THE DIRGE OF LIANG FU

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The Dirge of Liang Fu*
by
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Translated by Patia Isaku and the Author
One late afternoon, in the deep of winter, a black old-model official sedan drew up to the gate of the Weng residence in the Taipei suburb of T'ienmu; the car door opened and two men got out. The first was an old gentleman of three-score and ten; following him, a middle-aged man of some fifty years. The older gentleman was attired in a long black satin gown figured with darker round designs; in shoes of black flannel, on his head a hat of sable fur. A few strands of white hair covered his ears, were visible beneath his hat; his cheeks bore a rich growth of silvery beard. He was of majestic stature; as he walked, his long, full beard caught the wind and flared; still his face preserved its grave expression. The middle-aged gentleman behind him was also clothed in somber black, in a western suit and tie. He wore silver-rimmed glasses, and his hair, too, was turning white; he appeared weary, seared. As they neared the main gate, a wizened old orderly opened it from the inside and came out to greet them. He was well past sixty himself, outfitted in a faded blue Sun Yat-sen tunic, gone, his hair completely gone, his back bent like a bow. He kept nodding to the two men, "General, you've returned. Commissioner Lei, how are you, Sir?"
Commissioner Lei returned the old retainer's salute, turned to the old gentleman and bowed respectfully.

"His Excellency P'u must have had a tiring day and probably would wish to rest. I ought to take my leave."

"That's all right." His Excellency P'u waved his hand. "Come in and sit for a while. I still have some things to tell you." Without turning his head, he walked through the gate with a slow and firm step, Commissioner Lei close behind. Immediately the old orderly went back in and closed the main gate after them.

"Lai!" His Excellency called.

"Sir!" From force of habit, Lai the old orderly quickly stood to attention, his hands riveted to his sides, but his back was still so bent he couldn't straighten up.

"Make two cups of tea and bring them to my study."

"Yessir, General." Body bowed, Lai quickly took himself trudged off.

In the inner courtyard there were no trees other than dense clusters of purple bamboo around the wall. It was
late winter, so the stone path was strewn with fallen leaves and sheathes. As His Excellency P'u and Commissioner Lei went towards the house treading on the crisp, dry leaves, there was a *crackling, breaking* sound. By the time they entered the study Lai had already brought two cups of Iron Kuanyin and set them on a marble-inlaid tea table. He turned to the Commissioner with a bow.

"Commissioner Lei, please have some tea."

His Excellency P'u entered and, without removing his hat, went straight to a red sandalwood Grand Minister chair by the tea-table and sat down. He picked up a cup of hot tea and warmed his hands around it, blowing back the tea leaves floating on the surface, took a sip, and drew a deep breath. He raised his eyes and, noticing that Commissioner Lei was still standing, motioned him to another Grand Minister chair.

The study was furnished with archaic elegance.

On one wall hung the large center-scroll from a triptych, a Ming landscape, "Fisherman-Recluse in Winter Forest,"
by Wen Cheng-ming. The couplets on the two scrolls on
either side were taken from Tu Fu's poem "Climbing the
Tower," in the hand of Cheng Pan-ch'iao, in a vigorous
and forceful style.

With Spring Splendor the Silk River roars forward
through Heaven and Earth
As on Mt. Jade Castle/ floating Clouds transform
the Ancient to This Moment

On another wall hung a pair of calligraphic scrolls in
the tomb-rubbings style of the Han and Wei Dynasties, from
the brush of the late Mr. Chan-t'ang. On the first was
inscribed: 'To Comrade P'u-yüan, for Mutual Encouragement.'

The second was dated: "On the Eve of the Battle Oath for
the Northern Expedition, the Fifteenth Year of the Republic."
Recorded thereon was the famous quote from the last will and testament
of the Father of the Country:

The Revolution has not yet succeeded;
You, my comrades, must fight on with all your might!

