

哈公怪論

## Four Essays by Ha Gong

Translated by Don J. Cohn

### Getting High

DURING THE Cultural Revolution, the term “high quality” appeared everywhere, especially in connection with consumer products like “high quality biscuits” or “high quality cigarettes”.

Strange thing is, at that time, you never heard of such things as “low quality biscuits” or “low quality cigarettes”.

I happened to learn from some former “young generals” in the Red Guards that during the Cultural Revolution high quality biscuits meant biscuits that were made with wheat flour, while the biscuits which didn’t rate as high quality were made of rice husks. It was the same with cigarettes: high quality cigarettes were made with tobacco and all the rest were filled with papaya tree leaves.

Today the adjective “high” shows up frequently in such terms as “a high degree of freedom” or “a high level of autonomy”. Does this “high” bear any relationship to super *highways* or *high* tension lines? Whether it does or not, the people of Hong Kong have an innate dread of anything “high level”.

Do you all remember how the movement called The Great Leap Forward never even got off the ground? When they ran out of “thrice-steamed rice”—so prepared to increase its bulk—people turned to a certain “highly nourishing, high quality foodstuff”—duckweed. Ducks of course can grow big and fat on duckweed.

*Ha Gong (1933-1987) is the pen name of Xu Zibin 許子賓, a well-known editor and essayist famous for his satirical wit. “Ha Gong” can variously be rendered as Master Ha, Uncle Ha, or the Duke of Laughter.*

So why should humans go to all the trouble of eating ducks when they can dine on duckweed instead? Isn't simply eating duckweed more economical and constructive? The principle at work here is extremely simple, but unfortunately few people in Hong Kong can grasp it. They would rather eat black-pepper steak than hay, and have a peculiar preference for white rice over night-soil.

Perhaps for the very same reason, the people of Hong Kong are generally reluctant to accept anything too direct or high level, and "a high degree of freedom" and "a high level of autonomy" have little appeal to them. They actually prefer the same old sort of freedom they have been enjoying all along, and cherish no extravagant hopes about attaining a high level of freedom, since nobody knows for sure how high this will be. Will it be as high as Victoria Peak, or the Kunlun Mountains in central China? It's very difficult to establish a set of standards, and once the gavel falls a ceiling may be placed on the high level of freedom, after which any further increase in altitude may very well be impossible.

Autonomy has never been tried in Hong Kong before, much less a high level of it. But Hong Kong people, who tend to be a bit shrewder than your average chump, are inevitably reminded of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. It's so autonomous, in fact, that the Chinese Government keeps large numbers of commissars and People's Liberation Army soldiers there to make sure this high level of autonomy is maintained. If we were to judge things by the statement "practice is the only criterion for truth", the Tibetan variety of "high level" autonomy is probably one inch, or 2.5 cm in height.

Recently there's been talk of something called "a high level of democracy". Why qualify democracy with "high level"? Perhaps it's the same as putting the word "people's" before democracy, which results in "the people's democratic dictatorship". Hong Kong people have great difficulty understanding such things, and since they don't understand them, they will politely decline to accept them, and do their level best to avoid them. But if they can't avoid them, they'll run away from them as fast as their legs can carry them.

29 May 1984

## New Surgical Methods for Extracting An Arrow

A TREND toward returning to old-fashioned ways seems to be taking place in fashion, furniture and hair styles. Even the good old arranged marriage seems to have made a comeback.

There also seems to be a resurgence of old fashioned surgical procedures, and quack doctors are opening up offices everywhere. The most glaring example of this phenomena is a novel medical technique for extracting arrows from the flesh. It is so novel, in fact, that most sufferers prefer to conceal their illness rather than seek medical help.

A noted quack surgeon by the name of How-well<sup>1</sup> has recently begun to practise this new extraction technique. He hacks off the portion of the arrow marked "the thirteen-year transition period" with a saw and hands it over to a Mr As-you-want You-do<sup>2</sup> with the admonition: "Here, *you* take care of it." Then, after affixing a medicinal plaster made of dog-skin to the wound, he adds, "Make sure you leave that portion of the arrow marked 'no changes for fifty years' in the patient's body to ensure that there will be no further complications."

At this point, the patient spoke up: "My good man, this is a very poor prognosis. If you leave any portion of the arrow stuck in me, the wound will certainly become infected and start to fester. And if the arrow is poisonous, there's a very good chance I'll die of blood poisoning."

How did the good doctor respond to this? He said, "I'm only a surgeon. All I can do is cut off the arrow's shaft. If you want the point removed, get yourself an internist."

Dr How-well then got on his aeroplane and left. I heard that he was headed for South Korea, where he performed another similar operation. However, his first patient continued to worry that the portion of the arrow designated "no changes for fifty years" would at best leave him a cripple and at worst cost him his life, but an exhaustive search failed to produce a competent internist to treat him. Finally he obtained the services of a barefoot doctor.

