

# THE OTHER CHINA

## Hunger: Part II

### The Case of the Missing Beggars

Miriam London and Ivan D. London

It's nothing new in Chinese history to impress the foreigner for the sake of the country's face," said a young escaper last year in Hong Kong, who by no means intended to denigrate his country. "When people from other countries came to the ancient capital of Ch'ang An in the Tang Dynasty, it was so gorgeously decorated, those foreigners were astounded....If the rulers today desire not to let foreigners see anyone wearing patched clothes, that can easily be arranged. And if they want to show foreigners trees in Peking with silk hanging from the branches, that is also possible."

Visitors from afar viewing today what B. Michael Frolic describes as "the peaceful blues and grays and whites of Chinese cities" would certainly smile at the thought of brocades waving in the breeze. Aside from the exquisite dishes served at guest banquet tables—if the guests are important enough to rate the exquisite—there are no wondrous luxuries to report. Instead, many visitors note something quite plain in aspect, but a great miracle for China, nonetheless—an apparent equalization of living standards on a low but secure level and the elimination of outright hunger. The often-cited proof of this quiet but enormous achievement is the total absence of beggars.

By beggars we do not mean that small scattering of "professionals" and mentally or physically damaged unfortunates who can be found in many a flourishing metropolis worldwide, although even these, curiously, are almost never seen in the large Chinese cities normally open to foreigners—notably Peking, Shanghai, and Canton. We refer, instead, to those beggars whom the Chinese describe as *t'ao huang*—literally "in flight from famine (or disaster)"—peasants driven in large numbers from ancestral regions devastated by flood,

drought, or insect plague, and forced temporarily to roam the land and beg for their daily food.

The phenomenon of *t'ao huang* was not a fluke in Chinese history, but a common aftermath of recurring natural calamities. In *The History of Salvaging Natural Disaster in China* (1958) Teng Yün-t'e states that over a period of 2,142 years, from 206 B.C. to A.D. 1936, 1,035 droughts and 1,037 floods were recorded. On the average one province has been hard hit every year.

There is no indication that Heaven has relented since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, nor has the present regime, for all its determined effort, been able to set up effective terrestrial defenses. The Party has, in fact, managed inadvertently to add to natural damage through excess zeal unsupported by expertise: During the Great Leap Forward bungled irrigation projects made the water table rise in the North China plain, ruining large areas where wheat once grew.

Since the 1960-62 period of "natural disasters" mention of flood or drought has seldom surfaced in the national press, except in a context of militant optimism—that is, in feature stories describing the heroic reversal of some local catastrophe (thus revealed) by ideologically primed cadres and "class comrades." As in the Soviet Union, negative events as such are not major news, and the precise extent of damage or loss of life and property entailed is not publicly reported. Partial information does come through to Hong Kong, however, from official local sources. L. La Dany has listed and collated numerous details on natural disasters obtained from monitored provincial radio broadcasts. For example, from Honan and Anhwei alone—the two provinces most frequently mentioned as perennial disaster areas by Chinese emigrants and escapers—the following more recent information has accumulated: Flood or drought occurred in Anhwei during 1968, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1975; in Honan during 1968, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1975.

Against this background the remark of a young Chinese emigrant, interviewed in Hong Kong last year, does not seem exaggerated: "A classmate of mine in

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Shanghai always traveled through the eastern part of Honan, near Shantung and Anhwei, whenever he took a train home. Each time his train passed through Honan he found disaster there—either flood or drought.”

On January 24, 1975, *China News Analysis* stated that, despite the continued deployment of millions into water control projects, “...security against natural disasters is still far away. A whole series of reports containing casual references to such events could be collected. The disasters in Hupei in 1972 were widely publicized in the province. In the same year, 1972, the Hwai River burst its banks. There was a flood in the region of Nanking in the same year and many houses collapsed. In 1973 drought was reported in the region of the Hwai River; there was serious flooding in Kiangsi and in the region of Nanning, the capital of Kwangsi Province. Last year the *People's Daily* mentioned flooding in Kiangsu Province and the neighboring province of Shantung. Kiangsu Province itself reported eight million *mou* (1.3 million acres) flooded. There was also a big flood along the Yangtze and Han Rivers in Hupei, and in Sinkiang drought threatened the livestock. This sad list is not complete....”

