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SECTION TWO

LETTERS from the COMMUNES

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

By RICHARD L. WALKER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An Army intelligence officer in the Pacific during World War II, Walker has also been a member of the History Department at Yale, a visiting professor at the National University on Formosa, and a U.S. delegate to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization seminar held in the Philippines. Professor Walker is a graduate of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and received his doctorate from Yale in 1950. He has done extensive research in contemporary Chinese problems, has lectured before the National War College, the Armed Forces Staff College, the Army War College and other groups, and has written for the *New York Times*, *Yale Review*, *Current History* and many scholarly journals.

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Introduction

By Richard L. Walker



IN 1958 a new social organization appeared, fresh as the morning sun, above the broad horizon of east Asia." These are the opening words of the "Resolution on Some Questions Concerning the Peoples Communes," adopted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, December 10, 1958. The resolution, noting that 26,000 people's communes had been established among 120 million households or 99 per cent of the rural population of China, added: "Since their first appearance the people's communes with their immense vitality have attracted widespread attention."

Indeed, the communes received world-wide attention from the moment information about Chinese Communist Chief Mao Tse-tung's grandiose experiment with his Chinese subjects first became generally available in September 1958. Visitors in the East European satellites reported that loyal Communists there were "stunned" by the news. The *New York Times* (October 21) reported "a joke going around Warsaw's coffee houses and clubs that sums up how some of the Communist intellectuals feel about things Chinese these days. It goes: 'Thank God for the Soviet Union. We are lucky to have a buffer state between us and the Chinese.'" As more and more details of the new development on the Chinese mainland became available, including official statements and accounts from Peking, even some of the Chinese Communists' enthusiastic supporters in the uncommitted countries began to have second thoughts about Mao's China.

Others voiced their shock openly: "The most monstrous and gruesome degradation of a people in modern history," said President Carlos P. Garcia of the Philippines. "An existence of absolute hopelessness," observed the *Hong Kong Standard*. "In short, the Chinese are to be slaves," commented the *London News Chronicle*. "Even the Soviet Union is a free country when compared with Red China," said *Der Stern* of Hamburg. A well-known Indian social scientist, Dr. Sripati Chandrasekhar, returning from a visit to Communist China, noted: "This is the commune where human beings are reduced to the level of inmates in a zoo. But there is a difference. The animals in a zoo do not have to work hard, and what is more, they do not have to listen to the quasi-compulsory radio. The lack of peace and quiet in the countryside, where no one can retire and reflect, and the lack of privacy and solitude are to me more terrifying than all the hells put together." (*New York Times*, February 22, 1959.)

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1. The People's Communes

The establishment of the people's communes (*jen-min kung-she*) is the latest in a series of tremendous and frenzied attempts to transform the whole of Chinese society. These have followed upon each other in three-year cycles since Communist rule was imposed upon the Chinese mainland. After the regime's establishment in 1949, there was the "land reform" and the drive against counter-revolutionaries. In 1952, the three-anti and five-anti movements attacked all vestiges of private ownership in urban areas, while a cooperative movement was started in the countryside. In 1955, following a call from Mao Tse-tung, the move to socialization in the countryside was carried out with the establishment of agricultural producer cooperatives on a crash basis throughout the rural areas. In 1958 came the communes.

The communes began on an experimental basis in Honan province in April. Following Mao's tour of that province in August, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist party passed a resolution on August 29 (published September 4), stating that the communes would be the basis of the future Communist society in China. Within three months all but a few of the Chinese peasants had been driven into this new form of life, in essence a militarization of Chinese humanity. The Central Committee resolution of December 10, referred to above, declared that communes would not be pushed in the cities but expressed full determination to consolidate and maintain them in rural areas.

Each commune of about 4,600 families embraces roughly a township. The population has been organized into labor brigades along military lines. In many areas individual houses have been torn down and barracks erected, from which all able-bodied men and women march in military formation to work assignments. Old people are housed in "happy homes for the aged"; children are separated from their parents and housed in nurseries and boarding schools. Communal mess halls provide food; individual cooking is forbidden. Former graves have been dug up and communal interment pits established. In the most advanced communes, family and individual household living has disappeared altogether. The slogan for the communes is, "Organize along military lines, work as if fighting a battle and live the collective way."

In connection with the "Great Leap Forward" campaign of 1958, the ability of the communes to organize and control all Chinese was used for a dramatic effort to double production. Millions of peasants worked as much as 20 hours a day in the fields, on construction projects, or in such activities as tending the primitive iron smelters set up to double steel output. The New China News Agency reported on December 30, for example: "At one time, approximately 60 million people were assigned by the people's communes in the rural areas of China to engage in ore extraction, transport and iron smelting."

It is still too early to assess the future of the communes or to understand all the reasons which led Mao and his colleagues to attempt such a drastic measure. Certainly the communes represent an attack upon the

family as an independent social unit, and family ties represented the last major obstacle to total control by the Communists. Peking publications have talked about "contradictions" that appeared between cooperatives and between the State and the cooperatives, and they have indicated their belief that the larger communes will make possible more efficient planning. The Government and the commune are integrated into one entity. This guarantees complete control over all production and consumption by central authorities, and at the same time it insures easy military mobilization.

As stories of the communes from refugees escaping to Hong Kong and Macao began to circulate through the rest of the world, there was, as I have noted, a marked change in attitude toward Mao's China in much of the world's press. One of the serious reactions, as disbelief turned to full realization of what the Communists were doing, was the rapid decline in remittances from the Overseas Chinese, an important source of Communist China's foreign exchange.

2. Peking's Presentation of the Communes

Some of the initial impact of the communes was dulled by the Quemoy crisis, which erupted with the Communists' intense shelling of that Nationalist-held island on August 23 and directed world attention to preventing the spread of hostilities. Meanwhile, the Chinese Communists launched a vigorous campaign—still in progress—to present the communes in the most favorable light possible. Claims of doubled agricultural production were advanced and pictures of happy, well-fed commune members were distributed by the New China News Agency.

According to Peking, the people "volunteered" for the communes. In an interview with Juliusz Burgin, secretary-general of the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association, Mao asserted: "The old organizational forms proved too narrow. . . . As a result of painstaking searching for new forms, the idea for people's communes was born to meet the needs of hundreds of millions. Even the name of this new organization was given by the peasants themselves: 'The people's communes.' . . . The peasants wanted the communes very much. They need them very much. They help to build Socialism, which the peasants desire and need because they want to live better. The people know what they need. We, I myself, wanted to be careful and thought it would be better if the communes were created gradually in order to accumulate experience, but the masses changed our ideas. They did not want to procrastinate."

It would be difficult to summarize the Communist campaign to persuade both the Chinese people and outside critics that the communes epitomize the happy life where food is abundant, culture respected, personal property secure, recreation unlimited, and an 8-hour day guaranteed. The following excerpts (which could be multiplied *ad nauseam*) from mainland publications provide some idea of its scope.

Anhui *Daily* (Anhui *Jih-pao*), October 8, 1958:

"In the course of the rural communization movement, the broad masses

were extremely enthusiastic. The poor peasants and lower-middle peasants in particular were more excited and active and constituted the backbone forces of the movement, which was also approved and supported by most upper-middle peasants. A great majority of the former 24,100 independent peasants took the initiative to apply for admission to the communes. Hundreds and thousands of people joyfully beat gongs and drums to deliver their applications and resolutions to local Party committees and governments. The people of Manshui District, Huoshan County, walked 40 miles to deliver their resolutions to the local Party committees. The old people and women who had seldom left their homes wore colorful girdles and went out to perform folk dances in celebration of the birth of people's communes."

Political Study (Cheng-chih Hsueh-hsi), Issue No. 10, October 13, 1958:
"Communism is the paradise, and the people's commune the heaven-scaling ladder by which we can rise there.' The broad masses of the peasants have used this lively metaphor to express their deep acquaintance with Communism and the people's commune. How does one reach the Communist 'paradise'? By the 'heaven-scaling ladder' in the shape of the people's commune!"

Political and Legal Studies (Cheng Fa Yen-chiu), Issue No. 6, December 31, 1958:

"After the universal building of people's communes, the broad masses are joyously and spiritedly praising the good points of the people's commune. They sing:

*"The Communist party is like the parents,
The people's commune is like heaven.
The parents love their children dearly,
The latter enter heaven and live in everlasting bliss!"*

Peking People's Daily, March 14, 1959:

"In the people's communes of China, the old are respected, the young are well cared for, men and women are equal; everyone has work to do and lives a decent life, and everyone is equally master of the country. This dignity is impossible under United States and British capitalism."

The Chinese Communist leaders have shown an interesting sensitivity to criticism of the communes abroad, a criticism which has been undermining much of the favor and prestige built up by a concerted "people's diplomacy" over a period of several years. This sensitivity was especially apparent in Premier Chou En-lai's April 19, 1959, report to the opening session of the Second National People's Congress, held in Peking. Coming in the wake of the Communist suppression of the Tibetans—which proved a capstone to the disillusionment of many who had been going along with Peking—his report is one of the most defensive public utterances he has made. Chou denounced the "distortion and slander" of the "imperialists, and in particular the United States imperialists." He asserted that "the Chinese people made a great creation in social organization—the people's commune, established in response to the demands of the broad mass of peasants in the rural areas throughout the country."

Beginning in November 1958, Radio Peking spent a great amount of time, in broadcasts beamed to various areas, explaining and justifying the communes. An English-language broadcast to Britain and Western Europe on January 14, 1959, for example, went to great lengths to refute the "slander" that "in Socialist and Communist society the life of the people is monotonous, uniform and dull." (Dr. Chandrasekhar had stated on return from mainland China, "This dull uniformity numbs one's vision. . .") Again, a Spanish-language broadcast to Latin America on January 20 began: "Today we wish to tell our listeners why the Chinese people work with such enthusiasm in the communes." Radio Peking gave special attention to the Overseas Chinese in its broadcasts to Southeast Asia, explaining that the communes did not threaten the property of the Overseas Chinese, that their remittances were safe, and that "the family will not be destroyed."

