来到堂前了。

By the time I was old enough to better understand the ways of the world, the Republic of China had already begun. The new regime was like the mountains and rivers, its influence stretched far and wide, flowing to all parts of the country. From north to south, there were various forms

of civil unrest and misfortune, and the people were experiencing a long period of drought. Despite these complications, our family was happy. I remember when we would have guests round. The cheerful lady next door would sometimes visit. She was always laughing and joking and used to say everything with a smile on her face. When she saw me on the edge of the eaves peeling bamboo shoots, she would come over and give me a hand. At that time, Mother was in the kitchen cooking up a storm; the sounds of crackling, sizzling, and popping would bounce off the four walls and I knew the food was not far from being ready. The smoke spiraling upward from the kitchen chimney all the way to the front courtyard where it would gracefully disappear into the clear light blue sky. The scene was beautiful and served as a timely reminder of the splendid tranquility and heartwarming serenity of village life. Mother's brother and my older male cousins, who had been ploughing the fields and cutting and collecting wood for generations, would also visit. They were generous and courteous guests, bringing a joy that would reveal just how good life can be. Kith and kin, who we regularly engaged in business, were not as jovial as close family members but would nevertheless take the time to stop past Hu Village on their way to Hangzhou and Shanghai. They would come to our house bearing gifts and would bring happy and free-flowing conversation. When guests from outside the village came it would feel like they were bringing a part of the outside world with them; and for a brief moment, it felt as if the whole world were visiting.

我小时每见太阳斜过半山，山上羊叫，桥上行人，桥下流水汤汤，就有一种远意，心里只是怅然。我在郁岭墩采茶掘蕃薯，望得见剡溪，天际白云连山，山外即绍兴，再过去是杭州上海，心里就像有一样东西满满的，却说不出。若必说出来，亦只能像广西民歌里的、

唱歌总是哥第一， 风流要算妹当头。
出去高山打锣望， 声鸣应过十二州。

Every time I looked upon the sun setting behind the mountain, watching the goats bleating on the mountainside, villagers walking across the bridge, and the water beneath the bridge flowing endlessly, I would feel an overwhelming sense of melancholy. A kind of momentous desire to see beyond the mountains, coupled with a dejected sense of not knowing where that road may

take me.⁴³ As I stood upon Yuling Hill (郁岭墩) picking tea and pulling sweet potato from the ground, I would gaze at the flowing Shanxi River (剡溪), then look up at the horizon and see the white clouds engulfing the mountains in the distance. Somewhere over those mountains was Shaoxing, and if you kept going you would eventually find yourself in Hangzhou or Shanghai. As I gazed at the world around me and thought of what lay beyond those mountains, my heart was filled with something overwhelmingly, an indescribable abundance of emotion. I cannot quite put it into words but if I must, it would go something like a Guangxi (广西) folk song I remember:

*First my brother will always sing,
Sister refined and tasteful like spring,
Climbing high mountains, ring the gong,
Birds fly to all twelve states, singing their song.*⁴⁴

今我飘零已半生，但对小时的事亦只有思无恋，等将来时势太平了我亦不想回乡下去住，惟清明回去上坟是理当。胡村与我的童年虽好，譬如好吃的东西，已经吃过了即不可再讨添，且我今在绝国异域，亦与童年在胡村并非隔世，好马不吃回头草，倒不是因为负气。汉人的诗、「浮云蔽白日，游子不顾返。」我不但对于故乡是荡子，对于岁月亦是荡子。

Half my life has already passed me by. I feel myself falling and withering away like autumn leaves. I have a deep connection to my childhood memories, but no longer feel a sense of longing for the past. I am at peace with my childhood and have no yearning or desire to return to Hu Village and live there again. Perhaps the only way I would return would be for Tomb-

⁴³ This interpretation is adapted from the commentary Xia Shiqing, where this cathartic and emotive section of the book is understood as Hu Lancheng's desire to leave Hu Village. This desire is confronted by an overriding feeling of melancholy entrenched in the unknown life outside the village. Hu Lancheng wants to leave his village, but does not know where to go, or how to get there. Here, he is also confronted by the realisation that if he were to leave, he would likely never return. Xia Shiqing 夏世清, *Sejie: Zhang Ailing yu Hu Lancheng cheng de qianshi jinsheng* 色·戒: 张爱玲与胡兰成的前世今生 [Lust and Marriage: Zhang Ailing and Hu Lancheng Past Experience and Life] (北京图书有限公司, Beijing Publishing Co, 2007), 202.

⁴⁴ Here 'twelve states' refers to the nine provinces of ancient China, also known as Huaxia (华夏). These nine provinces were established regions during the Xia and Shang Dynasties. Depending on the historical records the names of the nine provinces can change. The Gungxi song exemplifies that birds will travel to all parts of China. According to the Shi Rongcheng (容成氏) the nine provinces are Tu (涂), Jia (夹), Zhang (竞), Ju (莒), Ou (藕), Jing (荆), Yang (陽), Xu (敘) and Cuo (虞). Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "The Rong Chengshi 容成氏 Version of the "Nine Provinces": Some Parallels with Transmitted Texts", *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 32, (2010): 13. — Trans.

Sweeping Festival; visiting the graves of my ancestors, as is right and proper. It is not that I have bitter feelings or emotions towards Hu Village or my childhood, I was well cared for. But I suppose it is like eating delicious food. The first time the food hits your pallet, you feel a sense of excitement and mouth-watering enjoyment. However, once you have tasted it before, your taste buds eventually get used to the feeling, and it is impossible to recreate the original enjoyment, as the memory of that first bite continues to fade. In any event, I am now living in a foreign country across the sea, a long way away from the place I once called home. I hold no resentment towards my childhood. My memories of Hu Village are fading but they are not so remote that it feels like another lifetime in some distant land. Just like a spirited horse will not turn back and graze on old pasture, I should move forward and not wallow over my past. As was said by a Han Dynasty poet:

*Walk on again walk on
From you, separated alive.
Between us, a million odd miles,
Each at one end of the sky.
The roads are difficult and long.
To meet: where, how and when?
Tartar horses follow north winds.
Birds of Yueh nest on south branches.
Separation: each day farther away.
My girdle: each day becomes looser.
Floating clouds veil the white sun.
The wanderer: no thought to return.
Thinking of you makes me old.
Months, years: all of a sudden: dusk.⁴⁵*

I am a vagabond; wandering far from my hometown; drifting through the years.

⁴⁵ The poem is called *Walk On Again Walk On* (行行重行行) and is translated in Wai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres*, (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 69. — Trans.

2 胡村月令

The Fortune of Hu Village⁴⁶

【陌上桑】

Rains of Spring: Awoken Mulberry and Vernal Women

桑树叫人想起衣食艰难，我小时对它没有像对竹的爱意，惟因见父亲那么殷勤的在培壅，纔知世上的珍重事还有比小小的爱憎更大的，倒是哀怨苦乐要从这里出来，人生纔有份量。

Mulberry trees make the people recall times of hardship and struggle. For as long as I can remember, mulberry trees were grown to feed silkworms and have been the bane of our existence. When I was young, I always shared more love for bamboo trees as they were free from adversity. However, when seeing the way my father devotedly cared for his mulberry trees, I realized there is something more important than negligible emotions like love and hate; only when feelings like grief, resentment, sorrow and joy are harnessed into our passions, can we live meaningful lives.

三国时庞德公在树上采桑，司马徽来访，又刘备小时门前有桑树团团如车盖，英雄豪杰的本色原是出在如此份量的人世的。我乡下的桑树也这样高大条畅，不像新式栽桑法的切短，拳曲纠结。桑树初发芽舒叶，金黄娇嫩，照在太阳光里，连太阳光都成了是新的。女子提笼采新桑，叫做「小口叶」，饲乌毛蚕的。及桑叶成荫时，屋前屋后园里田里一片乌油油，蚕已二眠三眠了，则要男人上树采叶，论担的挑回家。

Mulberry trees have an important place in history. In the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), when learned recluse and scholar Sima Hui (司马徽), visited admired friend Pang Degong (庞德公),

⁴⁶ Fortune here refers to the Chinese concept of *Yue Ling* (月令), also known as *Yue Jian* (月建). “Jian” represents the direction of the top handle of the Big Dipper. The handle rotates and points to the twelve hours (traditional Chinese chronometry) in turn, named “Twelve Yue Jian”. The Twelve Yue Jian represents twelve different fates, and therefore helps to predict the vicissitudes of life. Xue Fuxing 薛富兴, “Yueling: Nonggeng Minzu de rensheng moxing” 《月令》：农耕民族的人生模型 [Yue Ling: A Life Model of Peasant Civilization], *Journal of Social Sciences* 社会科学 10, (2007): 123. — Trans.

Pang was out the back of his house picking mulberries.⁴⁷ Another more famous example, is the story of famed warrior hero and eventual emperor of the Kingdom of Shu Han (蜀汉), Liu Bei (刘备). When Liu Bei was a child, there was a particularly fascinating mulberry tree which grew in his front garden. The tree was strikingly tall, with beautifully fronded leaves which hugged the branches tenderly; from a distance it looked just like a carriage. The young Liu Bei famously proclaimed, *'if I become emperor one day, I'll make that mulberry tree my royal carriage!'* Perhaps uncoincidentally, mulberry trees share an association to the great heroes of the past; it is true that greatness is born from humble beginnings.

