

A Battle for Life

Ba Jin

1958

Contents

Foreward	3
1. “The Masses Are the Hero of the Drama”	4
2. A Critically Burned Steel Worker	5
3. “The Furnace Cannot Go On Without Me”	6
4. “Many People Were Concerned and Helped Him”	8
5. Thousands of Hearts	10
6. “The Party Is My First Life”	12
7. Stubbornly He Lives On	13

Foreward

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

During the course of treatment which saved this steel worker's life, the Kwangtze Hospital received enthusiastic support and commendation from people in all walks of life. A very deep impression was made on some foreign friends who visited the hospital, by this marvel of healing. Dr. J. S. Horn, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, after checking the record of the treatment, said: "I consider the treatment to be outstandingly good. I have never seen a burned patient who received such excellent treatment and minute care." Professor De Rudler, Director of the Surgical Department of Geneva University in Switzerland, after personally examining the patient, said: "The treatment given is excellent. You observe the change of symptoms more thoroughly and carefully than we do." Later in talking with Professor Fu Pei-pin he again remarked: "In your country where flies and mosquitoes can be exterminated, anything can be done." A French correspondent Monsieur Robert Clarke said: "The fact that Chiu Tsai-kang whose burns extended over more than 80 per cent of his body was saved is regarded internationally as a rare occurrence." Again he reported: "In France, a certain locomotive engineer who was no more than 50 per cent burned died, notwithstanding the fact that fifteen workers volunteered to offer their blood and skin for transfusion and grafting."

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

Such marvels should no longer be regarded as "accidental" in China today. Following Chiu Tsai-kang's case the Kwangtze Hospital later saved sixteen patients with severe burns, sent there from other places. Among them was an army officer by the name of Teng Ming-chi whose burns covered 94 per cent of his body, 10 per cent being third degree burns, who did not arrive in the hospital until seven hours after the accident occurred. Owing to the fact that a summary of their experiences under the leadership of the Party had already been made by the medical workers who had saved Chiu Tsai-kang, Teng Ming-chi recovered steadily and satisfactorily after he once entered the hospital. Instances from other places in the country prove that even smaller and less adequately equipped hospitals are quite capable of saving critically burned patients just as the

Kwangtze Hospital did. Since May 1958 when the saving of Chiu Tsai-kang's life caused a furore in the whole country, hospitals in cities like Tzupo, Chinchow, Hsuanhua, and some medium and small-sized hospitals in the Tungchow District of Peking and the Yushihpao mining area, have all saved the lives of critically burned patients. For instance, Chin Hsueh-chih, a chemical worker of Peking' was burned over 85 per cent of his body, 60 per cent being second degree and 20 per cent third degree burns. Benefiting by the experience of the Kwangtze Hospital, the Tungchow District Hospital finally succeeded in curing Chin Hsueh-chih.

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

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

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

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

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

A joint consultation of medical and surgical specialists was held that evening on the roof garden outside the isolation ward and the consultation was not concluded until midnight. This was already 36 days after Lao Chiu's admission to the hospital. His condition appeared to be worse this day. His right leg had become seriously infected. The polymyxin applied hitherto could no longer control the bacillus pyocyaneus which had developed a strong resistance to polymyxin. On the same afternoon a new kind of bacteriophage had been given a trial. This kind of medicine was made experimentally by the professors and students of the No. 2 Medical College specially for Lao Chiu. It was very effective when it was tested in the tube, destroying a culture of the bacillus pyocyaneus from Lao Chiu's body. But the doctors were not certain whether it would be effective when used clinically. These twenty-four hours were a critical period for Lao Chiu. When the doctors who participated in the consultation were leaving, not a smile appeared on any face. Everybody seemed to pin his hope on "tomorrow."

