liked. Since Anja had indicated that she would like to walk with me, I parted company with Maria.

Anja and I walked side by side, her hand on my shoulder and my arm around her waist. We kept talking, and I asked her where Mrs. Heinrich had gone and why she was not here. She replied that Mrs. Heinrich had been separated from us and put in Ward 7, on the floor below us. We were in Ward 9, on the sixth floor.

She then asked me, "What do you think about this place?"

I said, "Better than the police station."

"No, no! This place may look more civilized from the outside, but actually it's very reactionary inside. Since yesterday afternoon, I have been scolded four times by the guard."

"Was it the fat, short woman guard?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Hmm, she has also yelled at me twice," I said. "She looks just like a bear."

"Ha! Ha! You are right." Anja completely agreed and could not help laughing heartily. "Let's call her Bear then!"

"Let's call her Bear then!" We both started laughing, as if we had done something very funny.

Our conversation flowed on and on like endless river waters just released from a dam. What was more important, we exchanged our cell addresses. She pointed out her cell for me, and I told her my location. Her window was on the north facing south, near the corner to the east. My window was on the west facing east, near a corner to the south. If we both stood at the window, we could partially see each other's face. Had we not been so far apart, we might have been able to stand at the windows to talk to each other, as an open secret.

We were deeply engrossed in our conversation, and I told her how the women inmates here hated us and how I saw the issue. She seemed greatly moved, saying, "The old society still exerts great influence! However, the creation of the new society is just like the sun over the ocean and will soon rise up in the sky!" Her eyes shone with indomitable enthusiasm.

4

Chen Xuezhao

(1906–1991)

Living in France until the mid-1930s, veteran May Fourth writer Chen Xuezhao had solidified her reputation as an outspoken feminist in progressive literary and intellectual circles back in China through regular contributions to avant-garde journals, yet she had remained aloof from the leftist politics into which so many of her contemporaries were being drawn. It was not until her return to China in 1935, amid the deepening national crisis and under surveillance by KMT police, that her sympathies for the Communist Party began to grow. In 1938, she accepted a special reporting assignment from *National Dispatch* magazine and traveled with her young son and husband to the Communist base at Yan'an to gather material and conduct interviews for a collection of journalistic essays—what would eventually be published in Hong Kong under the title *Interviews at Yan'an* (1940). Other female reporters had preceded her, including the Americans Agnes Smedley and Nym Wales, but she would be the first Chinese woman writer to document life at the Communist guerrilla base. The first selection here, "The Essentials and Ambience of Life," is from that collection and focuses on the spartan material conditions of everyday life in Yan'an while evoking the unique *esprit de corps* that the author witnessed during her ten-month visit. In 1940, Chen returned to reside permanently in Yan'an as a committed member of the community, working alongside Ding Ling, Ai Siqi, Bai Lang, and others as an editor at the party newspaper, *Liberation Daily.* Her critically acclaimed autobiographical novel *To Be Working Is Beautiful* (1949) gives a moving account of the author's personal metamorphosis as she moved from the bohemian milieu she inhabited in the twenties in Shanghai and Paris to her idle days as a young doctor's wife in the KMT-controlled interior to her newfound political calling at Yan'an. The novel examines the autobiographical heroine's ideological transformation, including the profound impact of Mao's Rectification campaign in 1942, during which urban middle-class intellectuals and writers such as

Chen were enjoined to reevaluate their attitudes toward the public they allegedly served.

Chen was formally accepted into the Chinese Communist Party in 1945, and in the years leading up to liberation she completed several important literary projects, including a new reportage collection based on first-hand observations of the so-called liberated areas in northern China, *Wandering Through the Liberated Zones,* from which the second selection is drawn. Chen makes little attempt to disguise her partisan allegiance to the CCP here or elsewhere in the volume, but attention to the gritty details of everyday life among the ordinary rural folk she meets, along with the self-effacing anecdotes of her own mishaps and physical discomforts along the journey, helps to ground her account in a materiality that is characteristic of the best journalistic work of the period. This collection, along with her novel, was published on the eve of the Communist victory in 1949.