Like the mulberry trees in the story, the ones in my hometown are grew tall and differed from the curving and twisting ones which were planted using the new cultivation methods. After our mulberry trees were planted and began to sprout, they grew the most golden and tender leaves. The newly emerged leaves would glisten in the field making the sunshine seem as radiant as the leaves themselves. During the lifecycle of mulberry leaves, the men and women would take different responsibilities. The women would pick the newborn leaves and place them in bamboo cages. These leaves were known as *xiaokouye* (小口叶), or little baby leaves, and were perfect for feeding the small mouths of the hungry black silkworms. A field of well cultivated mulberry leaves would make a sea of lush green, making for pleasant shade under the spring sun. The silkworms awakening from their second and third hibernations signaled time for mass feeding.⁴⁸ They were ravenous. The men, taking the heavier load, would climb the mulberry trees, pick the leaves, and place them in baskets attached to a carrying pole. Once they had picked one *dan* (担),⁴⁹ they would place the pole on their shoulders and haul the leaves back home.

⁴⁷ Here it is likely Hu Lancheng's account of Sima Hui (司马徽) and Pang Degong (庞德公) is not entirely accurate. In Romance of the Three Kingdoms (三国演义), it is Pang Tong (庞统) who visits Sima Hui and they share a conversation under the mulberry tree in what is famously known as '桑下之论'. To be faithful to the source text it has been translated as written by Hu Lancheng. Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms: Translated by Moss Roberts* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2015), 637. — Trans.

⁴⁸ Silkworms go through three or four cycles of feeding and hibernating each spring and summer before spinning their cocoon. David Hinton, *The Selected Poems of Li Po* (New York: New Directions Publishing Co, 1996), 127. — Trans.

⁴⁹ *Dan* is a traditional Chinese quantifier and equal to fifty kilograms. Cha Qisen 查启森, "Dan yu dan" "石"与"担" [Dan and Dan], *Beijing Archives* 北京档案 8, (1997): 17. — Trans.

惟有雨天檐头廊下堂前，连楼下到处，都牵起绳索晾桑叶，湿漉漉的我很不喜，但虽小孩，亦知道不可怨，只得用扇搨，又帮母亲用毛巾把桑叶一张一张揩干。又有时半夜蚕饥，母亲叫醒我，命我提灯笼，母子二人开出后门去采桑叶。外面月黑风紧，那时我还只六，七岁，也知做人当着大事，不可以害怕。一次蚕已三眠，有十几大匾，家里叶尽，父亲和四哥都不在，我母亲急得哭泣，恰好宓家山娘舅路过，他一见如此，就大骂外甥，又埋怨姐夫，叫姐姐不要哭泣，像泼水救火一样，他去下沿山采了一担桑叶来。李白诗、「蚕饥妾欲去，五马莫留连。」我纔知道这样的写美人实在有斤量。

While it was rewarding at times, there were moments when raising mulberry trees was painful. On rainy days, the air was damp, making it was especially difficult to keep the mulberry leaves dry. We did everything we could. Ropes were held and tied everywhere: on the eaves, under the porch, in front of the hall and even upstairs. I was young and tired but knew I could not complain in front of Mother. While fanning the leaves, I would help Mother dry them leaf by leaf with a towel. There were times when the silkworms would get hungry in the middle of the night and needed to be fed. Mother would wake me up, ask me to hold the lantern and we would leave out the backdoor to go pick more mulberry leaves. Even though I was only around six years old and it was dark and windy outside, I knew I had to stay strong for Mother and not be afraid. One time, after the silkworms had finished their third hibernation,⁵⁰ we had no more mulberry leaves to feed them. To make matters worse my father and my elder brother were not at home to help with the heavy lifting. My mother was so worried she burst into tears. Luckily, my mother's brother, who lived in Mijia mountain (宓家山), was passing by, and saw the terrible situation we were in. At first, he was angry and confronted my mother, blaming everything on my father and my elder brother. Thankfully, like putting a blaze out with water, my uncle was a lifesaver that night. He went straight to Xiayan mountain (下沿山) and picked a whole *dan* of mulberry leaves for us. It was just like Libai's (李白) famous balled of spring:

The lovely Lo Fo of the Western land

Plucks mulberry leaves by the waterside.

⁵⁰ Silkworms, which feed on Mulberry leaves, go through three to four cycles of feeding and sleeping each spring and summer before spinning their cocoons. David Hinton, *The Selected Poems of Li Po* (New York: New Directions Publishing Co, 1996), 127. — Trans.

Across the green boughs stretches out her white hand;

In golden sunshine her rosy robe is dyed.

“My silkworms are hungry, I cannot stay.

Tarry not with your five-horse cab, I pray”⁵¹

This poem strongly resonated with my childhood and beautifully captures the devotion one must have when cultivating mulberry trees and caring for silkworms, and of course, the beauty of vernal women.

胡村人春花就靠丝茶。正月里来分春牛图，又便是蚕猫图，都木版印出，家家贴一张在正房间墙壁上。还有绰灶王的人来，到每家灶君菩萨前舞一回，分下蚕花供养，得米一碗而去，蚕花是纸剪出缠在像香棒的细竹条上，形状好像稻花，分黄绿白红四种，都是极正的正色，我小时非常喜爱，问母亲要得几枝当宝贝。正月里妇女去庙里烧香，也是求的蚕花。

In preparation for spring celebrations, because many people in Hu village relied on silkworms and tea leaves, we would often pray for their prosperity by putting paper flowers into cakes and rice. In the first month of the lunar year, people would decorate their houses with a Spring Cattle Map (春牛图)⁵² as a way of bringing good weather and bountiful harvests. People would also have Silkworm Cat Paintings (蚕猫图)⁵³ pressed on wooded boards and hang them up on the wall of the living room. There was also a man who would dress up like the stove god (灶王)⁵⁴ and visit every household in Hu Village. He would stand in front of the kitchen stove and pray for family unity and food abundance. After the prayer, each household would be given ceremonial silkworm flowers (蚕花) and in return, the man would be given a bowl of rice. These silkworm flowers were not real

⁵¹ This poem is called ‘Ballad of Four Seasons: Spring’ (子夜吴歌: 春) and is beautifully translated in: Xu Yuanchong 许渊冲, *Libai shi xuan* 李白诗选 [Selected Poems of Libai] (Hunan People’s Publishing House, 2007), 77. — Trans.

⁵² Spring Cattle Map is a traditional Chinese wood engraving picture, embodying the expectations of the working people for a good harvest and a better life. Liu Ying 刘莹, “Muban nianhua zhong de chunniutu” 木版年画中的春牛图 [Spring Cattle Map of wood engraving New Year picture], *Zhongguo yishu shikong* 中国艺术时空 4, (2017): 24. — Trans.

⁵³ Silkworm Cat is not a real cat but a symbolic decoration, usually used to protect silkworms from mice. Xu Yizhen 徐艺乙, “Can mao” 蚕猫 [Silkworm Cat], *Ethnic Arts* 民族艺术 4, (2016): 87. — Trans.

⁵⁴ The stove God, also known as the Kitchen God, is one of the most important Chinese domestic Gods and helps to protect the family health. Phillips Carolyn, “The Kitchen God of Chinese Lore,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 13, no.4 (2013): 22. — Trans.

flowers, but were flowers made of paper and twined in a thick incense-like stick. They looked just like a rice flower and were magnificently decorated in the purest shades of yellow, green, red and white. They were so adorable I regarded them as treasures and would always try my luck and ask mother for more. Silkworm flowers were popular in our village, so much so that women would often pray for them by going to the temple and burning incense.

二月里木铎道人来沿门挨户打卦，是穿的清朝冠服，红缨帽，马蹄袖袍褂，手摇一只大木铎，他先口中念念有词，第一句是「官差木铎」，恐怕还是二千年前周礼里王官的流传，听他说下去都是劝人为善，要勤俭农作之意，我小时只听得懂不多几句，如「三兄四弟一条心，灶下灰尘变黄金，三兄四弟各条心，堂前黄金变灰尘」，以及「廿年新妇廿年婆，再过廿年做太婆」之类，我有些不敢近拢去，因听母亲说小孩不听话就让木铎道人捉去。他念完了，怀里取出三片竹筊，形状像对中剖开的半边冬笋，拍啦啦掷在门坎内地上，说出卦象，我母亲便问家门顺经不顺经？年成可好？蚕花几分？桑叶贵贱？他一一答了，得米一碗，又去到第二家。我有些不敢近拢去，因听母亲说小孩不听话就让木铎道人捉去。他念完了，怀里取出三片竹筊，形状像对中剖开的半边冬笋，拍啦啦掷在门坎内地上，说出卦象，我母亲便问家门顺经不顺经？年成可好？蚕花几分？桑叶贵贱？他一一答了，得米一碗，又去到第二家。

In February, the Muduo Daoist (木铎道人) would walk through the village, rattling his bronze *Muduo*.⁵⁵ He was adorned in ceremonial Qing Dynasty clothing, wearing a red tasseled hat accompanied with an intricate robe which had closed sleeves that would finish into the iconic horse-hoof shaped cuffs.⁵⁶ Going from door-to-door, he practiced *dagua* (打卦)⁵⁷ for the villagers using divination to predict their fortunes for the coming year. The ritual began with him muttering the words “*Muduo on government business*”, remnants of times gone by — the homage was so

⁵⁵ *Muduo* (木铎) was a kind of bell-shaped musical instruments in ancient China, which was used to assist in communicating information. The *Muduo* had several symbolic meanings, usually spreading information from the emperor to the people, or informing the emperor of public opinion. Yong Shen, “China Media Report Overseas,” *Muduo: The Traditional Image of Modern Chinese Journalism Enclose the Incident That Shun Pao Registered Muduo as Its Logo* 7, no.4 (2011): 101. — Trans.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Grayer Moore, *Patternmaking History and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 184: “The “horse’s-hoof” cuff was designed to reflect upon the Manchu riding heritage and represented protection of the finger when on horseback”. — Trans.