**I**n the past such natural adversity brought great human misery. Is it possible that China, which emerged impoverished from the crisis years of 1959-62, has since prospered enough to absorb these constant blows and provide effective relief for the victimized populations?

Given the “black curtain of statistical secrecy” that has been lowered over the Chinese economy since 1960, Western economists’ varying estimates of China’s ability to feed itself have been admittedly speculative. However, no matter how the “probable” figures for grain production and population are tested against variously estimated inputs, such as acreage sown to different crops and the increased use of chemical fertilizers, high yield seed and mechanization, the end result falls gloomily short of abundance. The question seems rather to be whether or not China is making it. At best, China appears to have been running very hard in order to stand still. In 1971 Chu-yuan Cheng, assessing the first two decades of Chinese economy under Communist control, concluded that “in terms of per capita food grain availability, the 1968 figure was the same as that of 1955; in other words, on a per capita basis, Chinese grain production during the past thirteen years achieved no growth at all.” Nai-ruenn Chen and Walter Galenson, in their analysis of the range estimates of food availability in 1965 as compared with 1957—the most optimistic of which reflects no growth on a per capita basis—showed that even the higher estimates imply a low daily caloric intake of only 2,000 per capita. Finding this datum too bleak to accept, Chen and Galenson concluded hopefully that “from what is generally known of the Chinese food situation” the Chinese peasants must be “enjoying an adequate diet in 1965.” In 1973 Alexander Eckstein wrote that, “...while farm production [in China] increased by about 30 to 55 per cent...between 1950 and 1970, population rose by an estimated 45 per cent. This would suggest that food supply may have lagged behind

population growth, or at best kept slightly ahead of it.” This conclusion, however, he added in a footnote, “is not borne out by the visual observation of all those who have visited China in recent years, including myself. Food seems abundant in all cities of China accessible to foreigners....”

Despite the close agreement in the findings of the respected economists cited above, it is interesting that, in two cases, the statistical data—avowedly speculative as they are—appear to bow to contradictory “general” impressions and “visual observation.” And yet, as will be seen, the contradiction may only be a function of arbitrary limits set on knowledge.

According to Chen and Galenson, in 1957, at the end of the first Five Year Plan, the Chinese people were close to the “traditional” margin of subsistence. On December 19 of that year a *People's Daily* editorial reported that in the early autumn of 1957, 110,000 people had fled into the cities from villages in Shantung, Honan, Anhwei, and Kiangsu, despite government efforts to prevent the exodus and to turn back those already in the cities. Some of these people, the editorial stated, came from areas struck by natural disasters. The four provinces mentioned are, in fact, known to all Chinese for recurrent devastation in the regions of the Hwai or Yellow Rivers.

At a time, therefore, statistically comparable in terms of per capita consumption to the mid-sixties and early seventies, we find an allusion to flight from disaster in the official Peking press. The same issue of *People's Daily* further reported that on December 18, 1957, the Party Central Committee and Cabinet issued a joint “Instruction on the Halting of the Outflow from the Villages,” directing that a stop be put to mass exodus in the four provinces named and also Hopei. It accordingly ordered the setting up of “Exhorting and Impeding Stations” along railway lines, highways, at river ports, and communication points between adjacent provinces. In the cities the police were directed to gather into camps all who had entered illegally.