In due time, publications in the European satellites began defending the communes. In its first issue of 1959, the East German Communist monthly, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik*, declared: "The movement for the formation of people's communes was not born at the conference table but in practical life. . . . In April 1958, the people's commune of Weihsing [Sputnik], made up of 27 producer cooperatives, came into existence in Honan, Suiping District. Thousands of peasants in all provinces followed this example long before the Party and Government had passed any directives. Once again practice has given the lie to those know-it-alls who are talking about 'force and terror' in the creation of people's communes. Life itself has created this movement."

The article went on to say: "Of course, outside the Chinese frontiers, great attention has been paid to the establishment of people's communes. In the comments of the bourgeois press, the organizational forms and goals of the communes have been grossly distorted. Once more the press of the capitalist states repeats the old, shopworn story that Communism destroys freedom, property and even family. Without making serious efforts to become familiar with the facts, some papers claim that in the communes 'there is no private property, no family life and no . . . leisure time.'"

The Communist leaders took other measures in the fall of 1958 to counteract the unfavorable impact of the communes. The border guard in the vicinity of Hong Kong and Macao was tightened and new regulations made it more difficult for Chinese to leave the country. The number of foreign visitors to China was curtailed. In addition, model communes were set up for the visits of those who did manage to get to the Communist mainland on carefully conducted tours. Akira Hina, a Japanese journalist who accompanied the Japanese Socialist party delegation to Communist China early in 1959, commented in the March 26 *Mainichi*, "We were allowed to visit . . . only two model communes, one at Hutukang near Peking and the other at Hsinchao near Canton." Such measures have made it doubly difficult, even for those with access to Communist-controlled territory, to get any real understanding of the full impact of the communes or any information which would help to evaluate some of the eulogistic claims and statistics issued by Peking.

3. Peasant Resistance

Some of the Chinese Communist publications—primarily those intended for internal consumption only—do reveal widespread peasant resistance, though much of it is blind, emotional and unorganized. Provincial and local newspapers, which must be smuggled out because their export is prohibited, have devoted considerable attention to resistance. This is attributed to “landlords” (long since eliminated, according to Peking), “rich peasants,” “counter-revolutionaries,” “criminal elements” and “rightists.”

For example, the December 5, 1958, Fukien *Daily* reported a special conference of the Provincial Department of Public Security on the work of safeguarding people's communes throughout the province. The article gave examples of “sabotage” of the communes: “On October 3, Lo K'ai-wen, a counter-revolutionary in the Hungchuan People's Commune, put a mixture of '666' insecticide and powder of 'red roots'—roots of poisonous grass—into 40 buckets of cooked rice. Fortunately, this was discovered in time and nobody was poisoned. There were also cases in which the enemy sabotaged production, communal property, public mess halls, nurseries and happy homes for the aged.”

Even the first commune, the Sputnik People's Commune in Honan, has been subject to “acts of sabotage,” according to *Political Study* magazine (No. 10, October 13, 1958): “A landlord in the 1st Production Team killed 1.8 million young fish by putting poison in the hatchery. Another landlord in the 3rd Production Team stole corn from the commune every night and in a few days he had stolen over 65 pounds. A depraved element in the 10th Production Team secretly felled over 200 large and small trees.” Other accounts have told of peasants slaughtering livestock or destroying property, burying gold and implements, spreading rumors, or establishing secret organizations prior to the imposition of commune control.

Given the tight control the Communists exercise over all communications and their monopoly of statistics at the national level, it is difficult to balance accounts of local resistance against overall claims of support. Original documentation is very hard to come by. Outsiders are frequently prone to discount refugee testimony, believing that it sometimes tends toward exaggeration. But the 5,000 refugees who have been entering Hong Kong every month for several years have some convincing tales to tell, and the very fact of their arrival is eloquent testimony in itself.

THE LETTERS

These tales are supported by a collection of more than 100 letters which have come into my hands. During the course of a trip to the Far East from December 1958 through early February 1959, I spent a week in Hong Kong where I renewed contacts with a number of Overseas Chinese and refugees from the Communist mainland whom I have known over a period of seven years. There I secured an initial collection of letters, and subsequent requests have been bringing more. Some of these letters have been sent through the

open mail to Chinese relatives and friends living abroad; others have been smuggled out. The letters have been voluntarily handed over by Chinese who desired to let the world know of the plight of their relatives and friends under Communist rule. Naturally, one condition was fixed: that I safeguard my sources and delete any personal names or other items which would aid in the identification of the authors.

The letters struck me immediately as important original sources, a unique and valuable set of documents for assessing the real nature of the people's communes. The first task, of course, was authentication. Consultation with several qualified people established that the letters are genuine beyond a shadow of doubt. Next came the task of translation. I must admit that the cursive writing in most of them made this too difficult for me, so the assistance of Chinese friends—who themselves had no little difficulty—was sought. It should be stressed that we have avoided rendering the original in smooth, colloquial English, so as to convey the authentic feeling provided by the style and quality of the Chinese.

When the translation was completed, my conviction of the importance of the letters was reinforced. As the reader will see, they speak for themselves. In fact, when it came to the next question of how best to present them, I decided that it was far better to reproduce a large selection of them in chronological sequence than to try to provide artificial classification or to organize excerpts in my own structural pattern.

This, then, is a presentation of about half the letters in my possession. I have included photostats of a few of them to give an idea of their appearance. I have added notes where I felt the meaning could be clarified or some comparison with a Communist claim was called for. But, in general, I believe the reader will agree that the letters themselves constitute the most effective possible presentation of the real meaning of the communes in human terms.

The reader will note that most of the letters come from Kwangtung and Fukien. A major reason for this is that well over 90 per cent of the Overseas Chinese come from these two Southern provinces. Another reason is that these two provinces are closest to Hong Kong and Macao, which serve as points of transshipment for mail from Communist China. Some letters sent to relatives living in Latin America, for example, are first addressed to Macao. A few of the letters have been sent from one area in Communist China to another and then enclosed in another letter sent to the outside. Many of those sent through open mail do not have return addresses.

What the Letters Reveal

The letters present a rather grim picture of the military emphasis and the degree of regimentation under arbitrary control in the communes. They confirm the separation of sexes, hardships for old people, no-work-no-food policies, work assignments at distant places, work up to 18-20 hours per day. Secondly, they portray the fate of the individual and the family in Communist China. Property and money have been confiscated; graves, family shrines and family identity are being destroyed. The individual, with

inadequate and poor quality food, is in a state of exhausted helplessness and hopelessness.

A third general aspect of life in Communist China which is clear from a reading of the letters is the extent of economic and educational disruption caused by the communes and the Great Leap Forward. Schools have been turned into military-type work regiments, and even medical schools have been affected. Farms are without adequate labor for harvesting crops, and food shortages are severe. In what Peking proclaimed to be a year of plenty, the peasants experienced shortages of rice, oil, fish, pork and even vegetables.

Fourth, the letters reveal some of the methods by which the Communist regime has been blackmailing Overseas Chinese for remittances of the foreign exchange it wants so badly. Many relatives write for money in order that they may eat. Others write for help to meet their "voluntary" quotas on investment programs. Still another method of wringing money from the Overseas Chinese is for the preservation of the remains of ancestors.

Finally, it should be noted that these letters from the people's communes tell their own story of passive resistance to the Communists. Writers urge relatives not to come home, and some either overtly or indirectly advise against sending money to Communist China. The story of Chinese trying to escape to Hong Kong or Macao is told only too eloquently. Moreover, every letter is in its own right an indictment of the Communist regime.

Conclusion

Certainly these letters tell at firsthand what the Chinese peasants would never dare to tell to a visiting foreigner: a story of coercion, militant unhappiness, widespread dissatisfaction and human degradation. But even more important, I believe they serve the purpose of reminding us of the very compelling and human side of the story that is all too frequently concealed by statistics or by such catchy terms as "the blue ants," which one visitor to Communist China used to describe the mobilized peasants he saw.

It is too easy to forget that each of the Chinese being forced into a commune is a human being, with his own hopes, desires, interests and loves. This individual human dimension is something we in the West pride ourselves on showing concern for, and yet we often forget that it matters to others too. If the presentation of these letters can help to rekindle a concern for the humanity of the individual in China among the readers, then I will have fulfilled part of the obligation I assumed when I accepted the letters.

LETTERS from _____ _____ the COMMUNES

NAN-AN HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
OCTOBER 5, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

After receiving your letter I cried a lot and my tears wet a whole towel. I deeply regret that I have failed you. Last month when I went to register to join the militia corps for drills, I was actually very hesitant. My heart jumped like mad and when I saw the rifles I nearly fainted. I told this to 6th Uncle, indicating that I did not want to join the militia corps. But he not only did not agree with me, he reprimanded me for my feelings. This settled my mind and I joined the next day.¹

Mother, although I joined, I actually will not really become a militia man at heart. I did try very hard to escape it. Mother, please forgive me for having joined. I know I have done a terribly wrong thing!

At the present time, it is the boarding students who are the mainstay of the militia corps in our school. Non-boarding students cannot join. I therefore want to take advantage of this and try to live outside the school if I can obtain the cooperation of my schoolmates. But many of them believe that those living outside do so only to escape from participation in the militia corps. Please do not worry.

SON

AMOY, FUKIEN PROVINCE
OCTOBER 8, 1958

OUR SON:

The construction of our house has been completed. We would not have done this thing at all if we had known that this turmoil which has turned the whole universe upside down would take place.²

1. The student who is writing to his Overseas Chinese mother has evidently been caught in the "Everyone A Soldier" movement which was launched during 1958, the year of the Great Leap Forward. By October, Peking claimed that more than one-sixth of the population had been organized into militia units. Most of these militia units were organized in connection with the communes.

An order of the day published by the *People's Daily* in November stated: "To take [military] lessons at noon and in the evening; to use land beside the fields as a parade ground; to practice dressing ranks while going up a slope; and to practice aiming three times before and after every meal." (New York Times, November 16, 1958)

2. Relatives of Overseas Chinese were, until 1958, given special privileges such as the right to repair or construct homes on a private basis. Chinese living abroad have frequently sent enough money home to pay for the construction of a new house. The parents are telling their son that his money has probably been spent in vain.

Now we are suffering all the hardships and difficulties here in the country. They have now started the people's commune and opened a people's public mess hall. We are required to take all three meals there each day. It might be all right for younger people, but it is completely unsuitable for us old folks. It is impossible to describe in full the difficulties we are undergoing. We can only take the attitude of "gaining a day after spending a day."³

Even students only study half a day; the other half is spent in farming. All in all, one just cannot tell the situation in one word. How the world has changed!