⁵⁷ *Dagua* (打卦) is a traditional Chinese divination technique used to tell somebody’s fortune by tossing bamboo blocks onto the floor. Richard. J. Smith, *Mapping China and Managing the World: Culture, Cartography and Cosmology in Late Imperial Times* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 145. — Trans.

seamless it was as if the courtiers, found in the two thousand year old Rites of Zhou (周礼), were leading the sermon themselves.⁵⁸ The ritual focused on instilling good values, teaching the people to be virtuous, hardworking and thrifty. I was only young at the time, but I remember hearing:

*When brothers are of the same mind,
they turn dust into gold,
When brothers are of diverse mind,
they turn gold into dust.*

*The passage of time
The many stages of life
From daughter to mother
From mother to old wife*

Mother told me that the Muduo Daoist would take naughty children away, so I dared not get too close to him and tried to stay on my best behaviour. Upon finishing the chant, he took out his divination tools – pulling three shoots of bamboo blocks from his robes. These blocks were cut in half, with one side flat and the other rounded. He proceeded to cast lots, tossing the blocks into the air, and sending them clattering onto the floor. After he finished, he would begin reading the deities response. Mother asked several questions, such as: will our family be free from woe, will we have a good harvest, will our silkworms have a good yield, and will the mulberry leaves be of good quality. The Taoist answered all the questions patiently and carefully according to whether the bamboo blocks were flat-up and rounded-down or flat-down and rounded-up. As thanks for the *dagua*, we gave the Daoist a bowl of rice and he left for the house next door.

孵蚕子的一天拜蚕花娘娘，在堂前摆一张八仙桌，只设一个座位，点起香烛，供一盏清水，去茶树上采小小一条鲜茶叶放在盏里，我母亲拜过就收起，吹熄的红蜡烛留下来做蚕花烛。

⁵⁸ The Rites of Zhou is one of the three rites of canon and ‘enumerates the official posts required in an ideal bureaucracy, without explaining the relation between ritual and sociopolitical systems’. Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (Yale University Press, 2001), 174. — Trans.

孵蚕子是还穿棉袄的时候，由婆婆或母亲当头，尚未出嫁的女儿与纔来的新妇各人孵一些在怀中，托托老年人的福气，年青人的运气喜气。

The day of silkworm hatching was especially significant in Hu village. The silkworm breeders would hold a solemn ceremony to worship the Silkworm Flower Goddess, praying for a bountiful yield of silk.⁵⁹ The ceremony would involve placing the traditional Eight Immortals square table (八仙桌) in front of the living room and only setting one seat.⁶⁰ The joss sticks and red candles (香烛) were put in place, followed by serving a *zhan* (盞)⁶¹ of clear water accompanied by a freshly picked small branch of tea leaves which was placed inside.⁶² After worship, Mother would pack up the table and blow out the candles, keeping them as silkworm flower candles. It was still cold, so the freshly hatched silkworms were placed in a cotton-padded jacket to keep warm. According to tradition, the hatching ceremony was led by the women in order of household seniority; starting with the host's mother or wife, followed by their unwed daughters and then the newlywed wives who had recently joined the family. During the ceremony, they would all hold freshly hatched silkworms in the warm embrace of their cotton-padded bosoms. The congregation of both the younger and older women helped to bring about yearly prosperity as it harnessed the fortune of the old and the happiness of the youth.

乌毛蚕孵出了，用鹅毛轻轻把它从蚕种纸下掸下，移在小匾里，饲的桑叶剪得很细，每天要扫除蚕沙，每过几天把蚕分一分，从小匾移到大匾。我母亲孵一张蚕子，一张蚕子是一两，分得十大匾，吃起桑叶来像风雨之声，此时饲蚕是从桑蒲里抓起桑叶大捧大捧的铺上去，夜里都要起来两三遍，桑叶一担一担的挑进门来都来不及。我帮母亲饲蚕，夜里饲蚕我执烛照亮。

⁵⁹ Li Song, *Chinese Festival Culture Series-The Tomb-Sweeping Day* (Paths International Ltd, 2015), 39. — Trans.

⁶⁰ Richard F. S. Yang, "A Study of the Origin of the Legend of the Eight Immortals." *Oriens Extremus* 5, no.1 (1958): 8. — Trans.

⁶¹ *Zhan* (盞) is a shallow wine cup and a Chinese traditional unit of measurement. Song Jiang, *The Semantics of Chinese Classifiers and Linguistic Relativity* (London and New York, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 70. — Trans.

⁶² Xiang Chunxiang 向春香 and Tao Hong 陶红, "xian canli zai Zhonghua nonggeng shehui zhong de zhuzhi chaunbo fenxi" 先蚕礼在中华农耕社会中的组织传播分析 [An Analysis of the Transmission of "Silkworm First Ceremony" in the Organization of Ancient Chinese Farming Culture] *Canxue tongxun* 蚕学通讯 *Newsletter of Sericultural Science* 3, (2011): 56. — Trans.

In preparation of egg laying, the silkworm moths were placed on a special kind of paper known as silkworm paper. After the black silkworms hatched, the women would lightly brush the silkworm paper using a piece of soft goose feather, coaxing the newborn silkworms into a small round bamboo basket. After hatching, the real work began. The baby silkworms' mouths were so small that the mulberry leaves needed to be cut into tiny pieces for feeding. Only a few days after birth, due to their terrific rate of growth, the silkworms were divided into several bigger bamboo baskets. The silkworm droppings also had to be cleaned every day. Mother would closely observe the hatching, making sure that each piece of silkworm paper was accounted for — every piece when covered in silkworm eggs weighed one *liang* (两).⁶³ As the silkworms continued to grow, so did their appetites. To give them adequate room to grow and feed, the ravenous silkworms were divided into ten big bamboo baskets. We would have to make regular trips to our mulberry leaf stocks and haul out as many leaves as we could carry, scattering the leaves into the baskets. The hubbub of voracious silkworms crunching into fresh mulberry leaves was like blustering wind and rain, a cacophony of insatiable rustling. No matter how many mulberry leaves we picked, and how many *dan* were carried back home, there never seemed to be enough. Their appetite was so unrelenting that Mother and I would often have to wake up two or three times a night to feed the hungry whippersnappers. During those times, it was pitch black, so I had to carry a candle to give Mother light while she tossed the leaves into the baskets, satisfying the hungry mouths below.

小孩对蚕不可以说是虫，要说蚕宝宝，亦不可以说蚕爬，要说蚕行。又忌说老鼠，老鼠要吃蚕，所以蚕时猫最当令。蚕又最怕被苍蝇蚊子叮，要挂帐子。还有天时不正蚕要僵。还有因放桑叶钱的利钱太重，市面上桑叶价钱骤贵，自家的桑叶不够了，把蚕倒了的。最是谁家把雪白的蚕倒了，顺溪水流去，叫人看了惊心，我小时因此彷彿晓得了仁者对于万民的哀痛。

There were many taboos when raising silkworms. The children were not allowed to refer to them as 'insects', but instead called them 'silkworm babies'. Saying silkworms were 'crawling' was also

⁶³ *Liang* (两) usually refers to the Chinese *tael*. Since 1959 the unit of measurement was standardised to equal 50 grams and is now part of the Chinese system of weights and currency. The exact quantity is different from period to period and region to region. The traditional one *jin* (斤) is equal to 16 *liang*. Wen Shaoxin, *Chinese Numerals and Classifiers (simplified Chinese edition)* (Hong Kong: Everflow Publications, 2014), 22. — Trans.

banned, instead we had to say they were 'moving'. The most forbidden was uttering the word 'mouse' as mice were natural predators of silkworms and would often be found scurrying near the bamboo baskets looking for a morsel. To combat the mice, we gave cats the run of the place. We would also have to hang nets around their baskets to protect them from the bites of mosquitoes and flies hovering above. Abnormal weather was also a danger, when it was at its worst, silkworms often would suffer and even die. Of course, nature was not the only threat to silkworms. At times, the price of mulberry leaves would soar leaving farmers with not enough money to buy leaves. The remaining leaf stocks were not enough to feed the silkworms and people would be forced to get rid of them. The sight of families pouring their snow-white silkworms into the river was truly shocking. As the silkworms flowed down the river, I felt a deep sadness — it was at this time I realised that the benevolent can feel profound sorrow.