Although more ambiguous and elusive, references to flight from disaster continued to appear in the Chinese media during the sixties and seventies. For example, on September 2, 1968, the Anhwei People’s Broadcasting Station revealed (as reported in *China News Analysis*) that “the Hwai River...had overflowed both banks. When the water receded...it was found that many farmers had emigrated to other regions. This was attributed to the incitement of the class enemy.” On April 20, 1970, the Hupei People’s Broadcasting Station issued what La Dany described as a “mystifying report” about a commune on the upper course of the Yangtze, in which “almost all the inhabitants, and even the Party branch, consisted of persons transferred from other places. No hint was given of what had happened to the original inhabitants of the locality, whether they had been removed elsewhere or perished in the floods [of 1969].” On June 4, 1972, the same provincial radio station referred again—in the context of “sabotage” by “class enemies”—to peasants abandoning the fields, at a time coincident with widespread drought in Hupei.

Persons who have left China during the past ten years



also consistently report regular defections of peasants from infertile regions in the North, where the annual harvest is normally insufficient to sustain the population for more than half a year. Repeated official exhortations in a number of provinces to "consume food grain sparingly" support the impression of food shortage between harvests.

Thus, a careful examination of Chinese sources alone suggests that somewhere, periodically, there are populations in distress. If Western analysts' calculations are, indeed, more accurate than they imagine, China's bare-subsistence economy has little or no slack to provide for adequate relief. Again, the authorities' constant emphasis on "self-aid," "self-reliance," and "not waiting for relief from the State" are remarkably confirmatory.

In an article published in the Hong Kong *Overseas Chinese Daily* [*Wah Kiu Yat Pao*] in 1974 Chai Yu-Kuei states, on the basis of his own past observation in China: "...the plain fact is that even in years of bumper harvests, there is not enough to feed all the people in the country. How can there be effective relief measures in bad years?"

If this is true, where are these people whom China, presumably, cannot feed? Or has speculative inference conjured up phantoms, to be readily dispelled by a visit to the People's Republic?

For the foreigner, the answer still lies at the end of a vicarious journey—and the process of discovery may duplicate that of many Chinese themselves.

**L**earning to "know reality" is not simple even for the insider. It is quite possible, particularly for young students, to live cheerfully ignorant, sheltered lives within the great privileged cities of China. Approved channels of information stop at provincial borders, and only Dame Rumor roams freely—a frequent passenger without travel permit on the trains between Canton, Shanghai, and Peking. The very young, however, tend to be insular and more neatly ideologized. During the worst years of economic collapse, when even Canton, for example, was under the shadow of famine, there were young people made to believe that the peasant beggars who suddenly appeared in the city were lazy "class enemies" deserving no pity, as the school authorities explained. "Under socialism

beggars could not possibly exist," one young Cantonese has said—and so they did not.

One day, not long after the desperate crisis of the early sixties had eased, a sensitive young Chinese traveled on official business to the mountain city of Hoyuan in Kwangtung Province. In his responsiveness to natural beauty, he might have been a young mandarin of a century ago, arriving to absorb the serenity and "mind-cleansing fragrance" of a mountain sojourn. He stayed, however, not at an ordinary inn, but at a County Party Committee guesthouse for out-of-town cadres. He was pleasantly accommodated. His first breakfast at the guesthouse included a "bowl of steamed rice and a side dish of four or five slices of fat pork on some tender green cabbage." Favorably impressed, he proceeded to complete his official business and then do some sight-seeing. He even joined a queue before a solitary, little shop selling popsicles and ice cream. Later he dined at an exclusive dining hall for visiting cadres, where, upon presenting the necessary coupons, he was served several dishes accompanied by rice and steamed buns. With a feeling of well-being he continued to wander about until sunset and came across some peasants on the outskirts of town.

"A few young peasants were loitering around the railroad station, offering clothes and other articles to travelers in exchange for food coupons. A peasant who looked about thirty years old began to pester me to 'buy' a pair of new blue cotton trousers for a 3-catty [3 x 1.1 lbs.] provincial food coupon. I finally told him that it was wrong to do such things. His only response was to lift his own patched trousers, revealing legs swollen from malnutrition. With a start, I also looked up for the first time into his pale and puffy face. The new trousers, he began to explain, had belonged to his older brother, who had died of edema a month before. His brother had saved them for three years, without wearing them once. I could not bear to listen any longer, nor could I meet his eyes. Thrusting a 5-catty coupon at him, I said, 'Stop spreading such rumors! The sort of thing you're saying just can't happen. Go back to your work and behave!'"