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

2. A Critically Burned Steel Worker

This bitter struggle for life commenced in the small hours of May 26, 1958. About one o'clock that night an ambulance pulled up before the doors of the Kwangize Hospital on Juichin Road. Three stretchers were carried down and taken into the emergency office. Three patients were escorted by Dr. Li and nurses on duty at the clinic of the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works, who were all steel workers burned by molten steel about one hour earlier. One case was fairly light but the other two were serious. The faces of the two critically burned workers were swollen to an enormous size and large sections of their bodies were deeply scorched. The skin on their lower limbs was charred and they were unable to move their hands which were lifted high up over their heads. The taller one of the two most badly burned men was grinding his teeth continually. However, he not only refrained from yelling out with pain, but encouraged his two fellow-workers to try and bear their suffering in the same way. He was the 29-year-old Chiu Tsai-kang, a member of the Communist Party and also an excellent team leader who worked at a Bessemer converter.

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

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

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

But the Party organization of the hospital would not agree to such a pessimistic view. The secretary of the general Party branch and the assistant secretary of the medical department branch immediately summoned the doctors treating the patients for a talk, and following that a meeting of all the responsible doctors was convened. The problem was analyzed from a class viewpoint, and it was stressed that in capitalist countries it was impossible to obtain the full use of all resources to save the lives of burned workers, but that in our socialist country it was possible to mobilize everything available to save them. For this reason we should not always accept the medical statistics of capitalist countries and allow them to influence us. The Party secretary called the attention of the doctors specially to the following points: First, that they must try to rid themselves of their blind reliance on established bourgeois medical experience, and they must try to think, speak and act in bold new ways. Secondly, they must follow the mass line and depend more upon the power of the people. Finally he said, "The Party will do everything possible to save these steel workers who have created vast wealth for the nation."

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

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

3. "The Furnace Cannot Go On Without Me"

After the patients' admission to the hospital a special treatment group was organized with four surgeons in charge, namely, the head and assistant head of the surgical department and two young doctors. When they accepted their assignments they were not very confident, especially the assistant head surgeon who simply believed in his own past experience, in the statistics of international medical literature, and in the medical equipment and resources of the hospitals in capitalist countries. Therefore when he first heard the talk of the vice-superintendent, who was the secretary of the general Party branch, he had some inner feeling of resistance. He thought to

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

himself, "This is simply coercing people to try and do the impossible! But since I have accepted the assignment I'll do what I can. At any rate, the patients will die either in the shock stage or later." With such downhearted feelings he entered the ward to see his patients.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, now there are four fingers."

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

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

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

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

Later the assistant chief surgeon told people that he had been a surgeon for eleven years, had seen not a few patients die and consequently had become quite cold and indifferent. He was interested only in diseases as such and had no feelings for his patients as people. But what Chiu Tsai-kang had said impressed him deeply. Even after he left the patient's room he thought it over for quite a long while. Here was a man awaiting death who had to clench his teeth to endure the searing pain of his whole body, but who constantly had the nation's steel production on his mind and who wholeheartedly desired to return to his furnace. In the past, he had read of people with such public spirit and unselfish character only in novels. He had regarded them as nothing but ideal, imaginary creations of literary writers. Now he has seen such a hero in the flesh with his own eyes. He was convinced that this man ought to live and that he was needed for the country's steel industry. He was determined to do his best to save him, but how? The more he thought the more he felt that he could not find a way out. When alone he secretly shook his head. But suddenly he recalled the analysis made by the Party secretary regarding "two kinds of social system, two attitudes, and therefore two different results." He felt as if he had seen a ray of light

in the darkness. He said to himself, “Lao Chiu can endure pain of such magnitude, and in spite of his burns he is always thinking of going back to the furnace. He wants to live. Why should he not be able to live?” That moment, suddenly the doctor and the patient were drawn closely together. From then on, the doctor thought of the patient often and also tried to compare himself with Lao Chiu. The more he compared the more he felt ashamed of himself and the more eager he was to do his best for this worker. So, from the very first day the assistant surgeon learned something from his patient.

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

4. “Many People Were Concerned and Helped Him”

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

This was a good beginning. All the outmoded rules of the hospital were broken. Minds which had been tied down by subservience to foreign experience were now set in motion. People began to speak, to think and to act boldly. A new world opened in front of them. They knew that what they were doing now was something unprecedented which doctors in capitalist countries had not been able to do. They were engaged in a battle to save lives and as the scope of the battle became

wider an increasing number of people were drawn in. Later on when a difficulty occurred in the course of treatment they solicited the opinions of many doctors both within and without the hospital, depending on the wisdom of the many to tide over one crisis after another.