蚕时乡下人个个晓得体谅妻子的辛苦，兄弟待姊妹也比平时客气，不可有粗言暴语，亦不可说不顺经的话，做一桩大事情要有好心怀，果然也是应该的。蚕时是连三餐茶饭都草草，男人都在畝里，女人在楼上养蚕，小孩在大路上玩耍，家家的门都虚掩着，也没有人客来，墙跟路侧到处有蚕沙的气息，春阳潏潏得像有声音，村子里非常之静，人们的心思亦变得十分简洁，繁忙可以亦即是闲静，这理该是通于一切产业的德性。

During the busy silkworm breeding season, men would treat the hardworking women with more understanding and appreciation. They would be polite to their toilsome wives and were kinder to their hardworking sisters, avoiding vulgar words and brash language. The men also avoided saying any unlucky terms which would jinx the silk breeding process as the villagers believed that hoping for the best and harbouring good intentions would bring fortuitous results. During this time, the villagers had no time to dillydally; mealtimes were no place to relax with everyone hastily shoveling down their rice to get back to work. The men would be outside tending to the fields, the women inside raising the silkworms, and the children would continue playing outside on the village road. Households would leave their doors unlatched but no visitors would come to visit, as the whole village was too busy. The smell of fresh silkworm droppings filled the air dissipating as far as the village walls and roads. The village was so still and quiet the only noise that could be heard was the sound of the spring sunshine, beating down on fields, flooding the senses, running through the

body, and nestling inside the hearts of the villagers. The quiet and tranquil environment made the people's minds unadorned and peaceful. Such a busy life brought a certain serenity to Hu Village. It was a quietness brought about by the calm focused hard work of the villagers. Like all the pegs of a finely tuned instrument, everyone worked in concert and harmonised beautifully to ensure the job got done. Perhaps it is the same kind of assiduousness and moral fortitude that applied to all industries.

及蚕上簇，城里人就来胡村开秤收茧，行家水客即借住在村人家里。他们戴的金戒指，用的香皂与雪白的洗脸毛巾，许多外洋码头来的新鲜物事儿，妇女们见了都有好意。而且也有是从城里来的少年郎，不免要调笑溪边洗衣洗菜的妇女，但她们对于外客皆有敬重，一敬重就主客的心思都静了，有调笑的话亦只像溪水的阳光浅浪，用不着羞傍人。茧客年年来，我小时却不听见说有过罗曼史。

When the silkworms were ready to start spinning their silk and constructing their cocoons, they would be placed in wooden and bamboo grids used to organise collection of the yield. Merchants from the towns and cities would come to Hu Village looking for high quality silk and would usually stay for days at a time, often lodging with villagers in their homes. The merchants would arrive endowed in an array of foreign goods and trinkets. When seeing their golden rings, scented soaps, snow white facial towels, and items of decadence, the women could not hide their curiosity and desire. Although not all the people who arrived were merchants. Some of the men who came were town and city dwellers who, instead of bringing foreign goods, enjoyed teasing the women while they were on the riverbanks washing their clothes and cleaning vegetables. Despite the men's attempt to get a reaction out of them, the women were neither annoyed nor fussed by the young outsiders and continued acting polite and respectful, treating them as welcomed guests. The women were neither shy or embarrassed and knew the men's words would flow away like the clear shallow waves of the river. They had experienced taunts from these kinds of men before and knew that a cordial reaction was the best way to pacify the situation. The silk traders came year in year out, and despite the advances of the young lads, there were never any stories of romance with the village ladies.

这时家家开簇拆茧，皎洁如雪色，都是妇女与小孩拆了，由男人挑到茧行去卖，茧行在各乡及三界镇上都有开着，路上都是挑茧的人，互相问答，评较各家的价钱，卖茧得来的是新铸的银元，照得人眼里心里明明亮。有价钱不合，亦不等钱用的，则自己缫丝再拿到城里去卖，但各家妇女亦多少都要留下一些茧，缫丝收藏着，为应急或私房积蓄，总总是人世之事。

Several days later, it was time for the breeders to unpack the silkworm grids and take out the beautiful snow-white silk and cocoons. The freshly spun cocoons would shine clear and bright. After the women had finished unpacking the cocoons, the men would put them into two bamboo baskets, attached them with rope to bamboo shoulder poles, and carried the cocoons to the market for sale. The marketplaces or ‘cocoon sites’ (茧行) could be found in every village stretching as far as Sanjie Town (三界镇). The streets were full of cocoon farmers and customers, haggling over the price and comparing them with others. The newly issued *Yinyuan* (银元) that the villagers made from selling their cocoons, sparkled, and shined through the eyes of the villagers and flowed into their hearts, bringing a warm smile.⁶⁴ When the price was unsatisfactory or fluctuating, the villagers would travel to the neighbouring towns and cities to sell their cocoons. Before the men went on their way, the women would make sure to pull out some of the valuable silk from inside the cocoons. The extra silk and cocoons would be stashed away in case the family was in need, or the price suddenly increased. It was always good to have a little extra in case the family fell on hard times. Naturally, that was the way things were.

⁶⁴ *Yinyuan* (银元) was a currency which originated in Europe in 15th century and spread to China in late Qing dynasty. In the Qianlong period (1736-1795), the government began coining local *Yinyuan*. Ma Changlin 马长林, “Qingmo minchu de yinyuan he tongyuan” 清末民初的银元和铜元 [Yinyuan and Tongyuan in late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China], *China finance* 中国金融 8, (2014): 87-88— Trans.

【清明】

Qingming (清明)⁶⁵

「正月灯，二月鹞，三月上坟看姣姣」，但是灯市台阁要到嵊县上虞城里去看，我乡下也不放风筝，且上坟没有姣姣可看，因为陌上路上相见都是相识的姊妹，嫂嫂。但是女子有她的正经，恰像桃花的贞静，乃真是桃花了。苏轼初出四川到帝京，过汉阳时作诗，有云「文王教化处，游女俨公卿，过之不敢慢，伫立整冠缨」，纪晓岚批说稚拙，但我很欢喜，这首诗也写出了苏轼自己是个志诚年青人。

At different traditional festivals, people enjoy different customs and activities. During the Lantern Festival (元宵节) people celebrate by hanging lanterns in the streets and gathering at night to set them alite and watch as they fly off into the dark sky. Kite-flying is another meaningful spring custom. People believe that cutting off the string and letting the kite fly away with the wind would get rid of the year's bad fortune. Then there is Qingming Festival. During Qingming, tomb-sweeping and the worship of ancestors is sacred, and attendance was mandatory. All the family, including the unmarried women (who would usually stay at home) all had a filial duty to attend. Therefore, there was an old saying:

In the first lunar month,

Light the lanterns up.

In the second lunar month,

Fly the paper-gledes up.

In the third lunar month,

Tomb-sweep and see pretty women dressing up.

Growing up, the closest lantern festival show was in the far away town of Shangyu (上虞) in Sheng County (嵊县), and the people of Hu Village did not fly kites, so the first real festival of the year was Qingming. On the way to sweep the tombs of our ancestors, the only women we met were our sisters or brothers' wives. Though they were all close family and friends, seeing all the beautiful

⁶⁵*Qingming* (清明) has rich connotations and profound meaning in China. It is not only one of the 24 solar terms and the optimum time for farming, but also a festival for the worship of ancestors, sorrow, and gratitude. Gao Zhiming 高志明, "Qingming xisu yu nongshi" 清明习俗与农事 [Custom and farming of Qingming]. *Nongcun shiyong jishu* 农村实用技术 4, (2004): 54 — Trans.

women in their festive clothing created an attractive scene of elegant femininity and was truly enchanting. Their youthful fertility and quiet tranquility was not dissimilar to the peach blossoms; maybe they had reincarnated from actual peach blossoms. It reminds me of a poem by Su Shi (苏轼 (1037-1101)).⁶⁶ After leaving Sichuan (四川) for Dijing (帝京), Su Shi passed by Hanyang (汉阳) where he wrote a poem about King Wen of Zhou (周文王). The poem told of the King's reputation amongst his people, and his passion for teaching people to be respectful and well-mannered. His teachings greatly influenced the people. When travellers passed through the many villages, the refined and elegant women were by the stream washing their silk handkerchiefs. When they saw the travellers, they immediately brushed themselves down and stood to attention like the high-ranking officials, flirtatiously arranging their handkerchiefs like an official would do with his ceremonial headdress. The famous Qing Dynasty writer and politician Ji Xiaolan (纪晓岚), criticised the poem for being plain and childish, but I disagree. The poem not only beautifully captures women's unique feminine attraction and playfulness, but also reflects Su Shi as an honest and sincere young man; unconstrained by convention and bold enough to express his true feelings.