* The courtesy name of Hu Han-min (18??-19??), a Kuomintang elder statesman & one of the early associates of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, "Father of the Chinese Republic."
Against the window on the left stood a large ebony desk; the four treasures of the study were arranged on top of it. A brushstand of calligraphy in the shape of a carp, an inkstone from the Heavenly Music Pavilion; an openwork-carved bamboo brush-holder containing brushes of various kinds. On the desk lay a single worn book with a hand-sewn binding, Ssu-ma Kuang's Mirror of Government. Against the window on the right stood an altar table; on it was placed a set of the Diamond Sutra; next to the Sutra was an antique bronze incense tripod decorated with mythical t'ao-t'ieh creatures. The tripod was heaped with accumulated incense ash, remnants of burnt incense sticks still stuck in its center.

"Your noble teacher —— " His Excellency P'u had been deep in thought for quite a while before he spoke.

"Yes, Your Excellency." As His Excellency P'u left his words unfinished, the old general spoke up in all told. Commissioner Lei responded.

"Your teacher and I, from start to finish, we were together well over fifty years —— " His Excellency paused.
He continued, "I knew his ways very well, the kind of man he was."

"Yes, Your Excellency. The deep friendship between you and my Mentor is known to us all."

'Ardent yet high-minded,' that was your teacher's strength, even so often throughout his life he got into trouble exactly because of it. Meng-yang, his character was a little too uncompromising." His Excellency F'u sighed and nodded his head.

"Truly, the way he conducted himself, my Mentor's deeds really caused people to look up to him," said Commissioner Lei.

"That's true, and yet it was a little difficult to work with him, though." His Excellency F'u turned to Commissioner Lei. "You were his secretary all these years of course you know all that."

"Of course, of course," Commissioner Lei quickly agreed. "When my Mentor acted, his orders were weighty as mountains. Whatever he said had to be done. No one dared to disobey him."
"All of you used to compare him behind his back to the blazing sun in July — too hot to withstand, isn't that so?" His Excellency P'u leaned toward Commissioner Lei with a smile. The Commissioner laughed knowingly; he didn't dare reply. His Excellency removed his sable-fur hat, scratched his white head and sank into his thoughts again.

"Actually, he was quite lonely in his last years — " His Excellency murmured to himself.

"Your Excellency?"

"I said — " His Excellency P'u turned and raised his voice — "Meng-yang, he was a little too hot-headed. He had accomplished quite a great deal in his life, but in the process, he hurt a lot of people nevertheless. Only Chung-mo and I were still able to talk to him."

"My Mentor always held Your Excellency and His Excellency Chung in the highest esteem." The Commissioner bowed respectfully to His Excellency P'u. His Excellency
stroked his silvery beard and smiled a little.

"Well, Chung-mo and I really didn't have that much about us to command his respect. However, there's quite a history behind the way we three first got to know each other — I'm afraid even you aren't too familiar with all the facts."

"I remember my Mentor once told me he, Your Excellency and His Excellency Chung were all schoolmates at the Szechuan Military Academy."

"That's quite true. It's a long story, though, if I take you through all the twists and turns — " His Excellency P'u sighed softly and closed his eyes with a faint smile. Commissioner Lei saw he was lost in thought and did not dare disturb him. He waited a while in silence, then ventured,

"If Your Excellency would allow us of the younger generation to hear the story, it would give me a good basis in the future from which to write my Mentor's biography."

"Hmmm ... " His Excellency P'u mulled it over a bit. "Well then, to start from the beginning: it was the year of Hsin Hai, 1911. Chung-mo and his wife Yang Yun-hsien
had just returned from Japan where they had joined the T'ung Meng Hui; they came back with a mission: to summon the revolutionary elements at the Szechuan Military Academy to aid in the great Wuch'ang Uprising. At that time the chief of the Society of Elders and Brothers was none other than Lo Chih-chou, the 'Eighth Prince,' he was in the vanguard protecting our secret shipment of ammunition into Wuch'ang. Even though all of us went to the same school, we didn't really know each other; we all ended up in the same unit purely by chance. We called ourselves the Dare-to-Die Corps and wore a red mark on our earlobes as a secret sign. Our slogan was: "Revolution to Down the Manchus; to Down the Manchus: Revolution!" In a moment people of every degree rose to arms; by day and by night, by land and by water they marched to Hupeih. And let me tell you about Chung-mo's wife, Yang Yun-hsien; there was a woman of valor and intelligence!"