PARENTS

CHAO-YANG COUNTY, KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
OCTOBER 16, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

I believe that you are all all right and must have adjusted to life there. My mothers,⁴ please do not worry about your son. It is just my fate. Mothers, I hope you will take good care of your health and go to Thailand at an early date for a family reunion and enjoyment of family relationships. The letters from you and brother [name omitted] were received and I understand everything well. I am glad to know that the health of brother [name omitted] is improving daily. This is something to be happy about.

Mothers! I never thought that the situation would change so much and so rapidly here! Alas! The words your son wants to say are as endless as the Yangtse River. My feeling is so awful that my tears are uncontrollable. I do not wish to tell everything so as to add worry to you. It is just my fate, my poor fate! What am I going to do?

Alas! Mothers, brother [name omitted] and sister-in-law, at this time, I am depending entirely on you for help. Please write to [name omitted] post haste, telling him how to apply for me and my mother so that we can get away from this sea-of-griefs. Alas! Otherwise, I will have to continue to live under these conditions. The bad days are already right before my eyes. As far as your son is concerned, life is not important. This is everybody's situation. If I am called upon for a transfer, I do not mind.⁵ Anyway, there is nothing one can do about it. However, my mind is on my son [name omitted]. I hear that the Government will send all children, male and female, between 8 and 13 to the Soviet Union and such places.⁶ Alas! What shall I do? Mothers, what am I going to do about [name

3. An expression meaning that they can only hope the future will bring something better.

4. The letter is evidently addressed to more than one female relative whom the writer addresses as "mother." Apparently his mother is with him.

5. He is referring here to the arbitrary transfer of work regiments to distant places.

6. In addition to indicating the uncertainty and the extent of rumors in the villages, this would seem to indicate that Communist propaganda has not completely convinced the Chinese that the Soviet Union is a paradise.

omitted]? When something is decreed by the Government, it will materialize. It is said that in other areas, this has already materialized. Mothers, brother [name omitted] and sister-in-law, please figure a way out for us in a hurry. Please go ahead and do it as soon as you have received this letter so that [name omitted] will be with us forever.

Mothers! It has been more than a month since my mother and I have written an airmail letter to [name omitted]. I do not know whether he has received the letter or not. That I have received no reply from him makes my heart only heavier. For me, there is no way to enter heaven or earth.⁷ One cannot speak out what one wants to speak out. Nor can one bare his difficulties. Financial difficulties could be one reason for his not answering me. How can I blame him when every family is in this predicament?

Mothers! I am sure that you must have already known of [name omitted]'s difficulties. How could I still dare to think of the words "going abroad"? It is something that I cannot help. It is a matter of preservation of life. Originally, I would not have brought myself to ask father and brother for help. I understand everything perfectly. While writing my tear drops are raining like a shower. I cannot go on writing.⁸ I hope you will not worry too much about me. Take good care of your health. How is little sister [name omitted]? Is she going to school?

I believe that [name omitted] has already arrived in Macao, and mother [name omitted] and sister-in-law must have already met him. You must have been told about the family. Mother [name omitted] and sister-in-law must know that things are changing every day. Yesterday, village delegates were in a meeting. It is very tense. Within four days, communes and mess halls must be established.

Mothers and brother [name omitted], try every way possible to help me upon receipt of this letter, and send me a reply as soon as you have received it. This letter is written with tears.

Wishing you happiness and safety.

YOUR SON

P.S. Regards from my mother.

Letter addressed to Macao

OCTOBER 16, 1958

DEAR [NAME OMITTED]

How are you? I wish you all the best. Time flies like an arrow. It seems such a short time since we parted, but actually it has been several months. I have not written you to find out how you have been getting along, but I have thought of you and feel that you must be in sound health and successful while living in other lands. Best regards.

During these several months since you left our home town, social changes have been so enormous that anyone would be startled to learn of the develop-

7. A Chinese expression for complete hopelessness.

8. The Chinese text of the letter does indeed become more incoherent, and the calligraphy less precise, from this point forward.

ment. To discuss these social changes would make my head ache. With the establishment of communes, all property has become State owned; all houses and furniture have been turned into Government property. They merely do what they like. No one has any rights at all. It is superfluous to mention this. What is more serious is the recent policy implemented by the Party's Central Committee. Under this they have rallied large numbers of youth or middle-aged men and women to proceed to Hainan Island, Hsing-ning, P'u-ning, and Mei-hsien to work in mines, build reservoirs or dams, and construct railroads. All those who are drafted or assigned are not permitted to resign. It is because at present the Government is carrying on a policy of coercion, and any individual unwilling to obey the Government's assignment would be transported to a work area to undergo labor reform.

This time, [name omitted] was assigned by the *hsiang*⁹ Government and this made me very disappointed. Fortunately, however, her census records are in Swatow and she hurried to Swatow in order to avoid disaster. My heart then eased a little. But another unexpected event came. [Name omitted] was required to join the reservoir building. They wanted large numbers of children of the ages 8 to 16 to proceed to the Northeast to pick cotton.¹⁰ As soon as I received the news, my heart ached. I was much worried for the sake of [name omitted] and her mother. I feel that this is certainly not the place for them. At present, [name omitted] and her mother cannot but run away. Both mother and daughter, I am afraid, may be transferred to distant places. What to do then? Therefore, I decided to advise them to avert the temporary danger by filing an application to go abroad. If it is approved, mother and daughter will be staying in Hong Kong temporarily. When they arrive in Hong Kong, [name omitted] will try to look for a job. It is because [name omitted]'s financial sources at present are limited, and it certainly would be difficult for him to get both mother and daughter to Thailand.

However, I have written to [name omitted] several times on [name omitted]'s trip to Thailand, in order to ask his views. But more than a month has elapsed and I have not had any reply from him. I am quite anxious. The time has almost come for the Government to assign people. Therefore, I could only apply on her behalf by writing to [name omitted] on the Thailand airmail letter paper. Later I shall write to Thailand and ask [name omitted] to speed up sending a letter to the *hsiang* Government applying to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau. That is the measure I have taken with regard to the transfer of [name omitted] and mother. What are your views on the matter? Please write to maintain our contacts.

During the past few days, public mess halls have been established. Each mess hall has approximately 100 families. As soon as the bell rings, all go into the mess hall to eat. When the bugle is sounded, all go out to the field

9. Township.

10. During 1958, Chinese mainland newspapers recounted the enthusiasm of hundreds of thousands of youth volunteers who went to frontier areas.

to work. We can't stay at home or rest. Such an environment makes one weep. Everywhere you can see people cry. There is an atmosphere of sadness around.¹¹

At present, the surveying is being done on the living quarters.¹² In future, perhaps the house will be eliminated by the survey so that only two 8-foot rooms, each like a back room, will be left. I tell you this as a matter of course.

I can never finish all I would like to say. Let us discuss matters again.

BEST REGARDS,
[NAME OMITTED]

NAN-AN HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
OCTOBER 23, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

Our school is now working for its electrification and needs to buy a generator. All teachers and students are enthusiastically contributing. I have been asked to donate at least 20 yuan.¹³

For the sake of the current Great Leap Forward campaign, and for the sake of my future opportunity of studying for higher education, I suggested donating 10 yuan, but this was not approved by the others.¹⁴

Now everybody must labor here. Money has no use. If you come back here, you also will have to participate in labor in the fields, and without rest. Old people have to wash clothes for others. All bank deposits are either used for investment or just taken over by the authorities. As to remittances from the South Seas, only a small portion is paid to us, all the rest is taken as public money.

Therefore, I suggest that if father continues to remit you money there, you had better stay in Hong Kong. Don't come home.¹⁵

SON

11. In an article published in the Peking journal *Political Study* (No. 10, October 13, 1958) three days before this letter was written, Shen Sheng described the rural scene in the following terms: "Like the rising sun coming above the eastern horizon, the communes are shining brilliantly over the entire sky of the fatherland. The peasants of the whole country are singing with joy: 'How happy we are in the East wind! The red flag flutters high up in the air. Thousands upon thousands of *li* [Chinese miles] of mountains and rivers are bathing in the sunshine. We follow the advice of our leader to establish people's communes. Now that communes are set up everywhere, men and women, the old and the young, have all joined. With these communes well established, we make the rivers smile and the mountains nod.'"

12. The author means the family home.

13. About \$8 at official rates.

14. In all such campaign and donation activities the small study groups to which all Chinese belong conduct criticism-self-criticism sessions. It was probably at such a session that the son's proposal to lower his quota was rejected.

15. Probably the father is elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The son is advising his mother who managed to get to Hong Kong to remain there and, incidentally, to have the father send his remittances there.

AMOY, FUKIEN PROVINCE
OCTOBER 28, 1958

DEAR ELDER SISTER:

We are extremely busy now, therefore I cannot write to you often. In addition, my left eye has become worse, plus our heavy workload, plus the fact that this is the time of the people's communes. Everything belongs to the commune now. There is no individual personal property or belongings. If you can stay longer in Hong Kong, perhaps you had better stay on. Here everybody of all ages and both sexes has to work. It is at least wash clothes or watch children for others if it is not manual labor.

We teachers now have no salaries. Each month the commune pays us one or two yuan for buying cigarettes.¹⁶ For months we have not tasted a *catty*¹⁷ of meat or a single piece of fish. Everybody is in the same situation. Nothing edible is procurable.

YOUNGER SISTER

NOVEMBER 3, 1958

DEAR FIFTH AUNT:

I received your letter on the second and through it understand everything. I forwarded the letters you enclosed to Fifth Grand Uncle and Third Younger Sister, so don't worry. Fifth Grand Uncle and [name omitted] are well and in good health. After reading your letter I know you are in good health. I am happy to know that [name omitted] will soon be leaving the country. You are very lucky, Fifth Aunt, because you are now in Macao.

Unfortunately, I am lonely and am now suffering day and night because I must work carrying dirt or sifting coal until my head and feet become so dirty. I have to work until 11 o'clock every night. I injured one of my hands and have been suffering pain day and night. Though I have seen three doctors, my hand is not getting any better.