By her own account in her post–Mao memoir *Surviving the Storm,* Chen was eager to witness and write about the agrarian reform movement sweeping her native Zhejiang province in the immediate postliberation years, and thus specifically requested an assignment in the countryside. Her request was initially denied on grounds that her intellectual training better suited her to an academic post, and she was instead appointed as director of political study at Zhejiang University, where she also taught part time in the Chinese literature department. Chen's persistence eventually paid off, however, and she was permitted to move to a village in Haining county to begin research for a new novel. Around that time she was also accorded the status of professional writer by the Central Research Institute of Literature and thus assured a steady income. In 1953, in accordance with party directives, she published a slim novel entitled *The Land,* about the collaboration of a land reform brigade with members of a village peasant association to eradicate the lingering influence of reactionary local landowners. Although the novel provides a straightforward account of the process—complete with scenes of "speaking bitterness" sessions, public trials of landlords and unrepentant rich peasants, and the redistribution of property to the poor masses—neither the characters nor the plot are sufficiently developed, and the novel appears to have attracted little critical attention. More disappointing in terms of Chen's long-standing feminist concerns, the novel alludes to a number of topical gender issues (including the special challenges the female peasants mobilized by land reform faced) but leaves them unelaborated as themes.

The following year, Chen relocated to the Longjing Tea Plantation to begin research on tea cultivation, the basis of her next novel *Spring Camellias* (1957). Set in Lionridge Hamlet, on the outskirts of Hangzhou, the novel examines the collectivization process following land reform through a candid story of the conflict that arises between grassroots organizers and ignorant party bureaucrats. Chen may well have been emboldened to explore this theme in the context of the new freedoms ushered in by the Hundred Flowers campaign that briefly flourished in 1956–57. One of the more interesting subplots involves the budding romance between Yueying, daughter of an unenlightened peasant, and Shen Dada, the branch secretary, through which the author illustrates the new freedoms under the Marriage Law (1950).

Testimony to the high regard in which Chen was held by the new leadership in the early postliberation years is the fact that she was invited to join a high-level women's delegation headed by Xu Guangping on an official visit to the Soviet Union in 1953. And in 1955, she was asked to host Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir when they toured China. Unfortunately, two of her articles on socialist-era labor relations published in *People's Daily* in 1957 were labeled "poisonous weeds," and Chen soon found herself branded a rightist and was stripped of party membership. What ensued in the course of the next two decades was a tragic, if not untypical, ordeal: she was subjected to public struggle sessions, demotion and loss of salary, and a series of humiliating work assignments (including the task of scrubbing the toilets at Zhejiang University during the Cultural Revolution). Chen's reputation was partially restored after Lu Xun's diaries, which contained positive references to her, were issued in a more complete edition in 1976, and by 1978 she had enough confidence to resume work on the sequels to *To Be Working Is Beautiful* and *Spring Camellias,* the drafts for which she somehow managed to protect from several raids on her house. She was officially rehabilitated in 1979. That year saw the reissue of *To Be Working Is Beautiful,* in a volume that also included the sequel. Interestingly, she made a number of revisions to the original novel, including an entirely new chapter that depicts in greater detail how the heroine benefits from party leadership in developing the correct revolutionary outlook. A collection of critical essays on Chen's work has been published in mainland China, but her voluminous output still remains largely unexamined by scholars abroad.

The Essentials and Ambience of Life

(1940)

HOW SHOULD ONE describe life in Yan'an? It seems to me only a few verses written in beautiful, solemn language could begin to do it justice. As an ungraceful writer, I can only let the poets in Yan'an realize this dream.

My dear friends far and wide, I do not have the ability to sit tight and offer a serious account, so please allow me to ramble on without following a fixed direction. I will talk about this today and about that tomorrow, in an unsystematic and subjective manner. You may say that what I talk about is nothing more than my own life.