The patient was now moved from the ward for serious cases to a strictly sterilized operating room, the bandages were removed and exposure treatment commenced. Air-conditioning in the operating room was strictly controlled to help diminish the high temperature of the patient's body and at the same time, to ensure that the exposed muscles were not injured by cool air. Doctors and nurses did their best to find ways and means of mitigating the patient's suffering.

During the first few days the patient needed a large volume of blood plasma. The doctors made a request to the blood bank and the staff in charge immediately replied without any hesitation, "All right, any time you want it we are prepared." As a matter of fact, they made arrangements so that when the hospital's supplies of blood and serum ran low, other institutions quickly sent more from their laboratories. A difficult after-effect of severe burns is the patient's total loss of appetite. In order to arouse his desire for food, the head nurse sent for the menus of Shanghai's best restaurants and they were read aloud to him over and over again. Gradually the nurses succeeded in arousing his interest in some dishes, which they immediately ordered and tried to feed to him.

Three days were safely passed and the first round was won. Needless to say everybody's confidence increased. The patient's condition began to improve and the doctors learned more themselves day by day. The changes in the chief and the assistant chief surgeon were most noticeable. At first they felt that they were just fulfilling their duty to the injured worker but were very dubious about the result. But then, full of confidence they really began doing their best. Formerly although they were interested medically, they were rather indifferent to the patient himself. Now they were filled with love and respect for him. In the course of the treatment they realized more deeply than ever the superiority of socialism, which the Party secretary emphasized so often. Later the assistant chief surgeon declared at a public meeting, "When I think that so many people are concerned about him and ready to help I begin to feel stronger. I feel a new source of strength in my heart." This man who had never believed in medical marvels before was now wholeheartedly taking his part in this extraordinary battle to save a life. This even he himself never dreamed of in the beginning!

Indeed the masses were stirred into action. The whole hospital, the whole medical world and the whole society of Shanghai, were all supporting this battle to save life. The whole body of doctors, nurses and others of the Kwangtze Hospital continually offered proposals whereby their collective and creative labor might help to protect the patient in passing through his second big crisis, namely, infection by bacillus pyocyaneus.

In order to effectively control the bacillus pyocyaneus, the Kwangtze Hospital began to make combined antibiotic sensitivity tests. This was proposed by a professor of the Shanghai No. 1 Medical College. This professor had conducted research studies in antibiotics before. He did not only take part in every joint consultation, but also came every other day to the Kwangtze Hospital to make suggestions as if the patient were his own. In addition he also asked the help of his own hospital in conducting experiments. Later a total of 58 different experiments were made for the production of an effective drug for the control of bacillus pyocyaneus septicemia. In this way polymyxin was decided upon.

To help the patient resist infection the doctors began skin-grafting. On June 5, the first grafting took place. The chief surgeon, assistant chief and other doctors and nurses worked at high tension

for a whole night. From 10:30 p.m. till 5:00 the next morning, they cut off the burnt tissue and grafted healthy skin to his hands and legs. Many people asked to have their skin used. At noon on that day, an old woman died in the hospital. Her husband willingly offered her skin, saying, "She would be glad to help a hero who's building socialism." The first attempt at skin-grafting proved successful. Eleven days after, on June 16, the second grafting began. On that the number of applicants offering their skin increased to more than 800. The time for grafting was in the afternoon but at twelve o'clock, people began to line up waiting to be chosen. A nurse attending Lao Chiu wrote in her diary, "I put down my name at noon. I wanted to have my skin grafted on Lao Chiu's body. My skin is good and is certainly fitted for the need. Even to do one helpful thing for Lao Chiu is glorious." The doctors finally decided to use the skin of four persons, three of whom were nurses. The fine hair on a portion of their skin was shaved and the skin prepared in readiness for the operation. But at that very moment a child died in the hospital. It was possible to use this child's skin on Lao Chiu's back and it obviated the need to use the skin of living persons.