Fifth Aunt, one thing I should tell you is that we are now having a movement called joining the communes. We will eat at the commune, work for the commune, and our house and everything we have, including our children, will be possessed by the State. People can be sent any place where they can work and eat, so the people can be scattered. Fifth Grand Uncle and I have discussed the matter of selling the things we do not use to get some money to buy food.¹⁸ What do you think?

You know that sewing-machine of yours must be turned over to the commune for public use. For this reason, I am very worried about it. I have discussed the matter with Fifth Grand Uncle, Third Younger Sister and a few others. We finally decided we must sell the sewing-machine as soon as we can. But the price of sewing-machines is too low because there are too many

16. Forty-two cents to 85 cents at the official rate of exchange.

17. One *catty* equals one and one-third pounds.

18. During the fall of 1958, criticisms of people who rushed to sell their goods prior to establishment of the communes appeared in the Communist press. The letter indicates how the commune movement depressed prices, making purchase by the State easier in case outright confiscation was not involved.

people selling their sewing-machines. For this reason, I am writing this letter to ask whether or not you want to sell the sewing-machine. Please answer me as soon as possible.

The present situation is frightening because there is nothing for sale; there is nothing to eat when we are hungry. People are afraid to die because they feel they will be unable to close their eyes after they are dead; and people hesitate to live on. Everybody is suffering. Everything is gone.

Every village has been formed into a commune, and at the present time they are beginning to assign personnel in our district. Everyone seems to have lost all interest. Men have been separated from their wives and children and it is difficult to see each other again. I will let you know regarding the situation at a later date.

You are lucky because you do not have to suffer. I really must congratulate you for being so lucky. How is [name omitted]? We are all well, so don't worry. I do not have the interest to write any more at this time, but will write you some other time.

WITH BEST REGARDS,
NEPHEW

AMOY, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 7, 1958

DEAR SON-IN-LAW:

With respect to the situation at home, 90 per cent of the labor power has now been drafted to do the "aid-front" work.¹⁹ Farm work is all done by women. Only a few male laborers are left behind for farm work. The women, regardless of their ages or whether or not they used to do such work in the past, all have to participate in the laboring now.

All the bricks of every household's kitchen stove have been taken apart for building an all-village mess hall. All eat at that mess hall now. A nursery has been established for children, and an infant nursery for infants.

School students are doing the same: agricultural productive work and school-industrial productive work. They therefore have very little time for classes. Those in senior classes are all boarding and lodging at school.

I am now working at the farm-tool department of the commune. Wages earned by us are given to the commune while all personal expenses, including even the purchase of a match, are borne by ourselves. Therefore, the life of the masses in this stage is extremely difficult.

Your letter was received, but the enclosed four headache pills were confiscated by the Customs. Hereafter, no matter what, please do not send us anything so as to avoid costing us more money.²⁰

STUPID²¹ MOTHER-IN-LAW

19. This letter was written during the Quemoy crisis of 1958, which started with the heavy Communist shelling of that island less than 20 miles from the city of Amoy.

20. The mother-in-law is referring to the heavy duties on all incoming goods.

21. A polite expression in this form of letter.

NOVEMBER 10, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

I have not written to you for a long time. Hope you are in good health. At present, grandma is working in the kindergarten taking care of the youngsters because younger brother is there too. Because younger brother wants to be with grandma all the time, grandma has to work there to look after him. Every day grandma has to take the children to Chung Hsing Li²² from our place and then come back in the evening. There are five of them working there to help the youngsters. Grandma does not read, but she does the cooking. She leaves early in the morning and comes back late in the evening. It is a very hard work for her.

[Name omitted] is not feeling well recently, but her case is not a serious one. Do not worry about her. The problem is that we do not have any sugar nor the herbs to prepare medicine for her. At present, the three of us are eating at the commune. But the problem is that there is only plain rice. No other food besides rice. For this reason, we must prepare the other food ourselves. After you have received this letter, please send us some money to buy food.

Now grandma wants to ask you to do something for her. She said the money from uncle will be enough for the school expense for the two older brothers. In addition, aunt may use the money to buy rice. Grandma also said once you can solve the problem of having enough money to buy food, I may not use the money from uncle. What do you think about this? It is not that aunt has said such a thing to me, but it is grandma who wants to tell you about it. Speaking of the problem of food, the commune has provided us with rice which we need not pay for. The adults must work every day in order to get food. But the youngsters do not work.

In the past, you mentioned wanting a picture of younger brother and myself, but now younger brother is not feeling well. We think we will have a picture sometime later.

YOUR SON

Letter addressed to Macao

KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 11, 1958

DEAR MOTHER-IN-LAW:

It has been two weeks since we were separated. Even until today I still remember you and shall do so all the time! At the very depths of my heart it seems I have lost you and miss you so much! It's because you are so kind to people! Indeed it's hard for me to forget your affection!

We have received your two letters in which you told us about the excellent living conditions as to food and lodging. After we read your letters, our mouths watered. This is your good luck. Why not enjoy it as much as possible? Ha! Ha! Do your best at eating your meals! Received another letter from younger sister, Chen, and learned that your body is getting stronger every

22. A nearby village.

day and that the splint from your injured hand has been removed. Feel you'll get well before long. We also pray the Lord's blessing on you so that you may get well shortly!

Before father-in-law had his teeth fixed, I also started cooking meals and preparing *con'ee*²³ for him to eat. Sometimes fish and meat could not be purchased on the market and then I added some shrimp and potatoes to give more flavor. Since you left the province, father-in-law himself has once or twice cooked meals. Sometimes while he helps prepare the vegetables I begin cooking rice. It's division of labor and really interesting! You said he likes to holler. It really seems that way. After having his teeth fixed he felt a little pain when food pressed on the gum. Then he said, "How painful! How painful! I can't eat anything now!" He's gradually getting well and yet says that his health is not good. You judge whether it's funny or not.²⁴

Third Elder Sister came here again and stayed with us for three days. She took very good care of the old folks. She brought two chickens to entertain us and we all had a big meal together. All of us enjoyed it greatly. Third Elder Sister then hurried back to the country last month to participate in the celebration for the establishment of the commune. After that all will have to go to eat at the commune. Every farmer every month will get at least three dollars for incidental use. Therefore it will be useless to have money from then on!

Night before last [name omitted] and [name omitted] invited father-in-law to go to see a *Hsin-hua* movie and also invited him to go to the T'ai-ping restaurant for a Western meal. He was very much pleased with it. This morning at 6:00 father-in-law took a through train back to the country! Day before yesterday I received from younger sister, Hsin, 120 Hong Kong dollars for all our expenses.²⁵ It's rare to have such a gracious and filial daughter as she. He's also so comforted because of this. Now that father-in-law has gone back we feel more lonesome! Hope you take good care of yourself! Respectfully wishing you the best of luck!

YOUR SON-IN-LAW

P.S.²⁶ And furthermore: Beginning from this month I have started working in a factory by shifts: In the morning—7:00 to 12:00. In the evening—6:00 to 11:00. After that I return home to rest! There is more or less sufficient time for sleep, but sometimes we have to work until daybreak!

My niece is able to cook the noon meals for us. She asked to be remembered to you! Do not worry about us. (In the future my niece can go to the place of Third Uncle. Younger sister, Chiao, wishes to be sent to Macao. At that

23. Boiled rice.

24. Evidently the mother-in-law has escaped from Communist rule and her husband was cared for for a few days by the dutiful son-in-law, who tries to be reassuring.

25. About \$21.

26. The postscript is written in the smaller Chinese characters in the blank spaces remaining on the single sheet of paper.

time it will be a very good thing if Uncle Ku can recommend her for some kind of job there! Don't know whether or not it could be done. Ha! Ha!)

At the moment I have very little time to spare even for writing this letter to comfort you.

My younger sister has gone to school to work at the agricultural experiment station cutting rice crops. She will come back home after one week. How quiet it is!

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 14, 1958

DEAR AUNT:

T'ien-li is in the labor service at the fertilizer factory at Ch'ing-Kang-Ch'un. Due to the requirement for iron and steel he may be transferred soon, but we do not know where. Mother is working as a cook at the mess hall in our commune company. All work from dawn until way after dark. The work is too hard, but everyone has to work.

Although I am not fully recovered, I have to continue my work. If I stop teaching, I may be sent to smelt iron in the "aid-front" work.²⁷ I am now teaching as a temporary teacher at the P'ei-Chen Primary School at a monthly salary of only 20 yuan, which is only enough for my food.

Because the commune mess hall supplies only potatoes,²⁸ which are not good for one's health, mother is thinking of sending grandmother to Hong Kong. But the procedure for it is extremely difficult. She has to go, however, because our houses have all been given out to lodge the students who have come from elsewhere.

NEPHEW

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 14, 1958

DEAR SCHOOLMATE:

I am nominally studying now, but actually it is all labor service. At no time of the day are we attending classes now. All day we are busy going to the countryside, washing iron ore, burning charcoal; here today and there tomorrow. Busy all day, busy all day really.

Nowadays the society is changing every day and is leaping forward ceaselessly. I am very afraid that I may be sent to chop wood in the mountains for fuel. The weather is not good, the life is tough, the living is poor. But one

27. During the Great Leap Forward of 1958, in which Peking claimed to have doubled steel production to more than 10 million tons, primitive iron-smelting furnaces were set up throughout the country and run on a 24-hour basis. According to news dispatches from the New China News Agency in November, when this letter was written, more than 350,000 such furnaces were in operation. Peking stated that tens of millions were involved in this program.

28. The nephew refers to sweet potatoes, which Chinese in many districts were compelled to eat in place of rice. The Peking *People's Daily* even published special menus describing how to make the sweet potatoes more attractive.

could not mention any of this in front of the others, or he is bound to be criticized. And, brother, it is no ordinary criticism!²⁹ You are really lucky to be studying in Hong Kong. Don't ever think of coming back!

SCHOOLMATE

LUNG-YEN DISTRICT, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 14, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

All the labor force has been transferred to work elsewhere, so I have come to work at Ch'ing-Liu. Only three laborers per each production team are now left behind to work at home.³⁰

Since this is the first time that I am practicing as a medical doctor, I really am not familiar with many things. My salary is only 15 yuan a month. I do not know whether there will be any raise later or not.