As far as food, clothing, shelter, and transportation are concerned, life in Yan'an is, in itself, monotonous and boring. Take clothing, for example. With the exception of local civilians, those who serve in the Eighth Route Army or work in the offices of the border-area government all wear blue army uniforms, and things such as georgette are nowhere to be seen here. . . . In general, seasoned cadres in the Eighth Route Army wear clean and neat clothes, with puttees wrapped around their legs, typical of a military lifestyle. Of course, not every cadre is dressed that way. I have seen some with the fronts of their padded army uniforms covered in so much grease that you probably could stir-fry a few dishes with it. As for the student recruits, they wear army uniforms, but they do not look like soldiers the way the seasoned cadres do. In addition, their puttees are often sloppily wrapped and often look rather dirty. Some of them argue that, since they were used to wearing western-style clothes before coming here, they do not know how to put on an army uniform properly no matter how hard they try. They argue that, if it is really true that the right way to wear the uniform comes from experience, you cannot blame them for making such a mess of it. Indeed, it appears that there is no such thing as fashion here and people wear clothes solely to cover their bodies and to protect themselves from the cold. However, in my daily life I have seen some young people, particularly girls, tilt the visors of their hats slightly to the left or to the right, or push them upward or downward a little, just to show their individuality. If this were a one-time occurrence, you might think it was inadvertent. But when it happens every day, it must have something to do with the notion of beauty. For a while, many girls wore colorful silk scarves around their necks. Women are particularly keen on displaying their individuality, so the futurist

painters think that someday women will carve words on their faces to show their uniqueness. Now, amid the hardships of the War of Resistance, we have to make do. In the future, when a new China is established and the government has the spare energy to develop a cosmetics industry, the market will be flooded with countless types of perfume and face powder, and young girls will be able to pick whatever they want to their hearts' content.

In my opinion, men should look a little homely in appearance. If a naturally handsome man gives himself all kinds of embellishments, he only deserves to go to Montmartre to become a plaything for women. He is by no means an enterprising man! For a naturally handsome man, only serious work and a serious character can round out his natural appeal. And the same thing goes for women too.

As for food, everyone outside Yan'an knows that millet is the staple for most people here. In the winter, cabbages, tofu, bean sprouts, red and white turnips, potatoes, and bean-starch noodles are the only vegetables available. Virtually the only meat to be had is pork and everything else that comes from pigs, since mutton, chicken, and beef are rarely for sale. Furthermore, the beef on sale comes from cows that die from disease. Eggs are nowhere to be found because the winter weather is too cold here for hens to lay eggs. At the moment, in this beautiful early spring, we only have spinach and no cabbage. The rest of our food is the same as what we ate in the winter. The only difference is that eggs have been added to the diet. Back in my hometown, plenty of seasonal vegetables will be on the market now, not to mention freshwater fish and seafood. One evening, as I sat in front of my cave dwelling and "enjoyed the natural scenery" (an expression some of my friends here like to use to tease me), I thought of the foodstuffs in the south. "How delicious the Hangzhou pork soup would be if you added spring bamboo shoots and extra condiments to it!" I said to a friend.

"Women like to eat!" my friend commented with a suggestive smile.

"Women appreciate fine food, whereas men just eat!" I retorted, smiling.

In Yan'an, you can do very little to vary your diet, since such a limited number of ingredients are rotated. In addition, food is prepared here in a way that is entirely different from the way homemade dishes or those offered in the restaurants in the south are prepared. Pepper, aniseed, scallions, and so on are often added in great quantities, making the food taste very spicy or very vinegary. Some people tell me this is typical army food. If that is true, I would never have known the characteristics of military food had I not come to Yan'an. Most of the cooks come from Sichuan. These people accustomed to eating sour, spicy, and strange-tasting food for so many years are among