The speaker, however, was already in psychological retreat from his own words. Eventually, the pleasurable impressions of Hoyuan in its mountain freshness receded to the back of his mind as he "realized that, in reality, it

was a poor place.” (From an account by Huang Chai-chun, a colleague of the authors, published in the *Chung Pao Weekly*, Hong Kong, July 17, 1970.)

In 1964 a young Cantonese Ping-Pong player, on his way north to a match, suffered a more immediate shock as his train passed through Honan Province in the aftermath of a serious flood:

“I’d known about floods, but had been persuaded there was relief. Through the Party’s concern such problems were supposed to be solved. But as our train went through Honan, I saw corpses and people in flight from disaster everywhere. There were half-naked people along the tracks begging for food. The train passengers—mostly Party cadre—were moved to pity and threw food out the windows. Groups of people fought over the food.... On our way back home through this area, the window shades were ordered drawn, and we weren’t permitted to look outside.... Afterward, Party officials forbade us to talk about what we had seen.”

It is interesting to couple the above scene with the implications of a statement published in *China News Analysis* on September 6, 1963: “It is widely believed abroad that the government provides food to suffering areas. In fact, regions which had a bad harvest in autumn 1962 have lived in misery throughout the winter, even when other regions in the same province were less short of food. To quote an example, Sui-hsi County in Kwangtung Province was encouraged ‘to organize the masses for self-relief’....”

**I**n 1966-68 the impressions of a comparative handful of travelers were to be multiplied into the millions. Red Guards from every part of China packed the trains and flocked to the open roads during the so-called great “linkups”—journeys undertaken for the “exchange of revolutionary experience.” They were not the only masses on the move. Taking advantage of the chaos and breakdown of control in many towns, where the security police themselves were frequently embattled, destitute peasants left ungrateful fields to wander abroad and beg for sustenance.

A former Red Guard from Canton relates the following:

“At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in June, 1966, beggars were a rare sight in Canton. But by mid-1967 beggars were swarming into the city from provinces to the north—Honan, Hupei, Hunan. The majority were young, but many came in families. They slept in the streets and sneaked into tea houses and small restaurants, where they ate leftovers. But soon it got to the point where beggars entered restaurants openly. They’d sit or stand opposite you while you were eating and also took away your food before you had finished. We Kwangtung people are clean, and those beggars soon learned we couldn’t eat from a bowl once they’d touched it. Several times when my friends and I had a snack in some eatery, our food was grabbed halfway through the meal. If the beggars were older and had little children with them, we’d let them; we even bought more bread, rice, or noodles for them. But we felt it wasn’t right when a healthy-looking young fellow took our food away. I

wondered about those outsiders. Though they were in rags, they were big, husky fellows with ruddy faces—in fact, they looked better than we Cantonese. So we stopped being polite after a while and gave them a lesson. We asked them why they didn’t go back home and work. They said it was because the land was poor and there was no food there. At that time I didn’t believe them, but later I visited some of those places and found out that what they’d said was true.

“When I went through Hunan and Hupei on linkups, I saw the most beggars in Chuchow and in Hanyang. Chuchow is a railroad junction and very dirty. It was really a beggar’s world. You just couldn’t go anywhere to eat, because there were more beggars than customers in the restaurants. They were in rags and smelled bad. We Cantonese couldn’t even sit down in such places. So we stayed only a few hours.

“I avoided going to Honan because everyone warned me there were far more beggars there than anywhere else. Honan is probably the worst off of any province because of natural disasters. Some of my friends who did go to Honan didn’t dare stay. They jumped right back on the train and left.”