SON

AMOY, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 18, 1958

DEAR COUSIN:

Have been ill for some time. Had to pay all medical bills. With respect to coming to Hong Kong, it seems we have to wait for some time. The reason is that Hong Kong is a forbidden port now, and the authorities will not let Overseas Chinese dependents go there solely for their own safety.³¹

Now our mess hall has become a part of the people's commune. Nobody has to pay for what he eats, what he wears, or for other daily necessities. All are supplied by the commune. However, one has to give his labor to the commune. All crops produced by farmers belong to the commune. Those who are not farmers, and are not engaged in production work, such as Overseas Chinese dependents, have to pay money to the commune before they can eat. Therefore, Overseas Chinese dependents still need remittances from their overseas relatives. Please tell my father about this and ask him to continue his remittances.

My present wages at the Tung-Yung Machine Factory are only enough to

29. The writer is referring to one of the large public denunciation meetings which are so dreaded. Frequently, following such meetings, some of those denounced are sent for "reform through labor service."

30. Following the harvest, the production teams or "labor brigades" of the communes were moved to participate in large-scale road-building, water conservation or similar projects. The author is apparently a student doctor attached to such a unit.

31. In 1958, the Communist regime imposed new regulations for obtaining permits to visit Hong Kong and Macao and tightened the border guard, possibly in an attempt to limit some of the unfavorable reports which were getting out following the establishment of the communes. For a sample account of the more desperate type of escapes, see the dispatch from Greg MacGregor in the *New York Times* of March 16, 1959.

pay for my food. I still need money for other daily uses. Please continue to send me money. Kuei-li is also working in a factory at Amoy. His wages are also only enough for his food, and he still needs money his mother sends him.³²

COUSIN

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 20, 1958

DEAR AUNT:

The situation here has changed tremendously. Life is hard in the extreme, especially for my two children. They are working too hard and too much. Ti-ti³³ was so over-wrought that even his lips began to bleed. This made my heart ache and my old illness recur.

My two children were supposed to enter the school. But in 13 weeks they studied only three weeks. All the remainder was labor service.

For the first pair of triangular rulers you sent us, we paid a tax of 1.53 yuan. For the second pair, the compass and the earrings, we paid 6.50 yuan. And for the raincoat we paid 14.28 yuan. Such taxes are heavy to us, and their payment aggravates our situation. Therefore, please do not send us anything. Please don't.

With respect to your suggestion that you come home, I dare not agree with you. Things here have changed too much and our difficulties have become extremely unbearable.

Because of your departure, however, we have been told to make contributions of at least 30 to 50 yuan. We really cannot afford it. Please tell uncle to send us more money.³⁴

NIECE

CH'I-HOU HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 27, 1958

DEAR AUNT:

At the moment everybody here is making coffins. I wonder whether you want to have your coffin made now. Please let me know.³⁵

Starting November 30 we shall all eat at the mess hall in the village. There is no count of the amount of food. Everyone can enter the mess hall and eat.

32. This letter is an example of how the Overseas Chinese are being pressured to continue remittances.

33. Chinese term for "little brother."

34. Possibly the aunt left Communist territory to visit the uncle and failed to return. The relatives have therefore been asked for additional contributions. The letter indicates the manner in which the regime encourages receipt of foreign exchange rather than goods.

35. In China, it has frequently been customary for older people to have coffins made in advance. During the course of the "land reform" of 1950-51, Communist authorities denounced many "bourgeois elements" for disposing of their liquid wealth by making elaborate advance funeral preparations. The reference to coffin-making here probably indicates that the peasants are disposing of their possessions in this manner prior to their confiscation by the commune.

But there are only the crude sweet potatoes, although there are three meals a day. It would be an idle dream for any old or ill people to hope to eat something better. It is really one's luck resulting from good deeds done in his former life if he could come to live in Hong Kong.³⁶

My son Li-sheng is still laboring in the commune, but always in the night-time. Brother is still working every day from day to night and night to day-break. Of the 24 hours in a day, he can sleep for only two to three hours.

NEPHEW

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 28, 1958

NENG-TUNG, OUR SON:

We are in extreme difficulty here. We do not now have a cent. Younger son can only take care of himself since he was sent to work in the mountains. He has never been home since he went to the mountains, and his wife gave birth to another child last month. We are old like the setting sun. We never thought that the world would change as much as it has since last year. There is not much longer that we can see. Do the best you can. Do what your conscience tells you.³⁷

PARENTS

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
NOVEMBER 30, 1958

DEAR HUSBAND:

At present all gold possessed by the people must be sold to the State. This applies to everybody without exception. The money obtained from the sale of gold is to be deposited in the bank for a period of three to five years. I had planned to sell my gold ornaments in order to adopt a son, but I never got your approval. The gold has been sold to the country; it is all gone now. I may be able to get the money, plus interest, back after three years.

Mother did not trust me and gave the key to her rooms to Chao-lin³⁸ when she left for Hong Kong. When they searched for gold the first time, Uncle Li reported that nobody would hide gold in any trunks, but bury it underground as people have been doing for thousands of years. Then, at the time of the second search, Chao-lin accompanied the searchers to mother's room and dug out about 5 taels³⁹ of gold. Uncle Li then had to tell people that there was more gold hidden there. In the third search, Chao-lin accompanied the searchers to her room again and dug out another 10 taels of gold.

36. A reflection of the faith in reincarnation found in the folklore of the Chinese Buddhist peasants.

37. The parents apparently feel that they don't have long to live. Ordinarily, this would be the time for a filial son to return home in accord with traditional Chinese propriety. Yet the parents hesitate to urge him to do so.

38. Probably a cousin.

39. A tael is the equivalent of a silver dollar.

Many people have been sneaking to Amoy these days, because in Amoy the regulations and controls are more lenient than here.⁴⁰

WIFE

NAN-AN HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
DECEMBER 1, 1958

DEAR GRANDMOTHER:

We have been extremely busy recently. The country has changed a great deal. Nowadays everybody must work before he can get food to eat. Even middle and primary students must also participate in the labor service. Middle schools are spending the whole semester in smelting iron, making steel, and in agricultural work.

Brother has been very feeble lately. Since he is so sick he can hardly continue his study, he applied at the school for release from schooling. But so far he has not received approval. The school authorities have only allowed him some leave for rest.

Our country's construction is developing day by day now. All the people have joined the labor force, and everybody is busy. Father is working as accountant at the public mess hall, but he only earns his own living and can spare nothing for his family. We five brothers are all studying. Therefore, we are unable to help our home in any way. Our family is in extreme difficulty. We need to pay for meals at the mess hall. I also need to pay for my meals at the Ch'en-Kung Middle School. Since I cannot pay anything, I am eating on loans made to me by the school.⁴¹ I really hope that you will be kind enough to send me ten dollars and send it to me at the school.

GRANDSON

HUNAN MEDICAL COLLEGE
DECEMBER 4, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

These days our labor services are served in night shifts.⁴² We get up at 4 PM (sometimes 5 PM), have our meal at 5:30 PM and start to work at 7 PM. During the night we have two more meals, one meal of sweet potatoes at 10 PM and a meal of rice at 2 AM. The work ends at 6 AM. Then we return, have another meal of rice and go to sleep. Besides eating, sleeping and labor

40. The sixth plenary session of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, which met at Wuhan, November 28 to December 10, 1958, decided that the cities should be organized into communes "only after rich experience has been gained and when sceptics and doubters have been convinced." Life in the Chinese cities, where foreign visitors spend most of their time, continues to be less regimented. Since the establishment of the communes in the countryside, the regime has had to cope with an increased "blind influx" into the cities.

41. Overseas Chinese have reported being pressured to remit large sums to pay for meals at communal mess halls or schools which have been given extended credit.

42. Medical students as well as others participated in labor service during 1958, in compliance with a Peking directive.

service, there sometimes are movies. Although the movies are good, we would rather sleep than see them. Therefore, I have only seen movies twice so far.

The work on our roadbed is about completed. But since the authorities want us to depart for the country early, we were recalled to the school today. Today is December 4, we are leaving for the country on the 8th. Our work in the country is half work as medical doctors and half learning. We not only need to learn about Western medicine, but also Chinese herb medicine. In the rural village we are to start a rural village hospital, and at the same time do some public health and disease-prevention work. We need to learn about acupuncture and many other things.

Elder brother has already received his remittance notice.⁴³ I hope mine will soon come too. Hope I can get it tomorrow. I need to buy a pair of trousers or a Chung-shan uniform, need to have my watch repaired, and need a new flashlight for the To-the-Country Movement.⁴⁴

SON

Letter addressed to Macao

DECEMBER 5, 1958

DEAR BROTHER-IN-LAW:⁴⁵

How have you been doing?

Your letter has just come to hand. I am very pleased to know how you are getting along on the outside. Everyone in my family is well. Don't worry.

According to your letter, your monthly wages in the place you work are over \$80. Does that mean they provide meals as well? Or do you have to provide your own? Also, with what field is your job connected? What is the name of your employer? What work is it? I hope you will advise on these in some detail when you write next.⁴⁶

Dear brother-in-law, I have a request to make. Because working outside night and day is very difficult, I cannot bear this kind of struggle. Besides, the wages are not adequate; I have nothing left after paying for food. Under these circumstances, I also want to apply to go with my husband to Hong

43. Relatives of Overseas Chinese go to a central People's Bank to pick up remittances in yuan, which are handed over at the official rate of exchange—anywhere from one-fourth to one-eighth of the free market value. When they pick up their remittance, according to many who have come out, they are asked to make "voluntary" contributions to State construction programs.

44. A large proportion of university students were enlisted in a "To-the-Country Movement" in 1958 for practical work. In his April 18, 1959 report to the Second National People's Congress, Chou En-lai stated, "In institutions of higher learning, practical work in production has also given a powerful impetus to scientific research."

45. The Chinese, more precise than English on relationships, means husband of my elder sister.

46. Relatives of Chinese living abroad are pressured to get all possible information. A censor seeing these questions might assume that this letter can be passed and perhaps not read further.