上坟做蒿饺，我小时就管溪边地里去觅艾蒿。蒿饺与上坟用的酒馐，只觉是带有风露与日晒气的。还有是去领清明猪肉与豆腐，上代太公作下来的，怕子孙有穷的上不起坟，专设一笔莹田各房轮值，到我一辈还每口领得一斤豆腐，半斤猪肉，不过男孩要上十六岁，女儿则生出就有得领，因为女儿是客，而且虽然出嫁了，若清明恰值归宁在娘家，也仍可领。若有做官的，他可以多领半斤，也是太公见子孙上达欢喜之意。我母亲把这些都备齐好了，连同香烛纸钱爆竹，及上坟分的烧饼，都把来装在盒担里，由四哥挑了，一家人都去上坟，母亲是只上爷爷娘娘的坟她也去，因为她是新妇，此外她是留在家里看家。

Wormwood dumplings (蒿饺) were specially made for Qingming festival. They would be placed on the tombs as offerings to the ancestors because people believed they could drive out evil spirits and ward off disease. When I was young, regardless of whether it was stormy or sunny, Mother would ask me to run down and collect the wild wormwood leaves which grew by the stream. That

⁶⁶Su Shi (苏轼), also known as Zizhan (子瞻) or Dongpo (东坡), was a Chinese calligrapher, painter, pharmacologist, poet, politician, and writer of the Song dynasty. Tan Xinhong 谭鑫红, *Zhongguo gudian shici jiaozhuping congshu – Sushici quanji* 中国古典诗词校注评丛书—苏轼词全集 [A series of commentaries on classical Chinese poetry- The Complete Works of Su Shi's Poetry] (Wuhan: Chongwenchujia, 2015), 8. — Trans.

might be the reason the wormwood dumplings and other food offerings seemed to be filled with dew and sunlight, they were infused with the goodness of the earth. In case some of the family members were too poor to afford the ceremonial offerings, our grandfather would arrange a fixed amount of money for tomb-sweeping and every *fang* (房) of our clan would take charge of the arrangements in turn; they were known as the on-duty *fang*.⁶⁷ Traditionally, families would prepare special Qingming pork and tofu. As for the children, only the sons of each *fang* who were over sixteen would be entitled to receive one *jin* of tofu and half a *jin* of pork. The daughters, on the hand, were regarded as guests and would receive Qingming pork and tofu from the moment they were born. Once grown up and married, they would sometimes return to their hometown *Niangjia* (娘家)⁶⁸ to see their ancestors and family during Qingming. Though they had married and become part of another household, they would still receive Qingming food. If someone in our clan worked as an official, he received half a *jin* more than anyone else, as he was regarded as having provided the ancestors with happiness and relief by bringing honour to the family. As well as the offerings, Mother would also prepare large incense sticks, red candles, paper spirit money (纸钱),⁶⁹ and firecrackers, however the sesame seed cakes were handed out by the on-duty *fang*. Before heading to the ancestral tomb, every item had to be accounted for. Once everything was prepared, each item was put into the appropriate position in a set of layered boxes which were packed one on top of the other. Once in place, Brother Four (四哥) would get out his shoulder pole and haul it to the tomb. As Mother's ancestors rested in another place, she was only expected to pay her respects to her mother and father-in law, after which she quickly returned home to take care of the family.

⁶⁷ *Fang*(房) originally means house in Chinese, however, here *fang* refers to a branch of the family or clan. He Guoqiang 何国强. "Luelun 'fang' gainian de yuyi qufen" 略论“房”概念的语义区分 [A Brief Study of Semantic Distinction of “Fang”], *Zhongnan minzu xueyuan xuebao* 中南民族学院学报 4, (1997): 49-53. — Trans.

⁶⁸ *Niangjia* (娘家) means home of a married woman's parents. Ellen R. Judd, "Niangjia: Chinese Women and Their Natal Families," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no.3 (1989): 525-544. — Trans.

⁶⁹ Spirit Money, Ghost Bills, Joss Money are just some of the English names used to describe the ceremonial paper money burnt as an offering to ancestors. It is believed that by burning paper money, it is being sent to ancestors in the netherworld. The origins of burning paper money are estimated to have arisen in around 86 A.D. alongside Cai Lun's invention of craft paper. Fred C. Blake, "Origins" in *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 76. — Trans.

清明太公的坟是由轮值莹田的一家去上，要用鼓吹，各房都要有人去拜。上过太公坟，吃清明饭，各房全家到齐，妇女都穿裙，打扮了去。在倪家山众家大堂前，有四五十桌，小菜自己带去，饭由轮值莹田的一家备弃，坐拢来都是同一个太公的子孙。吃清明饭在傍晚，其时日子已放长，吃了回来，许多人纷纷渡过溪桥，我跟着母亲，只觉暮色像早晨白茫茫天快要亮时，胡村人还要出去到外面打江山。

The tomb sweeping and worship ceremony was often accompanied by the sounds of beating drums and woodwind which was also organised by the on-duty *fang*. Every *fang* would send family members to attend to the tomb and pay respects to the ancestors. After the ceremony, the family members of each *fang* would gather for the Qingming banquet. The banquet was set up in the ancestral courtyard of Nijiashan, where forty to fifty tables were set for all in attendance. It was custom to sit next to closer relatives. In preparation for the festivities, the women would be formally dressed, in festival skirts and make-up. It was the on-duty *fang*'s responsibility to prepare the main dish and the side dishes would be brought by each of the other *fangs*. The banquet would start at dusk. As summer was drawing close the days were much longer so it was still light when our family members started making their way home. On our way back to Hu Village, I followed Mother as we crossed the river bridge with the droves of full-bellied villagers. The day was so long, it felt as if it was a misty morning before daybreak and we were all migrating to some far-off land to start a new life.

上坟要上许多天，各家有迟早，一家祖先的坟都上遍有的也得两三天。坟有的在路边，有的在山脚下，有的在半山里。上坟去的路上，只见茶叶已不久可采，地里谁家的蚕豆今年种得这样好法，麦已晾花，桑叶已成荫，还看得出去年桑树的枝条剪得非常齐整。此地是整个田畈都齐齐整整，日色映溪连山，又照在村子里，只见人家的乌瓦白墙益发显明。做生活有这样勤谨，所以坟前拜扫人也个个都是孝子顺孙了。

The tomb sweeping would go on for many days. Some families only took a single day to sweep their ancestors' tombs, while others could take two or three. There were tombs in all kinds of places: the grass next to the road, the foothills, and some as far as halfway up the mountain. The scenery on the way to the tombs was full of greenery. Even though the ideal time for picking had recently passed, the tea leaves were still fresh. The fields were filled with broad beans and were so impeccably cultivated that villagers would marvel at the hard work. Flowers covered the village.

As the wheat had already begun sprouting, its flowers had blossomed decorating the farmland in a beautiful snow white. Mulberry leaves made pleasant shade and the neat shape of last year's cut branches was still visible. The streams, mountains and green fields combined to create an endless bed of green which seemed to engulf the entire village. The greenery merged with the black roofs and whitewashed walls of the village houses; the colours contrasting exquisitely. It was as if the flora and fauna was blessing the festival, in a beautiful amalgamation of nature and nurture. The hard-working lives of the people brought happiness to their ancestors.

我五，六岁时，大嫂还在家，我顶与她要好，听见谁家上坟我就与别的小孩去接烧饼，有时一个，有时一双，不舍得吃掉，都交给嫂嫂，嫂嫂给我盛在一个瓦罐里，搁在灶梁上，吃时我也总要分给嫂嫂。嫂嫂是大人，当然不在乎这种一两文钱一个小烧饼，但她也当大事替我保管，有时近处上坟她也去接烧饼，要帮我积成十五到二十个。嫂嫂去井头拎水，我跟去，她烧饭时我与她排排坐在烧火凳上。可是他们夫妻不和，母亲说两人都不好。他们两人常时打拢来，我帮嫂嫂不得，就一面大哭，一面抓打大哥，但因人小，只打得着他的腿与腰身，大哥道、「我难为六弟。」总算不打了，因为大哥也是顶喜欢我的。可是嫂嫂又动了气，当下整整包袱必要回娘家，我牵住她的衣裙不放，叫、「嫂嫂呵，不要去！嫂嫂呵，不要去！」嫂嫂只得又坐下来，骂大哥道、「我是难为六叔。」她不走了，打水给我洗脸，我还哽咽难言。

When I was about five or six years old, my big brother's wife –who I called Saosao (嫂嫂)⁷⁰ – was still at home. She was very fond of me. During Qingming, the adults would give sesame seed cakes to children because it was said that if children ate sesame seed cakes, they would have a life free from hardship. Every time I heard a family making their way to the tombs, I would run with the other children to receive sesame seed cakes. Sometimes I managed to get one cake and other times as many as two, but I would never eat them immediately because they were precious to me. To stop myself from eating them, I gave them to Saosao and asked her to keep them in a safe place. She would put them in a pottery jar placing it on the kitchen beams where nobody would find them. Whenever I ate one, I would be sure to share it with her. Though those cakes were not valuable to

⁷⁰ Sao (嫂) means one's elder brother's wife. Deng Ya 邓雅, "Saozi yuanhe buneng shuo cheng 'xiongjie'" 嫂子缘何不能说成'兄姐' [Why Saozi cannot be called 'xiongjie'], *Qingnian wenxuejia* 青年文学家 8, (2015): 109-111. — Trans.