In 1967 a fourteen-year-old girl also traveled from Canton to nearby provinces:

“The first time I went with a propaganda team—you know, it puts on shows—because my girl friend was the team leader. She asked me to help arrange musicals. But I really wanted to go to see the world. My greatest impression was—I was so surprised to see that socialism, while it’s good in Canton, doesn’t work at all well in Hunan! Everything was still so desolate there. In many areas there was no place to eat. I stopped once at a private home, and I just couldn’t believe the poverty I saw. That family had nothing.... I was told about many natural disasters there—flood and drought and insects. I also picked up an old Hunan folk song and arranged it into a musical show.... I had another surprise—I saw beggars at Shaokuan [northern Kwangtung]! At first I didn’t realize they were beggars, because I’d always been told beggars are a product of capitalist society. While our team was eating, one boy about my age hung around and watched. I asked him why. He said he was hungry. He came from Hunan and was a beggar in Shaokuan. His father had died of hunger, and his mother had hanged herself. With his older brother he left his deserted village and hopped a train, but somehow they got separated in a crowd. How strange—that old Hunan song was about the feelings of a wanderer, cold and hungry, without a friend or relative. It really fit the description of that beggar boy.... Another time, on the way to Fukien, I was really surprised by the backwardness of Swatow and Changchow, which are important cities. Swatow, which is called “little Canton,” doesn’t come anywhere near Canton. Even sugarcane was scarce there and very expensive.... There were lots of beggars along the way on this trip, but they didn’t beg from us, because they knew they couldn’t get anything. We had few leftovers, because we had to use rice coupons to buy food. But after we finished eating, beggars nearby would come up to lick every bowl clean and chew over any leftover bones.”

“It wasn’t that I was altogether surprised by living conditions I saw during the linkups,” explains a former Red Guard from Fukien, “because I’d had a bad time myself during the famine [1960-62]. But I thought such conditions didn’t exist anymore. So I was, in a way, surprised to see how poorly peasants were still living in the border areas I visited of Szechwan, Hunan, and Kweichow. It was bad also in Anhwei and northern Kiangsu. The Anhwei peasants have food enough for only half a year; they go begging the other half.”

In his 1974 article on beggars witnessed during the linkups (published in Chinese in the *China Monthly*, Hong Kong), Chai Yu-kuei points up a phenomenon mentioned by others coming from China, namely, that groups of peasants have temporarily left their calamity-stricken villages to go begging with the permission of the commune cadres. One document reproduced by Chai translates as follows:

Chen X, native of X Brigade, X Commune, Sinsiang County, Honan Province, male, age 55, personal social background: poor peasant; position: Chairman of the Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants Association of X Brigade, X Commune. Because our commune has suffered from a locust plague, permission is hereby granted to the bearer of this letter to lead [poor and] lower-middle peasants from X Brigade to seek relief elsewhere. It is hoped that, during their travels, revolutionary comrades in other regions will provide them with food and shelter in the spirit of promoting class fraternity and of mutual help and cooperation.

With revolutionary salute,

[Poor and] Lower-Middle Peasant Association  
of X Brigade, X Commune, Sinsiang County,  
Honan Province

—Day —Month, 1967

The bearer of the above, a beggar whom Chai met while traveling through Mao Tse-tung’s native province of Hunan, was accompanied by two sons. He produced photographs of two other sons—one a “proud soldier in the People’s Liberation Army” and the second a Red Guard in the famed Tsinghua University Ching kangshan Rebel Faction. For the good fortune of these two children he was full of gratitude to Chairman Mao. As for his own lot, he could only weep in resignation: “With only hoes and waterwheels, how can you fight mother nature?...We cannot blame the government for everything.”