Kong. However, my husband has very few friends in Macao, and most of his friends are in Hong Kong. Thus, we are afraid we cannot maintain ourselves while we are in Macao. My request, therefore, is for you to take care of us for 10 to 20 days when we are in Macao in transit. At the same time, can you find me some piecework to do, so that we may stay for a short while? Upon receiving a definite reply from you, I shall file my application. I shall be coming over with elder sister. I hope that when you receive this letter you will answer the above matter in some detail.⁴⁷

Kindly favor me with an *early* reply. I shall end this letter now by saying I shall write again.

Wishing you good health and luck in your work, and best regards,

YOUR SISTER-IN-LAW

KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
DECEMBER 6, 1958

Letter addressed to Central America

DEAR COUSIN:

It has been a long time since I wrote you. I hope that you and your family are well, and that you are prospering.

Last month I wrote you a letter explaining the conditions in detail. It has been over a month, and I have not received a reply from you. I am concerned over this.

Our village is expanding its production and the Government has urged the people to develop land that is not being used for production. It has been announced that people having old or new graves must have the bones removed to another place or the bones contained in the graves will be burned and used for fertilizer.

My recent letter has reported to you that the nine graves of your maternal ancestors must be moved. In September it cost four to five yuan for each urn. Since the demands for these urns have become greater, the price has increased. Those from Shih-wan cost 6.25 yuan, and they have to be picked up at Kuang-hai or Tou-shan.

Recently, I have contracted for people to dig up the bones, but the number was 13, all of which are ancestral bones. They have been treated with heat and placed back into the original containers. Six of the containers are broken and cannot be reused. It will be necessary to buy the 13 urns. I am not able to take on this responsibility, therefore I am seeking your help. Some 70 or 80 yuan people's currency is needed. You will be blessed for this deed. You can complete the entire project for 40 or 50 U. S. dollars. I am awaiting your consent, for which I will be forever grateful.

WITH BEST WISHES,
YOUR COUSIN

47. The writer indicates knowledge of one of the major escape routes from the Chinese mainland—first to Macao and then filtering into Hong Kong by fishing boat—but is requesting more precise information on how her stay in Macao can be managed.

DECEMBER 16, 1958

MY SON:

Your letter of the 2nd has been received. Now about the food problem, we are getting the same as all other farmers. There is no special treatment for us. The three meals we get from the public mess hall contain only crude grains which are completely unsuitable for us old folks.

If you can, please send us more money. Remit it through the bank so that we can get "Overseas Chinese Rice Tickets."⁴⁸ Even with that, we have to pay double price for things or we just have nothing.

Pork is priced at one yuan a *catty*. There is absolutely no fish from the open market. In the black market, the price is about 1.3 or 1.4 yuan a *catty*. Since the big change this year, things have become so difficult for us old people that I just cannot explain or describe the situation to you.

With respect to the young men, all now belong to the country. When the authorities call them, they have to respond to the call and serve in construction work for the motherland. Little brother has been sent to work on the canal. The canal must be large enough so that ships and big boats can pass through. Therefore, there is no telling how long it will take to be completed. . . .⁴⁹

YOUR MOTHER

KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
DECEMBER 7, 1958

FATHER:

Day before yesterday, I received your letter regarding matters at home. Take good care of yourself. I also will take care to put everything in order. Please do not worry.

I have been so busy that all my time is occupied. At the moment, deep plowing for transforming the quality of the soil is being carried out.⁵⁰ The

48. In a statement to journalists from Hong Kong and Macao at the end of 1958, Tao Chu, head of the Communist party in Kwangtung Province, stated: "Overseas Chinese dependents may take part in physical labor according to physical conditions, and may also eat in the dining halls of the people's communes if they are not willing to work, provided they pay for the meals according to fixed rates." Apparently this applies to old people, such as the writers of this letter. Indeed, many letters complain of having to work around the clock as well as pay for meals.

49. The remainder of the letter is devoted to family affairs.

50. In connection with the Great Leap Forward of 1958, deep plowing was one of the eight measures taken by the Communists to increase agricultural production. The others were: water conservation, increased application of fertilizer, improving seed strains, close planting, innovations in farm tools, management in the fields, and protection of crops from insect pests. Toward the end of the year, the eight Chinese characters standing for each of these measures were popularized as the "Eight-Word Constitution for Agriculture." The goal of deep plowing was about one Chinese foot (1.09 English feet). In fertile areas it could go to two feet and in less fertile areas to about 5 to 7 Chinese inches (1/10 of a Chinese foot).

earth has to be dug out to expose it to the sun until it turns white. The digging is five inches deep and we have no tractor for doing it. The only tractor has been assigned to the Ku Ching area and it could not meet our need. In our commune, we have used human labor for plowing. Each of us has to plow half a mou.⁵¹ After the plowing, we planted winter-crop red beans and we also dug 300 mou for an orchard. The work seems to have no end.

The work is not figured according to work units. We receive three meals a day. A first-class worker can get three yuan, a second-class worker 2.50 yuan, a third-class worker 2 yuan, a fourth-class worker 1.50 yuan, and a fifth-class laboring worker one yuan.⁵² I was considered as a second-class worker. Comparatively speaking, I was classified pretty close to the first-class worker. I don't care! Each kind of music will fit for each kind of play! Each kind of pay will match with each kind of work. I am not stupid! Nevertheless, I will just work according to the classification.

When it came to the problem of appraising the unhusked rice stored at home, the captain of our team came to our home to appraise the rice and the unhusked rice. I did not agree with his appraisal. I told him that my father is not here, and I do not agree with the appraisal. Furthermore, after the appraisal no cash would be paid for the grain. It would be just like the former investments we made; they have all gone with the wind. If no cash would be paid, the problem would be worse. Our rice and unhusked rice therefore have not been appraised.

[Name omitted] has written to me stating that if the commune is interested in anything in his house, he will be glad to let the commune use it. In a letter of reply I told him that the things in his house have already been given to the commune without any compensation. None of the farmers has ever been as generous as the farmers are now!⁵³ As long as one doesn't have to pay cash, everything will be all right! I have written him and told him to "study" more.⁵⁴ As to the problems in joining the commune, I don't have time to discuss it with you in detail now. Let us talk about it next time. Best wishes for your good health.

YOUR SON

51. One acre equals 6.6 mou.

52. *I.e.*, per day. One yuan was worth approximately 15 cents on the Hong Kong free market at the time the letter was written.

53. This is a guarded remark indicating that according to the son's opinion, the farmers have never had more pressure put upon them.

54. What is implied here is probably the possibility that all personal cash will be turned over to the commune. The son has written to another relative abroad telling him to "study" (the Chinese term is *hsüeh-hsi*), an oblique way of saying that if the relative reads the Communist materials he will understand that his possessions on the mainland no longer exist. Cash is the only item retained by some people.

CHIN-CHIANG HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
DECEMBER 7, 1958

MY SON:

Conditions here at home have changed tremendously. Now our village has been organized into a people's commune. Uncle's old house is now used as the public mess hall. The whole village is using it, getting their share of the meal from there.

Although we get our meals from the mess hall, actually we need to share the expenses for all if just to cook together. Therefore, I hope you will continue to send us some support.

Nobody would ever have known that the situation would change so much this year. Had we known this, would your mother have returned home from Hong Kong last year?

Although you want us to come out again, your son Ching-tung just cannot get the permission to come out after repeated vain applications. Since he cannot come out, what use is there for us old folks to come out alone?⁵⁵

Ching-tung is in senior primary, I know.⁵⁶ But they spend all day for labor service and can only do some studying at night. He is lodging at school now and can only come home on Sundays. I cannot help feeling sad just thinking of it! If his mother were still alive, how could he still be here? I feel especially bad when thinking of the fact that he has already been to Hong Kong twice with your mother and could have stayed.

This time, the Government has required us to make a donation of 500 yuan and already has taken away 250 yuan which we borrowed from others. The Government is not satisfied as yet and is calling your mother for mobilization meetings every day.⁵⁷

YOUR FATHER

Letter addressed to Macao⁵⁸

DECEMBER 8, 1958

MY DEAR SISTER-IN-LAW, BROTHER AND NEPHEW:

The old and the young in the family are all safe and sound. Please do not worry about us. I wish you spiritual happiness and smooth sailing in everything. I have already joined the commune. Despite the fact that food is provided, money will still be needed to buy fish and vegetables. Whatever was still left in the house, including pigs and cows, etc., has all been turned

55. The Chinese Communists have tended to be more lenient in allowing older people, not capable of heavy work, to leave the country.

56. The fifth year of primary school under the Communist school system. This would make the grandson about 12 years of age.

57. Such meetings are used to stir up enthusiasm for the various drives conducted by the Communists and instill each participant with a full understanding that quotas should be met. This, too, puts pressure on the Overseas Chinese for heavier remittances.

58. A drawing of the new Yangtze River Bridge at Hankow is printed on the envelope.

over to the commune. The family is finding it tough. I do hope that you will try to get hold of some money and send it to us without delay. Also keep me informed of conditions of the family outside and the wife. Let me know as soon as possible, or else I will feel worried. Your letter and photo were received.

Salute.⁵⁹

[NAME OMITTED]

NAN-AN HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
DECEMBER 8, 1958

DEAR SISTER-IN-LAW:

The people's commune will be enforced here soon. In the commune everybody's work is assigned by the commune. People like me also have to do manual labor. It is indeed too much for me. I really hope that you will try to work out a way for me to go to Southeast Asia. If this cannot be worked out, then at least let me go to reside in Amoy.

In the commune everything is free for the farmers, including food and clothing. But for us who are dependents of Overseas Chinese, everything must be paid for in cash and the price is much more than before.

SISTER-IN-LAW

NAN-AN HSIEN, FUKIEN PROVINCE
DECEMBER 9, 1958

DEAR MOTHER:

This time when we were sent to the country, we were assigned to make charcoal, chop wood, and smelt iron and make steel. It is the same thing everywhere. Now all the trees on hills and mountains have been completely cleared up, including that old tree of ours. All have been chopped down for making charcoal.⁶⁰

Nowadays there is not a single idle man. And everywhere on the mountains you can see people sleeping. This time I slept for more than twenty days in the hills, too. I have never experienced such bitterness before.

We are working 18 hours each day, and are unable to have good and sufficient sleep at night.⁶¹ We have one-and-a-half *catties* of rice as our daily food, but because of the heavy work this is not enough. From now on, we know that work is going to be still heavier. Therefore, I may not be able to write you often. I only hope that you'll continue to write to me.