those I respect very much. But those suffering from digestive ailments find the food indescribably monotonous for their peculiar, pitiable, and delicate stomachs. In fact, in my opinion, I am not the only person concerned about food. As it is a necessity of life, people should do no more and no less than be frank about it. In Yan'an, when folks meet for the first time, the first question is "What kind of work do you do?" The second one is "Where do you live?" and the third is "What kind of food do you eat?" As far as staple food is concerned, I reckon steamed buns are the best, but on one condition: they mustn't contain so much baking soda that it leavens them. (All the buns made here are unleavened.) If you slice up a bun and toast the slices over the fire until they are browned, they taste like bread. Once a friend of mine gave me a pound of honey. It differed in color from the honey produced in the south and wasn't as fragrant, perhaps because of the poor raw materials. Other than certain wildflowers, there is little variety in flowers in the north. However, I suspected that either it was not pure honey or the merchant had mixed it with some powder before selling it. If you put a little honey on a toasted slice of bun, it tastes like jam. The border area supposedly produces suet, but it is not on the market in Yan'an. The second best thing to eat is rice. Since southerners are accustomed to rice while northerners are used to wheat, buns, no matter how tasty they may be, get boring for a southerner if he eats them all the time. The third best is rice cooked with millet. The fourth is porridge made with millet and red beans. The fifth is millet porridge and the sixth cooked millet. The ranking reflects my personal preferences.

There are only three things here to which I am not quite accustomed. The first, the matter of sugar and sweets, concerns food. The other two are privies and bathhouses. In Yan'an sugar is rarely for sale. Although restaurants and cooperative stores have it in stock, they are loathe to sell it because they want to use it to make sweets such as eight-treasure rice pudding, candied millet sticks, frosted spinach, etc. . . . In the shops run by the locals, sugar is in short supply, and it is also very dirty. Brown sugar is easier to buy, but it is horribly dirty. With no knack for shopping, I feel that the locals always overcharge me. Why? Is it because my clothing or my face looks different? I know a married woman, a frequent guest here, who goes shopping every day and spends all her time "getting something to eat." Knowing virtually every street and every store in Yan'an like the palm of her hand, she was able to buy a pound of sugar for just a dollar. During my two-week search, however, I was always snubbed. "A dime an ounce and I can sell you four ounces," a store owner replied to my inquiry as I approached his store with sugar on display. "You cannot even sell half a pound?" "No!" I got really mad. *What an outrage! I might as well go without sugar!* I thought to myself as I turned around and left. Eventually I got a tip from that woman, who told me about a shop where I was able to buy a pound of sugar for a dollar. It was foreign sugar, made in Japan. The shop looked very small, but it had plenty of foreign sugar. There were no posters advertising what was in stock on the front of the door. Even the shop sign was nowhere to be seen, whereas before the bombings every store had its own sign. The stores and stands on the streets of Yan'an carry lots of Japanese goods. Dare I say this? Last December, the supply of certain goods that were already low, such as enamel bowls, was suddenly cut off because of the fall of Hankou. Now the supply has suddenly increased and many items are available in complete sets. I think those matches with the words "Tianjin, Zhili Province" printed on their boxes are also Japanese goods. It is said that such items come from Taiyuan and the areas along the Yellow River. In that case, they are contraband. We have so many tough choices to make in the War of Resistance. In order to satisfy our needs, we are forced to use goods made by the enemy, and who knows how much money has flowed to them as a result? This proves that fighting without construction is insufficient. In my opinion, Yan'an can use "Boycott enemy goods" as a slogan to alert ordinary citizens. Under the current circumstances, it is true that we cannot but use certain enemy goods, but we should do our best to avoid it when possible. Last July, the market price for domestic sugar was twenty-five cents a pound in Chongqing. I wonder how much the price has gone up. But I do not think it could ever reach a dollar a pound under any circumstances. We should do our best to improve the transportation on the Sichuan–Shaanxi Highway. At the same time, we hope the border area will try its best to promote the production of basic consumer goods. That is precisely what it has been doing recently. An exhibition has been held here to stimulate the handicraft industry.

To tell the truth, I have consumed nearly thirty pounds of sugar in the nine months since I arrived in Yan'an. Before I came, a friend in Xi'an told me that I would need to bring some sugar, so I brought ten pounds with me. Later, a friend asked someone to bring me ten pounds of sugar and five pounds of toffees as gifts for the Mid-Autumn Festival. Then a friend here gave me another ten pounds of sugar. Having a sweet tooth is a bad habit and a weakness. But it is only fair that I defend myself. I do not smoke or drink tea. Nor do I eat peanuts. I just enjoy an occasional sweet. Isn't that forgivable? A person's desires can change with the environment. Now, with things such as toffees, fruit drops, and so forth out of reach, give me some sugar and I will be wild with joy.