The decision to release peasants periodically for *t’ao huang* appears to have been strictly local, forced by hopeless agricultural conditions. How often peasants simply take off by themselves; whether all of these regularly return for the next harvest is not clear. A university student, taking a Yangtze River boat to Shanghai one day in the mid-sixties, observed a curious incident. When the boat drew near Chiuchiang in Kiangsi, a group of about forty ragged people came aboard. They had no tickets, and there were no places for them; they were simply herded onto the boat. One or two persons among them seemed to be in control of the

group, giving various instructions. On inquiring from one of these “leaders,” the student learned that these were peasants from Anhwei who had gone off (*t’ao huang*) to Kiangsi, where food was more sufficient. The “leaders” were village cadre members from Anhwei who had been sent to bring them back. The student reasoned that this must have been one group of many, picked up possibly after complaint from Kiangsi.

In 1968 a Canton middle-school student encountered beggars from Honan on his doorstep:

“They went around knocking at doors and asking in Mandarin for some cooked rice [*fan*] to eat. Whenever we young people were home, we’d give them some. Once I asked a group of beggars at the door why they’d come to Canton to beg. They said that for the last two years there’d been poor harvests in Honan. Their monthly grain allotment was not enough for even half a month. If they ate that food then and there, soon there would be nothing left and they would starve to death. So they hoarded the grain and left the province to beg. When they returned to do the spring sowing, they would depend on the hoarded food....Once I saw a family, around seven members in all, begging on the street. They said there was disaster all over Honan. When they left the village, they had already been living on edible grass and wild fruit for three months. About twenty-five of the three hundred or so people in the village had died from hunger. The government did try to help, but the relief grain was only nine catties, not enough. The village head told them there was no solution except to leave (*t’ao huang*) and come back around March....I asked the reason for the poor harvests, and they told me it was drought and locust plague. The locusts came down just like rain, they said, blacking out the sun. And when they left—like a gust of wind—everything growing in the fields had been devoured. I was fascinated, but it was so hard to believe at first. When I was a little boy, I used to go up the mountain to catch grasshoppers for our birds to play with. It was so hard to catch even one! How could there be so many and so big?!”

The contrast between the well-off major cities and impoverished villages of China, evident from much of the foregoing material, is intensely felt and vividly illustrated by Chai Yu-kuei. Upon describing a fourteen-year-old boy encountered on a train from Sian in Shensi, who was “already a four-year veteran as a beggar,” he writes: “When I was ten years old, I was only a spoiled mama’s boy nagging my mother to buy me popsicles. But at the same age this boy was alone against the world, begging for leftover food to survive. While I continued my schooling all the way to the university, he was begging his way from North China to the Southwest with a broken bowl in his hands! Why such inequality? Was I really more intelligent? No, the only difference between us was our place of birth. I was lucky enough to have been born in a large city; he was born in a poor village.”

Stereotypic images fuse momentarily as one realizes that this oddly familiar expression of pain and guilt over unearned privilege does not issue from some haven of unrestrained capitalism, but from the People’s Republic, where, allegedly, a more equal distribution of basic

necessities has taken place and brutal contrasts have been eliminated.

Afflicted with what his fellow Red Guards called "bourgeois humanitarianism," Chai made a veritable survey of the beggar world on his linkups across China. One day, in Kweichow Province, after he and his friends had overeaten ("because food was so cheap" there) and drunk a good deal of *mao-tai* liquor to counter the cold, they came across a shivering young beggar at the Kweiyang Railroad Station.

"I felt [at that moment] overfed and overdressed. Quietly I bought him a bagful of steamed buns. The sight of this half-naked beggar touched many other passengers, who also offered him food. The young beggar in turn divided the food among fellow beggars at the station, and all of them started to eat heartily.... Perhaps this was the first time he had eaten his fill, or perhaps he just wanted to show his gratitude, but the young beggar began to dance and sing: 'Gazing up at the North Star/I think of Chairman Mao in my heart....'"