On June 21 the doctors decided to give two healthy volunteers for blood donation an injection of a combination of three bacterial vaccines. It was believed that as a result, their blood would contain anti-bodies which would kill the bacteria in Lao Chiu's blood and increase his power of resistance. As soon as this news spread, the students and nurses of the Shanghai No. 2 Medical College hastened to volunteer. Two girl students who were lucky enough to be chosen waited impatiently for a reaction. They kept asking each other, "Do you feel bad?" "Have you got a fever yet?" hoping that the higher the fever developed the better the response. The transfusion was given and after three days they returned to school. One afternoon they came to the veranda outside the window of the isolation ward to see Lao Chiu. He was still lying in bed and was unable to move his head at all. When he heard from the nurse that these two girls had given their blood to him he opened his eyes to look at them trying to express his thanks by a smile.

5. Thousands of Hearts

There is also a special story about the turning bed. Lao Chiu's burns were so extensive that, with the exception of his scalp, two shoulders, the waist where his leather belt was worn and the soles of his feet, practically his whole body was affected. His back and hips were burned deeply and his right leg was even worse. Every time it was necessary to turn him over and change his dressings ten doctors and five nurses were required and the process took several hours. Moreover, the patient suffered very much and was short of breath for a long while. When he slept face up, his back became seriously infected; if he were turned over it was bad for his chest. In order to reduce his suffering and expedite healing, it was necessary to make a specially designed bed. The doctors found a picture of such a bed in a foreign book and accordingly assigned the job to the technicians of the hospital saying that it was required the next day.

As soon as the technicians learned that this bed was for Lao Chiu they immediately set to work. On the basis of that rather indistinct picture and according to the patient's size they made a rough sketch in the workshop. They started working at two o'clock in the afternoon and the bed was finished the next morning at seven.

An air mattress for the bed was designed and made by the Shanghai No. 2 Plastic Works. In the afternoon of the same day a doctor had hurried over to the Plastic Works to arrange

for the making of an air mattress. Unfortunately it was the workers' day off. But when the manager learned that the air mattress was for the burned steel worker, he immediately called some workers living nearby. The request of the hospital was made clear to them and they started to work, designing as fast as they could. By one o'clock in the morning they had finished the job and a brand-new soft air mattress, a type that had never been seen in Shanghai before, made its appearance.

An hour later the doctor brought it back to the hospital. Although it was two o'clock in the morning, lights were still on in the courtyard in front of the hospital workshop. Everyone worked with extreme intensity and showed not the slightest fatigue. Now the bed was made, the air mattress was put on it, and everybody tried to lie on it to feel if it were comfortable. It took only two minutes to turn the patient over. Even after the bed had been moved into the operating room still the technicians did not feel quite satisfied. Quietly they stood by the door of the room, waiting for somebody to come out, so that they might ask whether the bed was all right. The manager of the Plastic Works also rang up to inquire whether the air mattress was satisfactory. If not, he said, they would try to make a better one.

The turning bed served its purpose very well, and when Lao Chiu was moved from the operating room to the isolation ward the bed also went with him.

Another of the numerous moving incidents connected with the hospital happened before this turning bed was made. The doctors had been over to the Shanghai Medical Instruments Factory to look for a suitable bed there. They had a bed for fracture patients. When they learned that the hospital needed it, many workers racked their brains to remodel it in order to make it possible for Lao Chiu to sleep comfortably. Late that night, after the bed had been delivered to the hospital, an old worker who had been involved in the job of designing, came to the hospital from the Yangshupu District. He declared, "When I returned home from work I thought that it might be uncomfortable for the patient to sleep in this way. I thought it would be better to put in a few alternating wooden boards for turning purposes." To obtain these special wooden boards, he had crossed the greater part of Shanghai. He made a sketch of his scheme and he said that if he hadn't come over he would have been unable to sleep in peace that night.

Once the patient needed a very special type of medicine but it was out of stock in Shanghai. The Shanghai Pharmaceutical Company immediately cabled to Canton and the Canton office at once sent it by plane. Within three days the medicine was in the hands of the doctor.