"Indeed, His Excellency Chung's lady was a true heroine!" Commissioner Lei added his praise.

* Literally, Alliance Society, abbreviated from Chinese Revolutionary Alliance society, a precursor of the Kuomintang, organized in 1905 in Japan, under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen. This loose-knit federation of anti-Manchu, pro-Republican elements was responsible for many uprisings in the Chinese Empire, culminating in the successful Wuchang Uprising of 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China.
"Did you know the day we shipped the ammunition into Wuchang Yang Yün-hsiu disguised herself as a bride and had the dynamite hidden in her bridal sedan chair? Now Meng-yang and I, we wore red turbans and acted as her chair-bearers, and Chung-mo was the bridegroom on horseback in a long gown and long vest. We were escorted by a number of Elders-and-Brothers comrades blowing horns and beating gongs, and the whole bunch of us passed right in through the Chengyang Gate. As we entered the city, we realized that inside it was already all rumors and alarms, unrest and panic among the people. It happened that some comrades in the Literature Society had let the secret slip and the Governor-General ordered arrests throughout the city; even now the heads of several of our revolutionary comrades hung before the yamen gates. Immediately we received orders from No. 10 Rouge Alley: Unexpected Developments, Coup Moved Up Midnight Tonight. Signal: Cannon-Fire. Our mission to blow up the Governor-General's yamen and rescue those comrades in the prison. We hid in Yang Yün-hsiu's
sister's house and awaited our chance to act. That very night, as if Heaven had willed it, the entire city was bathed in moonlight. Tragic and solemn sight! We all changed into battle dress, even Yang Yun-hsiu put on men's clothes. One and all we downed a cup or two of heated wine, loftily we spoke of the nation's rise and fall; we couldn't help but feel tremendously exalted. Your teacher was the most aroused of all. I still remember, he drank till his face was blood-red, he banged his sabre down on the table, pulled Chung-mo and me outside into the courtyard, we swore a blood oath like that of Liu, Kuan and Chang in the Peach Garden in The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and vowed to Heaven: "If we don't kill the Manchu slaves, we won't return alive!" We all promised from then on we would share prosperity and bear hardship together. At that moment we were indeed ready to die, the three of us had even left the record of our names and our dates of birth. In order, I was the eldest; Chung-mo was second; your teacher was the youngest, our Kid Brother. He was barely twenty then — "Oh?" the Commissioner exclaimed. "I didn't realize
Your Excellency, His Excellency Chung and my Mentor came to know each other in such historic circumstances!"

"Naturally you could not have known." His Excellency stroked his beard again and smiled. "This particular relationship was truly a secret belonging to the three of us. That night we waited until it was barely ten o'clock; then there was a burst of gunfire from the area around the Engineering Corps in the eastern part of the city. As some of us still hesitated, your teacher leaped to his feet and cried out, 'They've started the fighting out there! Are we still waiting here to die?!' He caught up a few hand grenades, seized his sabre and charged off, and we all stormed out after him. Outside the human broil was seething, fire shot skyhigh in Wuch'ang City. We fought all night; by dawn the battle was won. The white banners of our revolutionary forces waved everywhere throughout the city. A troop of us marched to the King of Ch'u Terrace on Snake Mountain to regroup. As we passed the Yellow Crane Tower, your teacher suddenly got excited. In a flash he climbed up, tore off his blood-spotted white
jacket, raised it with a bamboo pole and stuck it in the eave. Then he stood on the balustrade, brandished his sabre and shouted to us: The Revolutionary Hero Wang Meng-yang is here!" To this day I can still see him. What ebullience! What exhuberance!" His Excellency P'u laughed and paused for a sip of Iron Kuanyin.

"If Your Excellency hadn't evoked them today, those memories of my Mentor's heroic deeds done by my Mentor would have remained buried," said Commissioner Lei. "All this must be included in the biography."