Mentioning the privies in Yan'an, many people perhaps will frown. In fact, the more you travel in the northwest, the more you will find that all the privies in the region are similar. So Yan'an is not unique in this regard. Using the privy is the most unbearable aspect of my daily life.

I used to live near the Red Cross office, where there was a beautiful toilet for women. The pit was dug very deep and it had a wooden lid. Thanks to frequent scrubbing, it was also rather sanitary. Later I moved and had to bid a rueful farewell to the toilet. Things got really miserable from then on. Usually privies in Yan'an are not very deep. Some, those that might be considered among the best, are enclosed by dirt walls. Since they do not have partitions, men and women avail themselves of the same ones. As for the ordinary folks in northern Shaanxi, they couldn't care less about whether there is a privy or not. They simply squat down and drop their golden natural fertilizer everywhere. During the New Year in 1939, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party treated some people from the cultural circles in Yan'an and some other guests to a banquet one evening. After the banquet, as I started to leave, a friend called me back and offered me a ride in a truck. I happened to notice that Mr. Mao Zedong and Mr. Wang Ming were seated in the same truck on their way to another party. En route, Mr. Mao Zedong joked with Mr. Wang Ming: "What does Yan'an have in abundance? Lots of snow, lots of mountains—"

"And lots of privies!" Mr. Wang Ming cut in. Many people could not help bursting into laughter. "How convenient! Elsewhere, sometimes you have to go quite a long way to find a privy. In Yan'an, you can find one whenever you need to go."

Mr. Mao Zedong and Mr. Wang Ming then talked about the good things about the north. Mr. Mao Zedong said, "Here the moon is clear. . . ."

"If this were Wuhan, Japanese bombers would be back on an evening with such a clear moon," Mr. Wang Ming said. "Then this is another good thing about Yan'an."

The climate in the north is dry and the moon is crystal clear. The sky is cloudless, particularly on snowy evenings when there is no wind. But the air is very cold. The reflection of the moonlight on the snow gives people a feeling of purity and tranquility. Riding on a sled and speeding across the snow under the moonlight would be an indescribable thrill.

Indeed, Yan'an has so far not suffered any night air attacks, and the air raid sirens have never been sounded even on those bright moonlit evenings. Is that because the weather is too cold, or the enemy thinks there is no need for night air attacks? Or because there are too many mountains here and an air attack at night would pose too great a danger to their bombers?

With regard to housing, everyone knows that most people here live in cave dwellings. The way those are built in such haste for the sake of saving money, I am afraid, is something brought by the Eighth Route Army. The cave dwellings are separate from each other, but sometimes they can be conjoined. Housing in Yan'an can be said to be a most interesting issue. Because this is a place with no superstition or theft, you could say life here is most carefree. I remember when I went back to my hometown I found that people were so deeply steeped in superstitions in their daily lives that, as soon as I got there, I felt as though a ghost were following on my heels. And in the past, I never wanted to stay in a hotel alone no matter where I was, for fear that the guest next door might turn out to be a murderer or a rapist. . . . Those gruesome incidents that I so often heard about made me nervous. Luckily, I rarely had to stay in hotels. Whenever I traveled somewhere unfamiliar, I would always be put up by a close friend's family. I was also most afraid of living in an unfamiliar place. Unsure what kind of neighbors I would have, I had a hard time making a decision anytime I tried to rent a place. I like to live a life that is all light and no darkness, a life that can be read like an open book. It's not that I am afraid of the dark aspects of society. It is just that I get sick to my stomach when I see something gruesome happen, as if I have run into something filthy. Around your cave dwelling in Yan'an, your neighbor might be a government worker with a peasant background or a revolutionary. When he talks, he might sometimes dot his remarks with "damn this" and "damn that." He might somewhat have the air of a country bumpkin. But he is bound to be very simple and honest, making you feel that he is what a human being should be, a Chinese with dignity and not someone to fear. You might even feel he is rather lovable. Sometimes you might have a neighbor who works as a cadre in charge of such and such an office or department, and you will see him busy with this and that all day long. Their life is so incredibly simple. And their diligence at once moves you and makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