adults and were only worth a couple of *wen*, Saosao knew how important they were to me, and kept those cakes under close watch. Sometimes Saosao and I would attend other nearby tomb sweeping ceremonies and she would help me collect cakes, sometimes getting as many as fifteen to twenty. No matter what she did or where she went, I liked following her around. I followed her to collect water at the well and sat beside her on a wooden stool while she was cooking in front of the stove. Saosao and my brother had a troubled marriage. Mother told me they were both at fault for the way their marriage had unravelled. When my brother was shouting and arguing with Saosao I was worried and distressed because there was nothing I could do to help her. I burst into tears, crying out of anger and fear — hitting my brother as hard as I could. My punches and scratches were in vain as I was too short; my blows only reaching his thighs and waist. Seeing the affect the arguing had on me, my brother stopped arguing and apologised. Like Saosao, my brother loved me deeply and felt guilty for having upset me. At that time, Saosao was so angry that she started packing her belongings and threatened to go back to her *Niangjia*. I held her dress tightly and begged her not to leave, shouting “*Saosao, don’t go! Saosao don’t go!*” Hearing my plea, Saosao turned around, sat back down, and shouted at my brother “*Its only for the sake of LITTLE SIX!*” Thankfully, Saosao decided not to go back to *Niangjia*, but I was still sobbing and choked up with tears that it was hard to say a word. Realising my distress, Saosao fetched water and washed my face gently.

嫂嫂在后屋与堂姊妹们做针线，叫我坐在小竹椅上，拿手中的鞋面布比比我的脚寸。比对过了，她一面做，一面唱、「油菜开花黄如金，萝卜籽开花白如银，罗汉豆开花黑良心。」说道、「黑良心就是你大哥。」

The next day, when Saosao was doing needlework with my cousins in the back living room, she asked me to sit beside her on a small bamboo stool. While sitting there she compared a piece of instep from a pair of shoes she was making and measured it against my foot. After measuring, she began making new shoes for me and sang:

Canola blossoms strew the ground like gold.

Radish blooms open as bright as silver.

*Broad bean flowers open to reveal their black hearts.*⁷¹

Finally, she added:

“This broad bean flower’s black heart is just like that of your big brother”.

⁷¹ Jonathan P. J. Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 74. — Trans.

【采茶】

Picking Tea Leaves

我乡下山地高寒，采茶先从平阳地方采起，自己的采了便帮人家采。亦有谷雨之前采的，叫雨前茶，但只是少量为供客之用。胡村人是甚么都要长成了纔拿来派用场，蚕豆必要荚里的豆粒七分饱满纔摘来吃，黄瓜南瓜茄子纔结下来也不作兴就摘来尝时新，像城里人的吃雏鸡乳猪当然更没有。我五哥不知如何想得出来，他用二只酒瓮覆住竹笋，那笋在瓮里不见天日，弯弯曲曲，长得很大亦仍是极嫩的黄芽笋，我母亲见了亦不许，说是罪过的，要让它自然长大，作了肴馔亦饶有日月风露。依这来说，今时把未成年人来派政治的用场，当然亦与暴殄天物是一样。何况采茶是有个旺时，前山后山处处山歌，而采雨前茶则单是那冰冷淅索就不成风景。

The mountains around Hu Village were high and cold. To avoid the cold weather, villagers would pick the tea leaves on the flatter foothills where it was warmer. Once people had finished picking their tea for the day, they would help other families get the work done. As some buyers would want their tea earlier, a small amount of leaves would be picked before the grain rain (谷雨) fell.⁷² This tea had a slightly different texture and aromatic taste and would be called the ‘before the rains tea’ (雨前茶).⁷³ The people of Hu Village believed that one had to wait until the produce was fully developed and mature before harvesting. For instance, villagers would wait until the broad bean pods were full of seven plump beans and knew not to rush over to taste the newly sprouted cucumber, pumpkin, or eggplant. Unlike the town and city dwellers, we knew when everything was ready to be harvested. They had no regard for proper farming and would go so far as to eat chicks and suckling pigs before they had grown to maturity.

⁷² Grain Rain (谷雨) comes from an old Chinese saying: *Rain aids the growth of countless grain*. This illustrates the importance of rain for crops at this time of year. The traditional East Asian calendars divide a year into 24 solar terms. Each solar term was named based on the seasonal changes of climate. Grain rain (谷雨) is the 6th solar term. Chen Chao 陈超, “Shui yu ershisi jie zhi Qingming guyu” 水与二十四节气之清明谷雨 [Rain and Qingming, Grain Rain of Twenty-Four Solar Terms], *Zhongguo sanxia* 中国三峡 4, (2018): 108-109; see also Wu 无, “Guyu” 谷雨 [Grain Rain], *China Today: English Version* 今日中国: 英文版, 4, no.1. (April 2017): 77. — Trans.

⁷³ ‘Before the rains tea’ is a kind of tea picked at the beginning of tea picking season. The tea picked before the rains is usually picked in late March and has a distinct taste and texture. Commentators note how tea picked at the beginning of Spring ‘are especially flavoursome and aromatic – the flavour of some spring tea suggests that the crisp chill of the last snow was still in the air’. Mazy Lou Heiss, “China’s Legendary Spring Green Teas”, *The Leaf Magazine*, Issue no 1, December 2007, 1. — Trans.

Brother Five came up with the ingenious idea of covering the bamboo shoots with two clay wine jars. As the bamboo was in a dark environment and starved of sunshine it was unable to grow freely but nonetheless grew large, curved, flavoursome and tender yellow bamboo shoots. Mother looked on in disapproval and believed it was a sin to grow bamboo in such a way. To her, it should be left to grow naturally as the most flavoursome bamboo would come from the shoots which grew by absorbing in the sun, soaking in the rain, and blowing in the wind. Mother's words ring true as it is always a shame to see a reckless waste of nature and resources. Wasting sunlight, rain and wind is perhaps no different to the thoughtless student protests happening around that time.⁷⁴ In any event, the busy tea picking season was a fortuitous time. The whole village was bustling with activity and the mountains were filled with the sound of folk songs. While picking the *before the rains tea* the sound of joyful singing was so beautiful that the cold weather and rain could not ruin the joyful scene.

茶叶旺时，沿江村里来的采茶女，七八人一伙，十几人一队，一村一村的采进去，多是经过我家门前大路上。她们梳的覆额干丝发，戴的绿珠妆沿新笠帽，身上水红手帕竹布衫，各人肩背一只茶篮。她们在胡村一停三，四天，帮茶山多的人家采茶叶，村中的年青人平日挑担打短工积的私蓄，便是用来买胭脂花粉送她们。还有买大糕请她们，大糕是二寸见方，五分厚，糯米粉蒸的，薄薄的面上用胭脂水印“福禄寿禧”，映起猪油豆沙馅的褐色，流流动，留出雪白的四边，方方的像玉玺印。这大糕在绍兴城里长年有，胡村则只茶时有人蒸来桥头路亭里卖，年青小伙子一笼一笼买去茶山上送给采茶女。他们又给采茶女送午饭，顺便秤茶叶，背着爹娘，把秤棒放给美貌的，五斤半秤成六斤。茶山上男女调笑，女的依仗人多，却也不肯服输。

As the tea leaves were flourishing, the tea picking maidens from Yanjiang (沿江) would come in their droves. Seven to eight maidens were called a group, but anything over ten was a team. They would travel from village to village, eventually arriving at Hu Village. I would watch as the pretty maidens walked down the main road passing my house. They styled their hair in a fringe, combed

⁷⁴ It is likely Hu Lancheng is referencing the 1915-1919 May Fourth Movement where young intellectuals began protesting traditional Confucian values and exulting Western ideas of democracy and science. They were heavily critical of Chinese religion, philosophy, and politics. For more information see: Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, (Harvard University Press, 1960), 5. — Trans.

to sit just above their eyebrows and wore newly woven bamboo hats which were decorated with green beads placed around the brim. They wore light cotton blouses accompanied with a cerise coloured handkerchief and carried bamboo baskets on their backs. The maidens were in Hu Village for no longer than three to four days at a time and would help the overburdened families go up the mountain and pick tea leaves. The young men in Hu Village normally did seasonal labour and would make a bit of extra money by hauling loads on their shoulder poles. They would use the money they saved to buy rouges and make-up powder for the tea picking maidens. Sometimes young men would treat the maidens to *Dagao* (大糕), which was a square shaped cake, two *cun* (寸) long, five *fen* (分) thick, boiled in glutinous rice flour and had the red characters ‘*luck wealth health happiness*’ 福祿壽禧 printed on top.⁷⁵ The cake crust was so thin that the brown filling made from lard and sweet bean paste could be seen from the outside. One bite and the paste would ooze out of the four snow-white edges. The cakes square shape and regal decadence resembled the emperor’s imperial jade seal (玉玺).⁷⁶ While *Dagao* was common in Shaoxing and could be found all over the city, it was rare in Hu Village. They were only sold during tea season when people would freshly steam them and sell them in the *lutings* next to the bridge. The young men were eager to impress the maidens who were busy picking in the mountains and would saunter over to the bridge and buy a whole *longs* (笼) worth, giddily carrying them up to the young women.⁷⁷ Knowing the maidens would be hungry, the young lads would also offer them lunch and help them weigh the haul. The tea picking maidens were paid depending on the weight of the tea leaves so for the especially good-looking maidens, the men would go behind their parents back and slightly botch the scales; turning five and a half *jin* of tea leaves into six. During these few days, the young men and maidens would constantly flirt with one another, laughing and joking atop the mountain. They

⁷⁵ *Cun* (寸) and *fen* (分) are traditional Chinese length units, 1 *cun* equal to 10 *fen* and equal to 3.33 centimetres. Qiu Guangming, *The History of Ancient Chinese Measures and Weights* (Anhui Science and Technology Publishing House, 2016), 76. — Trans.