"By all means." His Excellency P'u nodded his approval. "I'm the only one who knows beyond question all those chivalrous acts of your teacher's youth. At the Uprising things happened fast; it started out with just a few hot-blooded youngsters raising a ruckus, and before you knew it there was a Revolution —— exactly because of these youngsters' dare-devilry our Republic was born. The next day we telegraphed the whole country round and announced the First Year of the Republic: the 4,609th Year of the Yellow Emperor —— " His Excellency P'u mused for a while
and resumed, "From then on, for scores of years, the three
of us, side by side, east or west, no matter what campaigns, east
and west, and
we were on, we were always able to hold fast to our oath
'to share prosperity and bear hardship together.' Later
when your teacher became the Commander-in-Chief his rank
was higher than either of ours, yet behind his back
Chung-mo and I still called him 'the Kid,' just as we
always had." His Excellency P'u turned to Commissioner
Lei and chuckled, "So did the Commissioner. "He, too,
from the beginning to the end, treated us like his older
brothers. So only Chung-mo and I could still get him to
hold his horses from time to time. I have been a cautious
man all my life. I haven't gotten my fingers burned very
often. Chung-mo was a kind-hearted fellow; he didn't like to
quarrel with people. But, let's be fair, when it came to
talent and military flair and strategic sagacity, I must rank your
teacher the topmost——" His Excellency P'u raised his
venerable eyebrows and turned his thumb up. "A long time
ago, I told Chung-mo off the record, 'Two, old chap, in the
future I suspect it's neither you nor I but the Kid's 
the one who's going to Lord it over the world. Later my 
prophecy did come true. Your teacher's feats indeed sur-
passed our own."

"My Mentor's military genius truly aroused people's 
admiration," Commissioner Lei declared. "What a pity, 
though, that he was never given the opportunity to exercise 
it fully."

"Well, you can't really say that." His Excellency P'u
stopped Commissioner Lei with a wave of his hand. "In 
fact, he had a magnificent career, all right. But your 
teacher made his mark early; he distinguished himself 
at such a young age; naturally he did things with a somewhat 
overweening pride, which 
wasn't the way to get along. For this, 
cycky air that simply didn't suit the times. You can't lay the blame on Heaven or man; it was his own character 
that was responsible. Meng-yang . . . " His Excellency P'u
sighed heavily. "I'd say he was just a little too hot-headed and uncompromising." His Excellency and the 
Commissioner sat face to face, each sunk in reflection.
After some time the Commissioner sighed gently.

"Still — you must admit it was quite an occasion today. Amazing how everybody came, even His Excellency Wang, His Excellency Li and His Excellency Chao. They all arrived in person to pay their respects."

"Really?" His Excellency appeared surprised.

"They came, too? I wonder why I didn't see them."

"They came quite early and left after only a short while."

"Oh . . ." His Excellency murmured wistfully,

"It's been a good many years since I saw them last. I did notice the memorial scrolls they presented hanging in the funeral hall. Wang Ch'ing-chih's scroll even included a couplet:

'That thou shouldst have died ere victory did crown thine Expedition!

'Still do the homeland fathers and elders call long for the sight of thy banners.'"

There had been discord between himself and your teacher,
and yet you see how he still held your teacher in such high esteem."

"That's very true, Your Excellency," the Commissioner hastened to reply.

"Today's memorial service turned out fairly well,"

I suppose, His excellency P'u remarked, "Although you may say all this is posthumous glory of a kind, such ceremonies should by no means depart too far from the proprieties. From what I observed, that son of Meng-yang's simply didn't seem to know the proper way to behave. Must be that after living abroad so long he just doesn't understand the manners and customs of us Chinese any more."

"Brother Chia-chi's just come back from America, it's understandable that he's a bit unfamiliar with the way we do things here," the Commissioner tried to explain.

"The Memorial Service Committee members tried to discuss matters with him; he vetoed every suggestion we made. I was the head of the Committee, and it made me feel very ill at ease; since he's a member of the deceased's family..."
Family and the chief mourner as well, it was not for me to make all the decisions. Later things just went too far, and I couldn't let them go any further. I called him to one side and told him: Naturally, according to the lessons of the ancients, grief supersedes every formality, but your father was no ordinary man; he had done great deeds for the country. The day of the memorial service—everything will be carried out in accordance with the protocol of a State funeral. Thousands of people from all over will come to pay their last tributes to your father. It isn't as if we're afraid people might criticize us in any way, but if we commit any error during the rites, it would be disrespect to your dead father.' That was as far as I could in offering advice, he displayed some signs of annoyance."