Another night a member of the nutrition department of the hospital went over to a restaurant to buy fish ball soup, a special delicacy, for Lao Chiu. The restaurant had just shut down and had put out its cooking stove. When the cooks heard that Lao Chiu wanted fish ball soup they started the fire again and began to work immediately. There was no fresh fish on hand so they went out to borrow some from another restaurant. The whole staff of 57 workers prepared these fish balls with a special message to Lao Chiu. "Each fish ball represents a heart and is offered to you to express our love and sympathy." They chose two delegates to deliver the fish ball soup to the hospital in person.

Moving stories of this kind are too numerous to mention. Not only 57, but thousands and tens of thousands of hearts were concerned about Lao Chiu and it seemed as though everybody was waiting for an opportunity to do something for him. Letters of consolation and encouragement came from all over the country indicating that everybody wanted him to live. Young Pioneers continually wrote letters urging the doctors to do their utmost. The whole staff of many medical units sent in letters expressing their devotion, "We are willing to offer him everything, our skin,

our blood and our strength. It would be our greatest honor if we could have a small share in the arduous task of saving our beloved Comrade Chiu Tsai-kang.”

Such is our people’s concern for the fast developing steel industry and such is our people’s love for the noble qualities and heroic spirit of our steel warriors.

6. “The Party Is My First Life”

During all these days Lao Chiu was lying on the bed suffering continual pain. The doctors and nurses did their utmost to reduce his suffering to the minimum, but they could not completely relieve it. Even the chief surgeon said once, “When we were healing him I often thought that if another person was in his place he certainly would not have stood it so long, but Lao Chiu endured everything. When I saw him grinding his teeth to suppress his groans, I felt so touched that the tears fell from my eyes.” Indeed he suffered great pain for a long period. While changing the dressings even laughing gas anesthesia could not keep him quiet. Sometimes these pains were so intense that his whole body trembled uncontrollably. Sometimes in trying to bear his pains he would shout, “Come over, Chairman Mao! Come over, Chairman Mao!” As soon as he mentioned Chairman Mao’s name it gave him courage and he felt he could stand even greater pain.

In the very beginning when he lay panting for breath, his pain seemed to be intolerable. When the secretary of the Party committee of the Shanghai No. 2 Medical College came to see him, he told him, “You believe in the Party when you are at work. You must also believe in the Party when you are sick.” He then promised the secretary that he would endure even greater bodily pains if necessary.

One time his condition became worse and even the assistant chief surgeon was alarmed and considered the battle as hopeless. Lao Chiu himself also realized the gravity of the situation and said to his wife, “It looks as though my condition is very critical and the two children will be left in your hands.” That evening the assistant secretary of the general Party branch came to see him and Chiu revealed what was in his mind. The secretary encouraged him to have faith and said, “You will certainly recover. With the Party by your side what problem cannot be solved?” He listened to the words of the Party just like a child listening to his mother. So once again he became optimistic. The Party always advised him to have confidence in and to cooperate with the doctors. In this respect he behaved unusually well all the way through. For instance, although changing the dressing was always extremely painful, he said to the doctors, “Go ahead! How can the burns be cured without changing dressings?” In swallowing food, the movement of his neck also caused considerable pain and for this reason he was reluctant to eat. But in order to get well, he needed plenty of nutritious food. From the moment the secretary of the Party committee persuaded him to eat, he took it as a serious duty and tried to do it. But he could not eat enough to supply the amount of nutrition he needed. The doctors had to insert a stomach tube through his nose and give him additional nourishment. The presence of this tube increased his difficulty in breathing, but nevertheless he accepted the directive of the Party and endured the discomfort without any complaint.

When his wife came to see him in the hospital for the first time he reminded her, “Pretty soon it would be the fifth day of the month. Remember to pay my Party membership dues for me. Do not let others advance the money. Pay it out of our own cash.” Then he continued, “Do not forget. The Party is my life.”

He regarded the Party as his life, so he always listened to the words of Party representatives. Indeed his desire to live was for the Party and also for the work which the Party entrusted to him.