In terms of travel, it is to be expected that, given the sheer size and sparse population of the border area, you can be on the road for five or ten miles without seeing a single house. Undulating mountains are everywhere and go on forever. I have tried to imagine what kind of transportation will be developed in this area once it becomes a base for heavy industry in a new China. Will the elevator or the mountain-climbing electric train be the common vehicle? At present, everyone has to walk. The northwest and the south are different in that, in the place where I come from, you will come to a village or a wayside pavilion every few miles where travelers can sit down and take a break. In summer the villagers there will make sure that tea is served. This kind of

pavilion must be what is meant by the "post house," which is so frequently described in traditional poetry in expressions such as "a dim light in a post house by the water" and "people talking by a bridge next to a post house." Indeed water, bridges, and pavilions occupy an extremely important place in the daily lives of southerners. But these do not exist in the northwest. After traveling a long distance, you won't be able to buy any boiled water on the road, even in the middle of a sweltering summer day. Even if you can find a shop, there won't be any boiled water or tea for sale. The common mode of transportation is draft animals—horses, donkeys, and mules. It goes without saying that local residents excel at riding. What amazes me most is that seasoned cadres in the Eighth Route Army, both men and women, are also skilled riders. Among them are southerners who can ride. Although "southerners take boats while northerners ride horses" sums up the situation of transportation in ancient times, it appears that this expression still describes the northwest to a certain degree. The roads here are all made of yellow sandy dirt and, since no trees were planted in the past, there used to be no shade at all. This year, thanks to the production campaign, over a hundred thousand trees have been planted in the border area, adding to a comparable number planted last year. In several decades, these trees will provide shade along asphalt roads for travelers who will be able to take a rest on benches complete with seat backs. At present, people just enjoy the light and the unpretentious atmosphere in this area as they put up with the temporary imperfections.

Real life in Yan'an is more or less what I have described thus far. This area, which can be regarded as the poorest region in China, is nonetheless a place that makes one reluctant to leave. I believe that I will remember Yan'an after I depart. I am so fond of the ambience here. "Life in Yan'an is really gratifying, mentally gratifying!" some young people always say, but they cannot explain why. Of course, it is not exactly gratifying to eat cooked millet. Getting a monthly stipend of one or two dollars isn't bad, considering that the money is saved by the Eighth Route Army. But it is probably not very gratifying to use this amount of money, I am afraid. Then what is it that makes life so gratifying here? I have been pondering this question, but I am not quite sure that I have come up with the right answer, since I certainly have no political acumen to speak of. To me the most important reason, to borrow an expression used in my hometown, is the political integrity, given that everything is so clear and aboveboard, and good leadership. As for other reasons, I think they are the reflections of political integrity in social life. And social life here is so full of light, candor, and purity! Not to sound too disrespectful of menfolk, but there are no brothels, no teahouses, and no taverns here. A visitor who stays for two weeks

or a month is only able to see certain aspects of Yan'an, such as people's intense work and study; their spartan clothing, food, and housing; their enthusiasm in the War of Resistance; and so on, but only those who have stayed here longer can feel the real greatness of Yan'an and what makes people reluctant to leave.

Living in the society of Yan'an marked by its light and purity makes me think of the dark social life Maupassant realistically described in his stories.[1] I believe back then Maupassant must have described those dark aspects with feelings of disappointment and disgust. People say that after he died someone found a Bible under his pillow. I wonder what kind of book Maupassant would put under his pillow if he were still alive now.