"Indeed, Brother Chia-chi is somewhat gauche in handling such matters," Commissioner Lei agreed.

"There was another thing I discussed openly with him. Meng-yang's first wife passed away early; while Meng-yang lay ill in hospital these past two years it was his second
wife who took care of him, gave him his medicine, helped
him in and out of bed; when the family published the obit-
uary they actually left out her name. She came to me and
wept and asked me to see that she got justice. Given the
depth relationship between your teacher and me, I had to do
something. But this is their family’s affair, after all;
no matter how you look at it I’m still an outsider; I
was in no position to interfere too much. In the end, all
I could do was mention the matter tactfully to Meng-yang’s
son: "For the sake of your late father, do take care
of her in the days to come." His Excellency P’u gave
a heavy sigh and said sorrowfully, "To see the way the
younger generation behaves nowadays, sometimes it chills
one’s heart."

"I know. I know," nodded Commissioner Lei. The
cup of Iron Kuanyin His Excellency held had long since
grown cold; he appeared pensive again. "Something
perceived signs of fatigue already showing on His Excellency’s
face."
"Your Excellency must be tired. I should be..." he suggested.

His Excellency looked up, glanced at the Commissioner and gazed out the window.

"It's getting rather late already. Look, why don't you stay and join me in a game of go. You can leave after dinner."

Without waiting for Commissioner Lei to accept, His Excellency P'u went straight to the go table and set up the game. The Commissioner came over and sat down. No sooner was His Excellency seated when he looked over at the incense tripod on the altar table; the incense had long since burned out. He stood up again, went to the altar, removed the burnt-out sticks, lit a sheaf of Dragon Saliva incense sticks and stuck them into the tripod. Soon the heavy scent of Dragon Saliva pervaded the entire room. His Excellency and the Commissioner began the match. After two or three moves, the study door suddenly opened...
in came a fine-featured boy of eight or nine in a neat khaki school uniform, a steaming bowl of herbal broth in his hands.

"Grandfather, please take your medicine." Carefully he laid the bowl of herbal broth on the tea table. His Excellency P'u looked around at him; immediately a smile broke into a smile, appeared on his face, but he assumed a stern voice.

"Shouldn't you say Hello to Uncle Lei at once?"

"Uncle Lei." The boy quickly stood to attention and made a deep bow to the Commissioner.

"This must be your Excellency's grandson." Smiling, the Commissioner returned the salute.

"My little grandson Hsiao-hsien." His Excellency pointed to the boy.

"What a smart-looking young fellow!" the Commissioner complimented the boy.

"He's in the third grade at the Elementary School attached to the Women's Normal College," explained His Excellency. "He was born in America; both my son and..."
his wife are there teaching. A few years ago his grandmother had him brought back here. Ever since she passed away he's stayed with me. When he first came back he couldn't speak a word of Chinese, he'd practically turned into a little foreigner! Now, after he's been studying with me for a while, he's even been able to memorize a few T'ang poems."

"Oh . . . ?" The Commissioner sounded impressed.

"Can you recite a poem for Uncle Lei?" His Excellency P'u caressed his silvery beard.

"Which one should I recite, Grandfather?"

"How many can you still remember?" His Excellency retorted. "Do you still remember 'the Song of Liang-chou' I taught you last week?"

Without the slightest hesitation the boy nodded his head in time and recited "the Song of Liang-chou" in accents loud and clear, nodding his head in time.
"A fine grape wine,  
a night-shining cup of jade —
Just as I'm about to drink,
on horseback their lutes
sound the recall.
You mustn't laugh if I lie drunk
on the battlefield;
Since ancient times, pray,
how many soldiers
have returned alive?"

"Splendid! Splendid!" Commissioner Lei cheered.

"To think he has such a quick mind at this age. Your Excellency," he turned to his Excellency P'u, "If you'll forgive my presumption, in the future this little fellow may well turn out to be 'A young phoenix whose voice outshines that of the elder phoenix.'"