⁷⁶ The Emperor’s Imperial Jade Seal or *Yuxi* (玉玺) was also known as the Heirloom Seal of the Realm. They were used throughout the Chinese Dynasties and has considerable importance. Li Yujun. “The ‘Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy’ amid the Political Chess of China’s Dynasties: In the Examples of the Song, Liao, and Jin Dynasties.” *Chinese Studies in History* 51, no.1 (2018): 37. — Trans.

⁷⁷ A round container woven by bamboo splits or wood sticks, usually used to contain cakes or food, and can be put into pot to steam. — Trans.

would play games often singing to each other and even though the women outnumbered the men, both sides would give back just as much as they got to impress the other.

白天采来的茶叶都堆在堂前地上，叫青叶子。吃过夜饭在后屋茶灶镬里炒青叶子，采茶女与主家的年青小伙子男女混杂，笑语喧哗，炒青叶子要猛火，烧的松柴都是头一年下半年就从山上砍来，劈开迭成像墙头的一堆堆，晒得悉噼粉燥，胡村的年青人惟有做这桩事项上心。我小时就帮烧火及搬青叶子，茶灶镬底已烧得透红，一畚箕青叶子倒下去，满满的一镬，必烈拍啦乱爆，采茶女立在灶前就伸手下去炒，要非常快，本来有茶叉的，但是她们不用。她们左右手轮换着炒，茶镬里就像放鞭炮，水蒸汽直冒，热得她们只穿贴身一件水红衫，系一条长脚管柳条裤，粉汗淫淫的，额上的干丝发都被汗贴住。她们一面炒，一面哄笑说话唱小调。等到青叶子浅下去，爆声也小下去了，就可盛起，是用畚箕覆向镬里一阖，随手翻转就盛起，再用棕帚掸两掸，镬里不留一粒，这都要手脚快，不然青叶子会焦掉老掉。然后夹手又是第二镬。炒过的青叶子倒在板桌上，男人双手把它来搓揉，揉成紧紧的一团，碧绿的浆水微微出来了，纔又抖散摊在竹匾里，明天用幽幽的火炒。

The green tea leaves picked during the daytime would be piled on the floor in the hall. After dinner, the villagers began roasting the tea leaves in the back room by putting them into a specially made shallow iron wok. The tea picking maidens and young men from the household would all congregate, and before long, the whole room would be filled with conversation and laughter. The roasting required a fierce flame — the fire had to be stoked with pinewood which was prepared during the last half of the year before. After the pinewood was cut down, it was cut into smaller logs, piled up like a dry-stone dyke and placed under the sun until they were sufficiently dry and splintered. The young men all knew that cutting and drying the firewood signaled it was close to the tea maidens' arrival, so they tended to the wood carefully, eagerly anticipating the days ahead.

When I was young, I also helped tend to the fire and would move the green tea leaves into position. Once the bottom of the wok was red hot, I would pour the whole *benji* (畚箕)⁷⁸ of tea leaves in and watch as they filled the wok, crackling and popping. As soon as the leaves hit the wok, the maidens were quick to react, immediately using their hands to turn the leaves. Even though the woks were

⁷⁸ *Benji* (畚箕) is a woven bamboo container normally found in the Chinese countryside, usually used as a farm tool. Huang Jinmin 黄金明, "Qiwu ji" 器物记 [Collection of Utensils], *Wenxue gang* 文学港 3, (2015): 127. — Trans.

hot and there were many utensils which could have helped turn the green leaves, the villagers knew that nothing compared to hand roasted leaves and were skillful enough to turn the leaves without getting burnt. As the steam and smoke from the fire continued to fill the room, the tea leaves were popping like firecrackers as they were continually turned so as not to burn or stick. It was so hot that the maidens would only wear their tight-fitting light pink blouses accompanied with willow patterned bow trousers. They would break out into such a sweat that clothes would stick to their bodies, the perspiration pasting their fringes to their foreheads. They were unphased by the heat and continued chatting, joking, and singing folk songs as they roasted the leaves. Once the leaves began absorbing too much water and the crackling had subsided it was time to take them out. They would put the *benji* face down in the wok so that all the leaves were completely covered and then in one motion turned the wok upside down so that the leaves fell neatly back into the *benji*. Finally, the wok was swept with a brown brush to make sure that all the leaves were accounted for. The timing was paramount. If the leaves were left to roast for too long, they would be charred, overcooked, and lost their flavour. Once the leaves finished roasting, they would be emptied and placed on a table where the men would knead them into solid rolls. As the men were kneading the leaves, small amounts of jade coloured tea water would seep out, after which the leaves would be spread into round bamboo baskets and given another light roasting over a gentle flame.

夜里炒青叶子，主家的老年人都已先睡，由得一班年青人去造反为王。他们炒青叶子炒到三更天气，男女结伴去畝里邻家的地上偷豆，开出后门，就听得溪里水响，但见好大的月色，一田亩里都是露水汤汤的。他们拔了大捆蚕豆回来，连叶连茎，拖进茶灶间里，灯下只见异样的碧绿青翠，大家摘下豆荚，在茶灶镬里放点水用猛火一焯，撒上一撮盐花，就捞起倒在板桌上，大家吃了就去睡，因为明天还要起早。

As nightfall descended on Hu Village, the young men and women were still roasting the tea leaves. The old folks had already gone to bed giving the youth an opportunity to do whatever they wanted without the gaze of prying eyes. The tea roasting would usually go on until around midnight, then the young men and maidens would like to get up to some mischief. They would sneak out the back door, go into the neighbour's farmland and run off with handfuls of stolen beans. The night was still and tranquil. The young men and women could hear the trickling sound of the river and would

look around at the peaceful moonlit village. Amidst the stillness of night, you could hear the ebullient sounds of nature as the leaves rustled and watched as the dew filled farmlands turned silver as it twinkled underneath the clear moonlit sky. Once the young men and women had finished grabbing the beans, they returned to the house and dragged the beans to the back room. The fire was still burning. The beans looked like precious jade under the light, so they wasted no time in peeling the precious little gems, putting them in a pot and cooking them over the fire. It was not long before the beans were cooked and with a touch of salt, they were ready to eat. They would all sit around the table together and went off to sleep as soon as they had filled their bellies. Tomorrow was another busy day and they would all have to be up early.

但是也很少听见恋爱的故事，因为青春自身可以是一种德性，像杨柳发新枝时自然不染埃尘。以胡村来说，上下三保大约一百五十份人家，我小时十年之中，听人说有男女暧昧事情的也不过六七件，其中两件是五十以上的鳏夫，二件是店员，对象皆是中年妇人，尚有四个年青妇人是在上海做娘姨的，到时到节回来家乡，有些引蜂沾蝶，但未出嫁的女儿则没有过一件。

Even though the tea picking maidens and the young men would often stay in close proximity, we seldom heard of any love stories or romances between them. In a way, youthful freedom was still bound by one's own moral character. The youth were still pure and spotless, just like how the new branches of willow trees would grow anew with fresh sprouts. This was not only true for the youth. Hu Village was hardly a place of sexual promiscuity. Out of the one hundred and fifty households I had only heard of around six or seven instances of secret love affairs or extramarital relations. Two of which were regarding widowers in their fifties, and another two more were involving salesmen who were not averse to the occasional dalliance with middle aged women. Perhaps the most scandalous were the last four, which involved four women who had gone to Shanghai to work as concubines. Upon returning to Hu Village, the village men would be attracted to them like bees to honey which unsurprisingly brought about many rumours of those four women entertaining their male pursuers. However, there were never any stories of unmarried girls engaging in sexual relations.