Crossing the Tong-Pu Railroad

(1949)

WE STAYED IN the Village XXX for two days, preparing to cross the Tong-Pu Railroad. During the anti-Japanese war, crossing this railroad was usually called "crossing the blockade line," since the enemy had dotted the whole railroad with fortresses. Blockhouses, equipped with troops and heavy weapons, had been built at one-and-a-half-mile intervals. Even though the enemy had by now already declared its surrender, since the Guomindang would not allow the Eighth Route Army to accept the surrender of Japanese troops and, moreover, since Yan Xishan, in collusion with the enemy, was using Japanese troops as the backbone of his anti-Communist operations, the fortresses along the Tong-Pu Railroad remained filled with enemy soldiers. Several of them had been fortified with even more troops than before the surrender. These enemy soldiers made forays everywhere and created havoc with their plundering.

When we reached the village, the scene could be described by the following lines: "Amid the surrounding mountain glow, a whip cracked in the setting sun." Here and there peasants were threshing grain. Though not a painter, I was moved by this lively scene of hard work that reminded me of Millet's oil painting *Autumn Harvest.*[2]

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[1]Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), a noted French realist writer.

[2]Jean-Francois Millet (1814–1875) was a French realist painter known for his depictions of rural life.

This area, including the county of Wuzhai, was not rich in agricultural products; it only produced hulled oats, sesame seeds, and potatoes. "Eating oatmeal and sleeping on warm brick beds" summed up the lives of ordinary people in northwestern Shanxi. When I saw hulled oats and oat flour for the first time, I did not know how to prepare them and had to ask the locals to cook them for us. In the house where I stayed, the two sisters-in-law gladly lent me a hand. Chatting with me as they prepared the oat dough, they found it funny that I had never seen hulled oats. A series of questions followed as they tried to imagine me, not as someone who knew nothing, but as someone who lived a life completely different from their own. After they kneaded the dough and rolled it into small rolls, they put them into a steamer, steamed them, and got them ready for serving. They told me that food made of oats would sit in the stomach for a long time so, according to local custom, one was supposed to eat such foods with vinegar or a broth of pickled vegetables. So every household in the area made its own pickled vegetables. They then sliced up some of their homemade pickled carrots, made some broth, and brought it over for me to drink. Though generally not particularly keen on pickled foods, I found the broth rather appetizing. Meanwhile, the freshly steamed oat rolls began to give off a delectable fragrance that smelled very much like the aroma of freshly baked bread. They told me that under the enemy occupation ordinary people in the area had nothing to eat. An acre of land could yield at most a little more than a hundred pounds of hulled oats, but the enemy would force people to hand over more than three hundred pounds. After handing in all the food they could collect from their houses, people had to live off the wild vegetables they scavenged. But now they had oats and potatoes to eat and, on top of that, they had several crocks of pickled vegetables in store.

In high spirits, they talked about what good the rent and interest reduction campaign had done: "Now that the rents have been reduced, even peasants have food to eat!"

Of course they supported the revolutionary regime. They also had a certain understanding of the Eighth Route Army as a revolutionary force, for they kept saying, "The Eighth Route Army does not take advantage of us ordinary people." Their household appeared to be a big, harmonious one, which was to be expected since the peasant family naturally becomes harmonious once its livelihood is protected. Things such as men beating and cursing women to vent their anger disappear. So without exception, every woman I met in the old and new liberated areas praised the Eighth Route Army. Indeed, immeasurable benefits had been brought to women by the revolutionary regime and the revolutionary armed force. Chinese women had always been doubly oppressed—by their fathers-in-law and their mothers-in-law. In this household the two sons had both gone out on business for a couple of days. With a high, wrinkled forehead, dark eyes, and a tall stature, the old man, close to sixty, appeared rather vigorous. Without saying a word, he would quietly slip past other members of his family as if to avoid displeasing anybody. I sensed he was an understanding, sensitive old peasant. After he got a saddle for me from his nephew, he fixed the leather straps with his shaky hands and told me the precautions I should take, and I was touched by his kindness. The attendant who had been traveling with me was an impatient, hot-tempered man. Whenever he waved his whip and yelled out "Giddyap" on the road, not only the donkey was scared to death; my heart almost jumped to my throat as well. Whenever I took a fall, I was afraid he might see and scold me as if I had made a mistake. I imagined that had this old man been my travel companion, he would certainly not have been unpleasant in the least. Youth is always appealing, but I love noble character and wisdom more.