"You mustn't overpraise him." His Excellency couldn't help a smile of satisfaction. "Run along, now," he told the boy.

After his grandson had left the room, his Excellency P'u lifted the bowl of hot herbal soup and tried a mouthful or two.
"Has Your Excellency been indisposed recently?"

Commissioner Lei interrupted his move to inquire with concern.

"It's nothing, really," replied His Excellency P'u.

"Do you recall how your teacher and I fought during the Battle of Lung-t'ian on the Northern Expedition? I got a grapeshot wound."

"Of course, of course, I remember."

"I was still young then, what did I care? Now that I'm getting along, in years it's acting up, all right; on chilly days my lower back aches and is stiff. I've had electrotherapy a few times and it didn't do a bit of good, so I went to Dr. Hsi Fu-yi and got a packet of Chinese herbal medicine; it seems to be working all right." (General P'u)

He finished the herbal broth and resumed the game. After some twenty moves, one of the Commissioner's corners was besieged; completely cut off. He toyed with the go-pebbles in the bowl and pondered for ten minutes or so before he could lay down another piece.
"Your Excellency — " He looked up and found his
dozing off, his head bowed. He rose in a
hurry, went over and called softly in his Excellency's ear.

"Your Excellency — "

"Eh?" His Excellency P'u opened his drowsy eyes and
murmured, "Is it my move now?"

"Your Excellency must take a rest. I've imposed on
you all afternoon. I think I'd better say goodbye now.
Besides, there are still a lot of things I have to see to
over at my Mentor's."

His Excellency hesitated for a moment and stood up.

"Well, all right, why don't you keep today's latest
position in mind. Next time you come, we'll finish what's
left of the game."

The old general walked his guest as far as
the courtyard, the Commissioner asked him over and over
to stop, but His Excellency paid him no mind and walked
straight to the main gate. As he reached the gate he
stopped, as if he had thought of something.
"The twenty-fifth of next month is your teacher's 'Seventh Seven.'"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Does your teacher's family plan to perform it at home or at a temple?"

There was a touch of disconcertion on Commissioner Lei's face. He looked disconcerted at this question.

"I've discussed the matter with brother Chia-chi," he said at last. "He told me they've all become converted to Christianity and wouldn't want to perform Buddhist rites."

"Oh..." His Excellency nodded his head. "Well, then let's do it this way. We'll invite people in my name on that day and ask the monks at the Temple of Kindly Guidance to chant the sutras and perform the rites to release the soul from suffering for Meng-yang."

Next month also happens to be the first anniversary of Chung-mo's death, so I might as well perform the rites for both of them. I think Chung-mo's wife Yang Yun-hsiu would want to take part, too."
His Excellency leaned toward the Commissioner and spoke low in his ear. "Your teacher fought in battles his whole life, and he accumulated a heavy weight of karma for taking lives. When he was mortally ill he told me in confidence his conscience often troubled him. I made a vow on his behalf that I would copy a portion of the Diamond Sutra for him, and I've just finished it. On the day of the 'Seventh Seven' when they perform the Grand Penitential Mass will be the best time to take it to fulfill his vow."

Lai the orderly had called over the car to send the guest home. He opened the car door and stood waiting. As Commissioner Lei stooped to get in, His Excellency P'u called him back.

"There was another thing. Just before he died, your teacher expressed a last wish: In the future when we fight our way back to the homeland, no matter what, his body must be returned to his birthplace. Go tell his heirs they absolutely must have a full-dress military uniform for this purpose, and he wore frequently; his medals must be preserved as well."
When the time comes to move his body, his gear and his military regalia be displayed. decorations will be of utmost importance."

"Yes, Your Excellency, certainly, I shall see to it."

"Hmm... " His Excellency concluded, "When your teacher was alive he always held you in the highest regard. For his remaining affairs, please do your best to take care of them. If his heirs do anything inconsiderate, please try to bear with them and don’t take it to heart."

"Your Excellency rest entirely assured." Commissioner Lei bowed deeply to His Excellency P’u and got into the car.

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"Lai," ordered General P’u, after watching drive them. "Time to have served."