It is said that the people of our school are going to work on a large reservoir at the border area between Yung-ch'un and Te-hui. Once we go there we'll have to work there for three months.

59. This is the Communist way of concluding a letter.

60. This would indicate that in some areas the regime was not as conscientious about conservation as some of its spokesmen claimed.

61. The month this letter was written, Party spokesman Tao Chu told foreign reporters: "It is obviously absurd for the reactionaries to assert that we have made the people work night and day without rest."

Mother, the workload is going to be doubled, and without labor services one will have nothing to eat. I am thinking, therefore, that when I complete my middle school I want to come to Hong Kong to live with you. Mother, from now on meals are free to us. This means that money is no use here, and any money remitted here from overseas will be Government property.⁶² The labor service is so hard that it kills, while the food is not sufficient. And if you talk carelessly, you'll be sent to a public criticism meeting.

Mother, don't even think of coming home from Hong Kong. Hong Kong is the right place for you and me to stay. Here the labor and hunger make everyone half-dead already.

SON

T'AI-SHAN,⁶³ KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
DECEMBER 11, 1958

DEAR FOURTH UNCLE AND FOURTH AUNT:

It has been 10 years since we parted and during this period I have not written to you. Please forgive me. I, your niece, have been laboring very hard at home and am in economic difficulties. I am sure that uncle, aunt and sister are well. But I am here in China, in the changing conditions and unthinkable living situation. How are the conditions under Communist Socialism? The Chinese people are now collected together, doing their share and taking their needs. The laborers, peasants, businessmen, students and soldiers work individually and cooperate. Each individual works for the fatherland. Products go to serve the country and economics are controlled by the nation. Individualism has been wiped out. The nation is becoming wealthy, but its citizens poor. In our village, the people's living conditions are low. Production has increased. There are economy drives, however, on finances and provisions. Every day, I work day and night without stopping and all I get is some rough rice. I am weak and am not able to sustain myself.

Our township has become a commune. Everything is being controlled. An individual's daily task may not be at the same location. The salary is very low. It is the same thing every day. There is no time for rest. Thinking about these difficult days, I am hoping that my uncle and aunt will give me some help.⁶⁴ When Fourth Aunt was at home she knew of my living conditions. She always helped. Thank you.

YOUR NIECE

62. Frequent statements to the Overseas Chinese guarantee that their remittances "will be completely at the disposal of Overseas Chinese dependents." (Radio Peking, in Mandarin to Southeast Asia, January 20, 1959.)

63. Most of the Chinese in the United States come from this area of Kwangtung Province.

64. That is, send some money. The situation is evidently so pressing that the niece has written distant relatives, long out of touch, for help.

T'AI-SHAN, KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
DECEMBER 11, 1958

DEAR FATHER:

On December 5, I received your reply and know that you have sent \$100 through the Hong Kong Bank of China to be delivered to me for my medical expenses. On the 7th, the bank exchanged this for 244.62 yuan people's currency. The request to enter the hospital for surgery has been approved. The head of the hospital went to the county seat for a meeting, and I am awaiting his return to perform the operation. I will write you later, but please do not worry yourself over the matter. Take care of your health.

My hemorrhoid became painful while I was working at the farm. I was examined and it was determined that I needed medical care. I was given leave for two months with pay; now the time period has elapsed and my salary has been stopped. We dare not touch the money you sent for medical expenses, but the family at home do not have enough to live on. Mother and my wife come to visit me daily and it makes me very unhappy to see them in this sad situation. Please send some money back to keep us going until I get my health back, and return to the farm to work.

Mother and the rest of the family are well. Please do not concern yourself.

YOUR SON

KWANGTUNG PROVINCE
DECEMBER 15, 1958

DEAR SON-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER:

I received your letter ten days ago, and also \$25 gold. It was delivered to me by Mr. Wang. I hope, son-in-law, that your health is getting better, that your business is flourishing, and that your family is well.

I hear that you are the chairman of the Communist Youth League in your city. This has made me unhappy. This is a time of confusion. It is not wise to come out for public office. You who are living overseas have the good fortune of living together. You must think about the situation more thoroughly before you take action. You should discuss these matters with your father. Why not give your full attention to the business, to prevent it from being socialized? Study your father's example.⁶⁵

At present, the trend is toward the communes, public dining halls and everybody's laboring. A monthly salary is still being given. This is divided into seven grades: 1st, 10 yuan; 2nd, 8 yuan; 3rd, 7 yuan; 4th, 6 yuan; 5th, 5 yuan; 6th, 4 yuan; 7th, 2 yuan. Those who do not have strength to work, under the supply system, get their ration of rice but no supplemental food. Those who work will get two ration units worth of supplemental food. Actually it is impossible to buy supplemental food.

Those with strength have been sent out to work on the reservoir, or to the

65. This is strong advice—and somewhat risky in this letter which was sent through the open mail.

mines or to iron works. The daily goals must be attained. We work from 6 AM to 6 PM and from 7 PM to 11 PM.⁶⁶ If this schedule is not adhered to, the dining hall will be notified and no meals will be served. Children from 12 to 18 years of age live in the school dormitories. They also have to work. Meals are served in school dining halls and the children are not permitted to return to their homes. As to the cadres and the families of Overseas Chinese, beginning in 1957, they have had to pay each month for their food since there were insufficient workers left behind for them. On an average, each individual must pay 2.60 yuan for rice; for supplemental food the prices vary. Shrimp sauce and other such items are not being sold. The daily food has the same taste. Your sister is engaged to be married to the son of an old friend. He is 19 years old and is in the second middle school. His father is in Canada, but his mother is at home. He has sisters who are married. We have let him decide as to the dowry he is to give. They have not registered with the Government nor have they had pictures taken. The boy may request to go overseas.

Brother would like to come back for a visit but he does not have the money. If you could send \$100 Hong Kong it will cover the expenses. The money could be sent to Mr. Chao. Li-sung is working but he earns only enough for his daily needs.

We are well. I will give you more information later.

MOTHER

DECEMBER 16, 1958

DEAR DAUGHTER-IN-LAW:⁶⁷

With respect to your house here, I have the following to tell you. Around the middle of the 8th Lunar Month,⁶⁸ the workers from the cooperatives came here to build 6 large furnaces for smelting iron and making steel. They worked day and night and produced quite a lot of iron. While this was going on, workers of three cooperatives came to our village. There were over a hundred workers and they took all vacant houses and rooms as temporary dormitories. The rooms in my house were no exception. My fruit chest, sideboard and long table were taken out and put in their office. My bedroom was taken to be used as their general-services section office.

The iron smelting ceased when the winter tilling began and all these people had to go back to their cooperatives for the winter tilling work. However, as soon as the winter tilling work is completed they will come back and do iron smelting again.

In addition, since the cloth factory has been placed under State operation, my house in the village was taken over for the factory's use. Even the firewood

66. Peking consistently claims that outside reports of impossible working hours are "imperialist slanders." In a broadcast on March 19, 1959, for example, Radio Peking stated: "As for working conditions in communes, the eight-hour day system has been adopted in communes throughout the country. . . . Eight hours of sleep and four hours of meals and rest are always guaranteed."

67. The letter begins with family matters which have been omitted.

68. Late September.

shack was taken for use as a cotton-weaving room, with other rooms in the back used as workers' dormitories or as store rooms for grains or as pig pens.

As to your house, the town commissar inspected it recently. Since it is not being fully used, it will probably be taken for public use soon.

Big brother's house recently was requisitioned for use as a student dormitory. His whole family has to move away. They will probably live with me.

So it is obvious that no house or room can be left unused now. This has become a rigid law. . . .⁶⁹

YOUR STUPID AUNT

DECEMBER 31, 1958

DEAR ELDER SISTER:

I received two letters from you at one time.

I can come home only once in two or three weeks. When I am in school, the classes and homework are heavy. Along with the daily labor service, I really have no time to write you more often.

The whole village has been communized now. All people eat together and work together. Everywhere water reservoirs are being built. Everyone who is well enough has to work, including those women of over 40 who are classed as Overseas Chinese dependents. If you were here, you would have to work too. Therefore, I advise you that since you are already in Hong Kong, stay there. Do not come back unless it is absolutely necessary.

Here at present there is nothing to be had. Even if you have money, there is nothing for you to buy. As for food at the public mess hall, there is never enough rice. One could hardly get a full supply of rice in 3,000 years. People fight each other to get to the rice barrels first, but there is never enough. Don't ever tell this to others.

BROTHER

Letter addressed to Macao

JANUARY 6, 1959

DEAR YOUNGER BROTHER:

I have heard people talking about you and saying that you do not have enough clothing. I don't know if this is so and I am very worried. Yet you have the wages you earned before and can have winter clothes made. You must not worry about the family. As for me, I do not have to worry about the daily two meals.⁷⁰ All of us, young and old, go to the collective mess hall to eat. For my share, I can earn monthly pay in proportion to my labor. The highest pay is seven yuan per month, the lowest about three yuan per month. So, I am telling you not to worry about the family!

It is further said by people that you are not in good health.⁷¹ I do not know

69. Closing remarks of a personal nature have also been omitted.

70. An indirect way of saying that the author is getting only two meals per day.

71. The issue of the younger brother's health is probably introduced so that the writer can use it to advise him not to return to the Communist mainland.

whether this is true or false. Please give us an immediate reply about your health so that the anxieties of our mother and elder brother can be duly alleviated. You should also not worry about the ring you took from your younger sister. Anyway, your elder brother is prepared to share it and you should not worry about it.

You may be quite willing to return, yet you should give it a second thought. You can send back a photograph. People in the countryside are fighting a desperate battle and I don't know whether your health is up to it. If you are in [place name omitted], you should send us a reply to give peace of mind to mother and elder brother. It is not that our mother and elder brother do not wish to see you come home. It is because you have already been in Macao for so many months.

Have you corresponded with your Second Elder Sister? Probably, you will meet your Second Elder Sister in Hong Kong after a while.⁷² Younger brother [name omitted] received and read the above.

ELDER BROTHER

JANUARY 8, 1959

DEAR ELDER SISTER:

I received your letter today and all is understood.