Once Lao Chiu told a young doctor about his former life. He said, "In the past I was a miserable man. I suffered much in the old society." He was a poor peasant on Chungming Island at the mouth of the Yangtze River and was pressganged into the Kuomintang army. He escaped and went back home. Then he did some peddling in Shanghai, served as a boy on a steamship, drifting about here and there without any fixed occupation. Then liberation came. In 1951 he entered the Shanghai No. 1 Steel Works as an apprentice and very quickly became a skilled worker. He joined the New Democratic Youth League in 1952 and the Party in 1955. In 1956 he was transferred to the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works and afterwards served as the team leader of a group working at a Bessemer converter.

When the accident occurred in the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Works he was covered with flames. He crawled out from a small window and rolled down from the platform still in flames. The workers held him, extinguished the flames and he then became unconscious. When he came to, he immediately thought about the steel furnace and the production target for the year. He hoped to return to the steel works at the earliest date. When his fellow-workers came to see him, he encouraged them saying, "Don't be afraid, accidents like this happen very seldom. Do not be scared and feel discouraged. Try to work still more energetically." When the Party secretary of the No. 3 Steel Works came to see him he said regretfully, "I am afraid our target for this month cannot be reached." He often talked about going back to the steel works to help overtake Britain in steel production.

At night he sometimes cried out in his dreams, "Molten iron! Molten iron! Release the ladle a little and push the wagon nearer!" It sounded as if he were directing his work beside the converter. Once when he woke up, his wife who was by his side, asked him what he was talking about, saying, "You seemed to be in your workshop." He replied: "I have been there all along."

Even while he was enduring terrible pain, his mind remained perfectly clear. Flat on the bed, unable to move, his whole body sore and trembling, he never forgot to care for others and help them. His mind was active all the time. As a nurse said: "He always looked at problems from a political point of view. Very often he would offer his opinions on a subject; sometimes they were sharp but correct." He behaved like this when he worked in the foundry and also when he was sick in the hospital.

One day a young nurse was reading the papers to him and all she read was the light news. He said: "When you read the papers you ought to read the editorials first, then the great events of the nation and then international news."

Lao Chiu was this kind of a person. While lying in the isolation ward of the Kwangtze Hospital he acted not like a patient but rather as a responsible political instructor. All along he kept his mind on the work of ideological education. He continually used his own living example, his sharp criticism and concrete suggestions to help educate and to unite all who had direct or indirect contacts with him. They all loved him, respected him and developed deep friendships with him.

7. Stubbornly He Lives On

The battle to save life is still going on. Up till now Lao Chiu has already lived for forty-four days. He lives on stubbornly and endures all suffering. Already he has become a banner, a fresh red

banner. Many people regard him as a source of encouragement and as a model for them. Many consider him as a personification of the noble qualities of the working class and as a shining example of the great spirit of communism.

This battle to save life will eventually be won. The fact that Lao Chiu has lived until now is already a medical marvel. He has passed through one crisis after another and later he may face still more. But he will certainly live. Blind faith in established experience has been shattered, outmoded regulations have been smashed. The Kwangtze Hospital in Shanghai has really waged and won two battles: a critically burned patient lives, while the doctors who were healing the patient have been educated by him. The malady of the doctors was by no means lighter than the patient's burns for the disease of these intellectuals was in their minds and had been there for a considerable length of time. If any intellectual were in Lao Chiu's place and compared himself with this worker, he would certainly realize his own limitations. When he analyzed his own problems he would be willing to correct them.

This battle for life is pushing forward the whole of Kwangtze Hospital, and the whole medical profession of Shanghai. The fact that this battle has been so victorious and has had such a great influence, is not due to any individual doctor's effort. In such an arduous struggle, the role of the individual is very limited. Let me recall the words of the secretary of the Party committee of the Shanghai No 2 Medical College: "Only when the masses were aroused under the leadership of the Party, with one mind and one goal, could such a force be generated."

Therefore although the writer of the scenario had made Lao Chiu the leading character of his play, what he emphasized was the role of the people, of the masses of socialist society.

July 9 1958.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Ba Jin
A Battle for Life
1958

Retrieved on 24 November 2010 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

usa.anarchistlibraries.net