"Yessir, General." Lai snapped to attention, his back stooped. He trudged over to the gate and shut it.

By the time His Excellency P’u returned to the courtyard, a wintry evening breeze had risen; the purple bamboos rustled and shivered. In the western sky a spray of setting sunlight froze, bloodred. His Excellency strolled to a corner of
the courtyard, and paused. There stood a three-tiered black-painted iron flower stand on which were arranged nine pots of orchids, all superior Pure Hearts. The nine square flowerpots were white porcelain patterned with Mohammedan-blue dragons; the pots were filled with pieces of cold-fir bark. The orchids were already past their bloom; on the dried, brown stalks the three or so withered blossoms that remained gave out a faint wisp of cold fragrance. Only their sword-blade leaves still sprang up green and shining. His Excellency P'u stood long in contemplation before the bare orchids, hands clasped behind his back, his full silvery beard blown unfurling upward in the wind. Again his reminiscences of long-forgotten episodes from the Year of Hsin Hai half a century ago came flowing back to him, until his grandson Hsiao-hsien came and tugged at his sleeve, his hand on the boy's shoulder, the two of them, grandfather and grandson, went in to dinner together.
Dear Kenneth and Patia:

I'm sending herewith the revised "Dirge of Liang-fu". This is one of two or three elegiac pieces in the book, quite different in mood and language from the others we've treated so far. I find the translation suitably subdued and smoothly executed, but nevertheless have endeavored to sketch in the nuances and take care of some of the finer points....I hope!

A couple of technical problems are worthy of note: (1) The frequent appearances of the term P'u-kung, consisting of one character from a person's given name coupled with a form of address signifying esteem-cum-affection, as from a junior official to his superior and, among friends, from a younger to an older person and even as between those of the same generation. (For instance, the movie director King Hu has called me "K'e-kung", from my name --sometimes this form of address can be used in a half-humorous and intimate vein.)

To render it "Your Excellency", therefore, is not too apt because this carries more of an official flavor. But I cannot, for the life of me, think of a better solution. Still, I have counted no less than 82 times that either "Your Excellency" or "His Excellency" is used (see the numbers on the lefthand margins) -- an average of almost 3 per ms. page. Sometimes (as on p.16, p.20) several of these "Excellencies" come bunched together. This seems to me to spoil the whole effect and a definite no-no! I have tried to attack the problem from another angle -- to retain the term but lessen its frequency. I have retained it in all cases of direct address from Commissioner Lei--i.e. "Your Ex." -- and in a few places of "His Ex." coming in close proximity where the viewpoint is still that of the Commissioner. I have removed it in all cases where the omniscient narrator is talking, and changed it into "General P'u", "the General", and occasionally "the old general" or "the old soldier". This cuts the number of "Excellencies" by more than half (those retained are circled), thus making the text less cumbersome and more readable.

I think this device has the additional advantage of making the role and personality of our chief character--P'u-kung--more concrete. We know that he was a General in his active career, had been a revolutionary when young, and now a venerable old soldier and elderstatesman. By contrast, no matter how many times he is referred to as "His Excellency", he remains a somewhat fuzzy character.

(2) The need for some footnotes--a problem I have raised before. This story in particular contains so many allusions that a few key references must be footnoted so that our reader won't be entirely lost. One is the "Liang-fu" in the title; its clarification is essential because nowhere do we find the term in the story. My footnotes are, of course, subject to revision, but I don't think we need to explicate all of the story's allusions, metaphors, symbolisms, etc.--that's the role of a literary critic like Ouyang Tzu--but some basic things pertaining to the Republican Revolution and the Peach Garden Oath should be briefly annotated. (I have not done them all.) The fact that this book will be published by a university press makes it less objectionable to include a few footnotes.

Kenneth: Thank you for your letter of Oct. 22 and the copy of "Winter Night". I'll probably do that next. I will send a final revised copy of "Blossom Bridge" to Lyell, with a covering letter explaining our process (editorial). I forgot to respond to your previous letter re title. TALES OF TAIPEI CHARACTERS is fine with me--somewhat reminiscent of Michener/Tales of the South Pacific.

All the best to you both,

Yours truly,

[Signature]

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