With the gradual restoration of order by the military after the Cultural Revolution, both Red Guards and beggars began to retreat from public view. A peasant from Changlo County in Fukien has described Anhwei beggars as still "living in the village primary school in 1968-69" and "walking on their knees in the street, crying aloud in Anhwei dialect, which nobody understood." Another peasant, however, from Lienchiang County noted seeing no more Anhwei beggars after 1970. The connection between the degree of local control and the presence or absence of beggars was intriguingly perceived by a traveling speculator from China, interviewed by La Dany in 1971. This shrewd man could size up the "political atmosphere" of a city by a "quick look" around the railroad station: "If everything in the railway station is very orderly and quiet, you know that very strict discipline has been imposed on the city; but if you see people standing or walking idly, some selling little things, others looking like businessmen [private dealers] coming from other places, and if there are pickpockets and beggars, then you know that discipline in the city is lax."

The "police action" to reverse exodus from the villages, announced nineteen years ago in *People's Daily*, has continued to operate fairly effectively, even in chaotic times, to preserve the immaculateness of Peking and Shanghai. In Canton, it is demonstrable, however, that despite strict control and police roundups before the spring and autumn trade fairs, beggars have not altogether vanished in a flurry of rags.

"From 1969 to 1974," reports a young woman who recently escaped to Hong Kong, "I still saw some beggars in Canton, but no longer in groups, only individually—so they were a smaller target. They were still mostly from the countryside and outside provinces. They scavenged for food in the streets, but if they ran into the police or worker patrols, they would be [immediately] arrested and put into a detention house."

How does one know that there really are beggars in Canton's famed Sand River Detention House [*Sha Ho Shou Jung So*]? Because many of the thousands of young

"illegals" who successfully reach Hong Kong every year were caught during earlier escape attempts and temporarily confined in *Sha Ho*, where they found them, along with other extinct denizens of Canton society—petty thieves, speculators, pickpockets, prostitutes. The beggars, moreover, were conspicuous as "willing" longer-term residents, refusing to cooperate with procedures to return them to their hungry villages.

A well-educated young Cantonese relates the following:

"After I failed in my first escape attempt [in 1971], I was confined in a rather large cell at *Sha Ho*, with about forty people inside. The man who slept beside me was a beggar from Honan, but I learned this only later. At the time he seemed to be a mute. All of us in the detention house were interrogated about our legal place of residence [*hu k'ou*], so that we could eventually be returned there. But this man was illiterate and evidently deaf and dumb. The worker patrols beat him with their long poles (painted red and white—we call them "big chopsticks") and burned him with cigarette butts, but he still 'couldn't' say a thing. He was generally abused in the cell, but I treated him decently and we struck up a sort of friendship. Finally, after three months, he suddenly spoke to me. He told me that he had begged his way from Honan down to Canton after a poor harvest in his home village. He had to pretend for four months to be mute, because he would have found nothing to eat if he had returned home then. Now that the new harvest was probably in, he could disclose his *hu k'ou*.... In the detention house we got only three taels [3.3 ozs.] of rice twice a day and all of us were dizzy from hunger. But for this man it was comparative plenty."

A few years earlier Chai Yu-kuei had met such a beggar, wandering far from his native place to beg until the following harvest. Only the women and small children of his village had remained behind, with barely enough to tide them over. The beggar complained to the empathetic Chai and his companions about being expelled from Canton by worker patrols just before a trade fair: "Comrades, you have been to school and know a lot. Tell me who is right or wrong. They can have their trade fair, and we beggars wouldn't bother them. Why did they chase us away?..."

"His question," said Chai, "was hard to answer.... We told him there was no justice in this world where might makes right. The Canton workers were told to get the beggars out, and they had to be harsh. Many foreigners would come to Canton for the fair, and the sight of beggars would make China lose face.... The more we tried to explain, the more confused he seemed. ... Then he mumbled, 'But of all my ancestors and relatives—who has *not* gone out begging? So what does that have to do with losing face? Anyway, don't we always say we're not afraid of foreigners? Why should we be afraid to let them see us begging?'"

"We looked at one another in silence. The young beggar's question had gone beyond what we could answer in the open."

Perhaps the foreign visitor to the new Middle Kingdom can hazard a reply.

(This is the second in a series of three articles.)