You asked whether I am still going to our family temple. No, I am not going there anymore. One time I went there and the authorities wanted me to "debate" about your taking money with you when you left here. In August and again in September they called me there for *hsueh hsi*.⁷³ I slept on the ground at night and worked in the labor corps in the daytime. Then someone reported I had money buried at our house. They sent laborers to dig around the house and they found nothing. Still, they wanted me to continue *hsueh hsi*.

Nowadays, everyone must give up things for "investment." No one seems to know just what "investment" really means. We are told we must give our things to the Government and that's "investment." In return we get three meals a day—three meals of rough grain, not a single grain of rice.

All is bitterness here. Don't ever come back here. Remember! Remember!

YOUNGER SISTER

Letter addressed to Hong Kong

JANUARY 16, 1959

DEAR MOTHER:

We have started the half study-half farming system. The work load for both studying and farming is so heavy that I cannot come home⁷⁴ even on Sundays.

Our mess fees at school are important. If we did not pay the fees on time

72. A way of indicating that the elder sister is in Hong Kong.

73. Brain washing.

74. The son refers to the family home which the mother has left. Students are boarded at schools, even though close to home.

there would be trouble. Therefore, mother, please remit my fees regularly and to the school, so as not to affect my studying and my school record.

Remittances from Nan Yang⁷⁵ must be deposited in the bank and sometimes have to be used for investment by the State, because at present, under the communes, the State needs a lot of money. Therefore, when you remit money home, please separate my school mess fees from the other remittances. You can reduce some of the money for home, but you must remit my mess fees regularly and directly to the school.

Do not come back here. Stay in Hong Kong for at least one or two months more. There is nothing here that needs your return.

YOUR SON

JANUARY 13, 1959

MY SON:

The letter which you sent me has been received and everything stated is understood. The \$50 gold which your brothers and sisters sent was converted into \$280 Hong Kong and was received. The transaction was made through the black market. This is extremely bad.

I have given 4 yuan people's currency to Shih's mother. Please do not worry.

Since we joined the commune, the food at the dining halls is little in quantity! Each individual is given a monthly meat ration of .40 yuan. In the dining room, the purchased food is not distributed to each individual. We do not have to use the meat ration. We can purchase meat whenever we wish.

At present, typhoid is prevalent. Almost everyone of us has had it. The exception was your mother. We have all recovered and are well. So do not worry.

The children are now eating at the nursery. Soon they will be transferred to other places where they will not be permitted to see their parents. This is very disturbing.

Deep plowing and land reforms are now in practice. It is just like raising the bottom of the fields. Each layer of field is plowed one *ch'ih* five *ts'un*⁷⁶ deep. Next year the aim is for 10,000 *chin*⁷⁷ per *mou*.⁷⁸

Many of the villages have sent their people to fetch coal and refine steel. Those remaining in the rural areas are mainly the weak. Next year each individual will be responsible for tilling of 4 or 5 *mou* of land. At the same time, in the dining halls, each individual will be responsible for his money for vegetables.

Is there any possibility of getting Shih's mother and the others out to Hong Kong to live? We are all well. Please do not worry. You who are abroad must work diligently.

YOUR FATHER

75. Chinese term for Southeast Asia; literally "South Seas."

76. Approximately 21 inches.

77. A *chin* equals approximately one and one-third pounds.

78. One-sixth of an acre.

JANUARY 13, 1959

MOTHER:⁷⁹

I learned from brother [name omitted]'s letter of December 1 that father had passed away. The news brought unlimited sorrow to me. I understand everything from the letter and am much concerned. That my son and my wife will not be able to attend my father's funeral makes me so ashamed, because they will fail to perform their filial duties. The gradual disappearance of morality and deterioration of human nature is deplorable! Have uncle [name omitted] and his wife arrived in Macao? Please let me know in your next letter. My eyesight is failing and that explains why I seldom write to you. I did write a letter to you and father a few months ago. However to this day, no reply to that letter has been received.

I have heard that a letter dated the 9th of the month before last, telling of father's sickness, was enclosed in the letter addressed to the bad brother.⁸⁰ Please do not send any more letters through him. I have severed my relationship with that bad brother. I hate him like an enemy. Even to talk about him makes my heart sick. My family is all broken up. Recollection of the past will only bring sorrow to me. All the furniture and other items were confiscated. Even steel window frames were removed. The big house was taken over and the rice in husk was checked. Nothing remains of the family worth talking about. I was not a landlord; the Government policy is beyond me. My elder son is working so hard that he is becoming almost as skinny as a flamingo. My daughter-in-law is doing no better. Both of them are working 18 hours a day. And we are sick so often. It could not be worse. You should take good care of yourself.

How is the health of sister [name omitted]? I am concerned about her. Please give my regards to her. Do not feel sorry about the worsening conditions. It is even harder for us at home. Labor day and night is only equal to two meals. The commune was started two months ago. There is not even any freedom of eating. We are paying 30 cents a day; this means 15 cents per meal. People run around only for two meals. Many older people cannot take the food. They remain half-fed. It is even impossible to do cooking at home as there is no rice available. Nor are there vegetables available, not to mention fish and meat. Only sick people with certificates are permitted to buy. Eggs are selling for between 18 cents and 20 cents each and chicken between 3 yuan and 4 yuan each. This is the black market price. Mother, do not feel sorrowful over father's death. In this world, there is no feast which would not end. Do not feel bad. Take good care of yourself. I think I will stop talking here.

Wishing you good health,

YOUR SON

79. The envelope of this letter is decorated with a sketch of the new Yangtze River Bridge at Hankow, the paper with a floral design. The letter itself is somewhat carelessly written with a Chinese brush-pen.

80. Apparently the brother is a Communist cadre.

JANUARY 23, 1959

DEAR MEI MEI:⁸¹

Your letter came just when I was thinking of you. It made me very happy to know you have a baby boy. Congratulations. I hope you will take a good rest and eat lots of nourishing food to restore your health.

Regarding permission for me to go to Hong Kong, I still have not received any word from the authorities. If I get any information I will let you know as quickly as I can.

At present, life in our village is very difficult. Our food each day consists of six ounces of rice and two *catties* of potatoes. It is difficult for me to eat them, but what else can I do since there are no places to buy other food? Take pork for instance. I have not been able to buy even one piece in the past month. In this kind of life, I really do not know how to spend the days to come.

After you read this, you can imagine how anxious I am to go to Hong Kong. Please do not tell anyone about this, and please burn this letter after you are through with it.⁸² I hope you will soon be in good health and will write again soon. Happy New Year to you.

ELDER SISTER

*Letter addressed to Central America*⁸³

KWANGTUNG PROVINCE

DEAR HUSBAND:

Your letter and \$40 have been received. I am very concerned about your being sick and spitting up blood. Please take care of yourself and do not drink so much liquor. At the same time, please write monthly so that I will not worry.

Formerly, I was working in agricultural activities, but later, because there were no laborers among the Overseas Chinese, the Government organized the relatives of the Overseas Chinese to work. At present each individual is doing what he can. If a person does a great deal he will have somewhat of a monthly salary. If this is not sufficient, there will be a monthly subsidy. The Overseas Chinese do not have to work, but they must have money.

Shao-erh⁸⁴ is now studying at a middle school. He is working and studying. His food is being supplied by the Government, but he must buy his own supplemental food. Vegetables are much more expensive than before. Not only that, they have become very difficult to buy. He is spending over three yuan more per month than he did previously. Our daughters are both in school and are working and studying at the same time. They do not have the strength to work so their food bill is 13 yuan per month. The other children have to supplement money for board. At present the food expenses are very high.

It is difficult to purchase most items even if you have money. An Overseas

81. Chinese expression for younger sister.

82. This letter was brought to Hong Kong by a friend.

83. The letter is undated, but was probably written in December.

84. The second son of the family.

Chinese, if he receives 100 yuan in foreign exchange, will be permitted to buy one *chin* of oil and four *chin* of sugar.⁸⁵ At present, if you want to buy pork you will find it very difficult to get. Some cooking pork can be purchased at the dining hall. Fish is as difficult to buy.⁸⁶ Because things are so difficult to purchase, my expenditure has increased. I will need at least \$200 Hong Kong per month before I can make ends meet. With the \$40 U. S. money you sent me, I made cotton clothing for each of the children. There are always donations and people do not care whether or not there is money in my pocket. All they know is that I am a relative of an Overseas Chinese. Even if we are in difficulty, a donation has to be made in your name. Therefore, we need extra money at home before things can run smoothly.

I hear that father-in-law sold his business and is returning to Hong Kong to live. Mother-in-law and your sister have been requested to ask for permission to go to Hong Kong. They are waiting for Chung⁸⁷ to make passports for them to go abroad. At present mother-in-law is doing very well. Your brother sends her around 500 yuan people's currency annually. She is living very well but she does not worry about the children. If the children do not have money to start school, she still will not give a penny to help. In other words, we do not benefit from her money. Actually, she is very cold to us. We are in financial difficulties and find it hard to bear. I hope that you will be able to give us some blessings.

Our daughter has become acquainted with a boy going to the same school from Wu-ts'un *hsiang*.⁸⁸ His appearance, intelligence and knowledge are of a medium level person. His father is in England. He is an only son. His mother has talked to me several times of marriage. I have not given her an answer. I am awaiting your decision. Please write. This is a matter which affects her whole life. I am not sure whether you want her to marry here or whether it is your plan to get her abroad to marry.

In your last letter, you stated that you are studying Spanish. Are you now able to understand? Please let me know. You are now working abroad, you must fight to get ahead. A man creates his own future. Money is for those who fight for it. One must be patient. You must make a resolution and must believe. You may not reach your goal today but there will be your day. Remember this and struggle for your wife and children. You are an Overseas Chinese. If you do not succeed, people sneer at us at home, and say "unsuccessful." I am sure you do not want people to look down upon you.

Husband, determine and struggle on. You will be able to overcome all difficulties.

May you be in the best of health.

YOUR WIFE

85. Approximately 1½ lbs. of cooking oil and 5 lbs. of sugar per month.

86. One reason for the difficulty in procuring fish in Kwangtung Province in 1958 was the great number of fishermen who escaped with their fishing junks to Hong Kong and Macao during the year.

87. An unidentified person.

88. The nearby village of Wu-ts'un.

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