沿江来的采茶女是头年下半年挑私盐去就约定的。胡村人下半年田稻收割后，身刚力壮的就结队去余姚挑私盐，他们昼伏宵行，循山过岭，带着饭包，来回两百里地面，要走六七天，用顶硬的扁担，铁镶头朵柱，力大的可挑一百六十斤至一百九十斤，一个月挑两次，一次的本钱两块银洋钱变六块。但也有路上被缉私兵拦去，又亦有与缉私兵打起来的，五代时的钱武肃王及元末浙东起兵的方国珍，就是这样挑私盐出身。胡村人挑私盐经过下沿江，村村保保有相识的采茶女把他们当人客款待，而亦即在此时约定了明年茶时与女伴们再来。

During last year's salt smuggling, the Hu villagers would stop by Yanjiang (沿江) and meet with the tea picking maidens to arrange the plans for next year. When next year came around, after the people from Hu village had finished harvesting their rice fields, the strong bodied would travel by foot to Yuyao (余姚) to start the salt smuggling operation.⁷⁹ They would hide during the day and travelled with the cover of nightfall, moving through the unpatrolled mountains and ridges. The journey was long and arduous so everyone packed light, taking a satchel of food supplies and a heavy shoulder pole to carry the salt. The round trip was two hundred *li* and would take around six to seven days all up. It was an incredibly heavy load. The shoulder poles were iron rimmed and the strongest amongst the group could carry one hundred and sixty *jin* in one trip. They would usually manage two round trips a month and were able to turn two *yinyang* (银洋) into six.⁸⁰ It was incredibly lucrative work, although the smuggling was not without risk. Salt inspectorates were under strict orders to police the trade and blocked many of the well-known smuggling routes. The inspectorates were often hostile and would sometimes come to blows with the villagers.⁸¹ The

⁷⁹ During the early-mid twentieth century there were several government policies which monopolised the salt industry in China. Salt was heavily regulated with high tariffs and oppressive tax rates, as such illicit smuggling of salt was rife. Ralph Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth: The Political Origins of Peasant Protest and Communist Revolution in China* (University of California Press, 1997), 66. — Trans.

⁸⁰ Yinyang (银洋) also known as the silver dollar, has an identical meaning to Yinyuan (银元) found earlier in the text. During the Qing Dynasty mountainous villages relied heavily on the Yinyang as a currency. The price of Yinyang always changed due to market fluctuations. Wu Bingkun 吴秉坤, "Qingdai Huizhou Yinyang jiage wenti" 清代徽州银洋价格问题 [The Price of Silver Dollar in Huizhou in the Qing Dynasty] *Journal of Huangshan University* 黄山学院学报 12, no.1 (2010): 38-41. — Trans.

⁸¹ Esson M. Gale. "Public Administration of Salt in China: A Historical Survey." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 152, (1930): 249. 'A Chief Inspectorate of Salt Revenue, represented in

region had a long history of salt smuggling. It was no different to King Qian Liu (钱镠) who lived during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-979). Qian Liu was born in Lin'An (临安) not far from Hangzhou to a family of farmers and fisherman. From a young age he turned to salt smuggling as a source of income, becoming a commander of the infamous salt smuggling militia which would pillage the eastern regions of the Zhe (浙东). It was through his salt smuggling that he was able to rise to prominence.⁸² Then there was the famous 14th century salt-smuggler Fang Guozhen (方国珍) who attacked Yuan Dynasty (元朝) Mongol officials and established the coastal satrapy of Zhejiang.⁸³ The Hu villagers certainly took up regions historical trade, making sure not to miss out on the profitable opportunity. After the villagers had bought the salt, they would stop by Yanjiang to see the tea picking maidens. They were treated cordially, and would all discuss the plans for the following year.

采头茶时养二蚕，采二茶时是秧田已经插齐了，畈里被日头气所逼，田鸡叫，田螺开厝，小孩与燕子一样成天在外，摘桑椹拾田螺，拔乌筱笋，听得村中午鸡啼了，纔沿溪边循田塍路回家，赤脚穿土布青夹袄，有时身上还穿小棉袄，满面通红，一股热晒气。

The first harvest of tea was ready to be picked around the same time as the second cycle of silkworms. The second batch of tea was picked after the rice beds had been planted. As the sun was beating down on water covered the rice fields, we could always hear the field frogs, known as the 'chickens of the field' (田鸡), croaking in the water. The water was clear the field snails could be easily spotted due to the spiraling coiled whorls on their shell. The top dimple of the shell would be cracked open for cooking. The farm was a hunting ground for children and swallows alike who

the provinces by District Inspectorates, and in the Yangtze transportation offices by the Chief Auditors of the Salt Revenue, was accordingly created as an integral part of the Central Salt Administration. — Trans.

⁸² Hugh R. Clark, "Scoundrels, Rogues, and Refugees: The Founders of the Ten Kingdoms in the Late Ninth Century" in *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*, ed. Lorge, Peter Allan (Chinese University Press, 2011) 49-77, 51. — Trans.

⁸³ John Makeham, *China: The World's Oldest Living Civilization* (Thames & Hudson, 2008), 275. — Trans.

would spend all day gathering field snails, picking mulberries and collecting wild bamboo shoots (乌筱笋).⁸⁴ Upon hearing the chickens cawing in the afternoon, it was time to return home. We all barefooted and wore hand-woven grass coloured thin jackets and would follow the river, taking the paths between the fields to get back. On colder days we would sometimes wear a small cotton-padded *mian'ao* (棉袄) over the top.⁸⁵ Faces bright red, as the rays of sun continued to beat down on the village.

夏始春余，男人在畈上，女人在楼上养二蚕，大路上及人家门庭都静静的，惟有新竹上了屋檐，鹁鸪叫。鹁鸪的声音有时就在近处，听起来只当它是在前山里叫，非常深远。灶头间被窗外的桑树所辉映，漏进来细碎的阳光，镬灶砧板碗橱饭后都洗过收整好了在那里，板桌上有小孩养在面盆里的田螺。母鸡生了蛋亦无人拾，「各各带，各各各各各带！」的叫。而忽然是长长一声雄鸡啼，啼过它拍拍翅膀摇摇鸡冠，伸直脖子又啼一声。我小时听母亲说，龙的角本是雄鸡的，借了去不还，雄鸡啼「哥哥哥！」就是叫龙，可是此刻青天白日，人家里这样静，天上的龙亦没有消息。惟后屋茶灶间里有人在做茶叶，即是把炒过搓揉过的青叶子再来二度三度焙干，灶肚里松柴微火，只听他悠悠的嘘一声，双手把镬里的茶叶掀一掀，日子好长。

The passing of spring signaled the beginning of summer. The men would be outside tending to the fields, while the women were inside raising the silkworms—nurturing them through their second seasonal cycle. The village become quiet at this time, the roads were peaceful, and the families were still. The only noises would come from the red bellied pigeons who would perch themselves on the newly built bamboo roofs, coo-cooing aloud. Though they were close by, the sound they made sounded was as if they were atop the mountains calling out far and wide. It was a beautiful

⁸⁴ The term 'wuxiaosun' (乌筱笋) is local dialect for all wild bamboo. This is explained in: Xiao Yan 晓燕, "ruguo meiyou sun, rensheng jiu shao le lequ" 如果没有笋, 人生就少了乐趣 [If there was no bamboo, life would be without joy]. *Shangyu Daily Newspaper* 上虞日报, May 13, 2019. — Trans.

⁸⁵ A *mian'ao* is a special kind of cotton-padded jacket. Depending on the context it has been translated as 'jacket', 'veste', 'robe', 'tunic', 'coat' etc. A *mian'ao* was a common piece of clothing for farmers and would be used to keep warm. Zhe Yuan, "Study on the Translation of Clothing Names in A Dream of Red Mansions based on its English and French Versions" *Francis Academic Press*, (2018) 798. — Trans.

time to be in the kitchen. The rays from the sun would reflect off the mulberry trees outside, splitting into separate beams which would shine through the kitchen window. The kitchen cupboards, pots and chopping boards had all been washed and put away leaving room for the children who would sit on the kitchen stools; tending to a shallow bucket full of field snails they had caught earlier that morning.

After laying her eggs, the mother hen would call out “*ge ge dai, ge ge ge ge ge dai*” as if she was telling the farmers her eggs were ready. As if in unison, the rooster would suddenly let out one large “*cock-a-doodle-doo*” as he flapped his wings and shook the comb atop his head. Stretching his neck he called out again “*cock-a-doodle-doo*”. When I was young, Mother told me that back in ancient times roosters antlers like stags and dragons were only in their infancy and were not yet fully formed. The Jade Emperor (玉帝) invited the animals to meet him in his celestial palace to celebrate New Year. The night before the celebration the dragon was swimming in the river and the rooster came strutting by looking magnificent. The dragon asked if the rooster would be so kind as to lend him his antlers, and the rooster agreed, on the condition the dragon returned his antlers after the Jade Emperor’s celebration. The dragon was the talk of the festivities and never returned the antlers. Mother told me that every time the rooster calls out “*cock-a-doodle-doo*” he is calling out “*Dragon, return my antlers!*”.⁸⁶ On that early summer’s day, the sun was bright and the sky was clear, even though the village was quiet and tranquil, the rooster’s cries always fell on deaf ears. At that time, the villagers were in the back room, preparing tea leaves by hand-roasting them in a wok over an oven fire. Once they were roasted, the green leaves had to be grounded down, roasted two more times, and then dried over the fire. To ensure quality tea, the oven was kept at a low flame and stoked with a small amount of pine wood. Amidst the tranquillity, the only sound

⁸⁶ Eric, Kimmel, *The Rooster’s Antlers: A Story of the Chinese Zodiac* (Reed Business Information, 1999) — Trans.

you could hear was the tea maker's gentle blowing of the fire while his two hands turned the tea leaves. The days spent tea picking were long indeed.

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