As I sat in the warm sun on a pile of hulled-oat straw in the courtyard and jotted down some notes about my journey with a pencil, their oldest grandson, aged nine, snuggled up against my knees and watched me, despite the fact that the grownups kept urging him to go away and leave me alone. "Do you like to go to school?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said.

"How come you aren't in school now? Is there an elementary school here?"

"There was one before, but we did not want our kids to use the textbooks from Jap devils. They were filled with nonsense," the old man cut in as he walked by.

"In the future you can go to school and learn from our own textbooks, Chinese textbooks!" I stroked the child's head and said. "Did Jap devils ever come to your house?"

"Yes."

"Why did they come?"

"They came to our house and said they wanted to 'learn something.' Then they snatched the chickens from the coop, carried off our oats, and took away the eggs. They wanted everything, even my trousers," the child said. "They also took out their bayonets and asked my grandpa, 'What do you do for a living?' before shoving him down to the ground."

At this point the old man said emotionally, "I have suffered enough! I wish I were dead!"

"You shouldn't say things like that. You should live on so that we can show you a thriving new China and let you enjoy some happy days!" I said to him.

Having had our fill of food and water, humans and mounts alike, and a good rest to boot, we resumed our journey. At dusk, we got to a small village and stopped to take a break and have a drink of water. As I turned around I was, for a minute, stunned to find a man standing right beside me with a rifle over his shoulder. "What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"I am here to protect you," he said proudly.

"How old are you? And what is your name?"

"My name is Ma Sanxiao and I am twenty," he replied.

"When did you join the Eighth Route Army?"

"Four years ago. Tonight my assignment is to ensure that you cross the railroad safely."

Touched by the forthright, proud tone in his voice, I still felt somewhat offended and embarrassed that I required the protection of a young man who was barely twenty years old. On the other hand, I understood why the young soldier felt about himself the way he did, for he already had a four-year history of fighting at such a young age. How glorious and honorable it is to be a soldier in a revolutionary army! Even without my promotion or praise on their behalf, their own conduct is proof enough of that. The Eighth Route Army is such a fine army. With their strict discipline and their love for ordinary folk, these soldiers represent a whole generation of marvelous Chinese youths! And I respect them from the bottom of my heart. "Are you saying we have already entered the danger zone?" I asked.

"Not yet." His answer was firm and precise, without any undue brevity or verbiage.

Soon after we set out again we reached a river, which, unexpectedly, my donkey stubbornly refused to cross. It bolted here and there on the riverbank, as if spooked by something. I whipped it for all I was worth, but the whip, a willow branch, seemed to have no effect whatsoever. From the very beginning of the journey, before I got on the road each day I would have to get a branch to use as a whip. My travel companions all laughed at the embarrassing scenes I made. Luckily, with one shove from the butt of his rifle, Ma Sanxiao got my donkey to catch up with the others ahead. In order not to lag behind too much, I had to depend on the butt of his rifle the whole way that night. Knowing that this was not his responsibility, I felt rather bad. My donkey galloped on and on, across high mountain ridges and along gravel roads. It went so fast its legs seemed to have shortened so that its body was close to the ground. The surrounding area was quiet, and the only sound that could be heard was the hoofbeats skimming the ground monotonously. With Ma Sanxiao next to me

the whole time, we crossed the Tong-Pu Railroad without incident other than hearing six explosions of grenades launched by grenade dischargers.

On the trip the travelers were tormented by either exhaustion or thirst. Most were weighed down by sleepiness; some even fell from their mounts as they dozed off. But I remained alert. Looking up at the Big Dipper glittering in the sky like sparkling eyes, I could not help wondering in a trance, *Is there any friend living far away who would, while working late tonight, be aware that someone is spending the night traveling on the road?*

When I took out two flat cakes from a pocket in my padded army uniform and tried to give one to Ma Sanxiao, I found he had already gone.

January 19, 1946