This barefoot doctor was indeed barefoot when he sneaked into Hong Kong, and since he'd made his way over hill and dale, he had plentiful experience dealing with cases of arrowhead wounds. He said: "That portion of the arrow marked 'no changes for fifty years' is sure to change before long. Remember what Sunzi said in his *Art of War*? When the enemy is weak, your troops must be strong; when the enemy is strong, you must be weak. When the enemy changes, you must remain firm; when the enemy remains firm, you must vary your tactics. You don't have to wait thirteen years. Things are bound to change in four or five years, like infection and festering. Let me explain this in medical terms even a layman can understand:

<sup>1</sup>A pun on Geoffrey Howe, British Foreign Minister.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Youde, Governor of Hong Kong 1982-1986.

*By studying the problem, we can deepen our understanding of it, and when our political consciousness rises to the heights of the "four pillars which hold up heaven",<sup>3</sup> we will be able to wipe out all bourgeois tendencies consciously and voluntarily, reject everything that smacks of the bourgeois lifestyle and the bogus human rights and freedoms of the bourgeoisie, and unanimously demand the early realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which will allow the five million flesh-and-blood compatriots of Hong Kong to be accorded the same treatment as their billion flesh-and-blood compatriots on the Chinese mainland, and share together a happy life under socialism . . . .*

The only problem is that a thick layer of scar tissue has formed over the wound, thanks to the action of the dog-skin plaster, and there seems to be no way of removing it. Perhaps the best course is to let the arrowhead rot inside.

30 April 1984

<sup>3</sup>The four guiding principles of Chinese socialism: maintain the leadership of the Communist Party; take Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding ideology of the state; uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat; carry out the policy of reform and opening to the outside world.

## An Injection of Hong Kong Dollars

THE LAST few months have seen a rash of Chinese provincial governors and party bosses visiting Hong Kong. They're here to urge local businessmen to invest in China. Obviously this is a step in the right direction.

After World War II, it was injections of American dollars that revitalized the economies of Japan and West Germany, and before long these two countries became two of the world's leading economic powers. Thus the governors and party bosses visiting from the north should be praised for daring to discard their Marxist and Maoist preconceptions and lining up for injections of Hong Kong dollars.

Sadly enough, the moment all the capitalist roaders of Hong Kong learned of the upcoming Liberation of the territory, they very deftly injected most of their capital into the United States and Canada, leaving themselves with only a bit of pocket-money to spend as long as they chose to remain in Hong Kong.

Professor Chen Shubo's suggestion that the Communist Party change its name makes good sense. Do you recall how Zhou Enlai promised the capitalists that Shanghai would maintain its prosperity and stability after Liberation? Certainly, but didn't the Great Helmsman have some other tricks up his sleeve? First, private enterprises were to come under joint state-private ownership, and then state ownership, while factory owners were to become salaried factory managers. But before long these factory owners were subjected to public struggle sessions, paraded through the streets, and locked up in solitary confinement. All their private property was Liberated, and a good number of them lost their lives in the bargain. With this historical lesson in mind, every capitalist in Hong Kong turns pale at the mere mention of the word communism, and has paranoid fits when he hears anyone talking about Liberation.

During the last few years many patriotic businessmen have invested in the Motherland, but few have escaped being driven batty by the bureaucrats and their nutty ways, and even fewer have earned any money.

Gulangyu, an island near Xiamen in Fujian province, had all the makings of a fine residential area, but the local government forgot to build a sewage system for the place, so now "women of the fragrant night" make their rounds collecting the contents of chamber pots in the wee hours of the morning. Is this "modernization"?

Illegal child immigrants\* continue to flood into Hong Kong in a never-ending stream. When the governor of Fujian visited Hong Kong, he promised to find a way to stop them, but how is he going to accomplish this?

The mythological Gun and Yu each calmed the flood waters in their own way. In 1976, Hong Kong harbour was filled with trussed-up corpses "afloat on the blue seas". At present, illegal immigrants are still finding ways to enter Hong Kong. How shall we deal with them?

\*Sometimes their parents are already in Hong Kong, sometimes not.

If the "four pillars which hold up heaven" aren't chopped up and turned into firewood; if the Chinese Government doesn't substantially revise its policies; if the present system isn't turned inside out; and if mere lip service continues to be paid to concepts like the "open policy", then all you can say is that the communists are a bunch of fast talkers.

If you don't believe this, "open up" Hong Kong for a month and see what happens. At the end of that time, if the population of Hong Kong doesn't rise to one billion, and that of China shrink to five million, I'll eat my hat.

A billion people in Hong Kong? And only five million in China? Victoria Peak will be reduced to Victoria Flats.

Leaving this matter aside for the moment, let's explain the reasons behind this strange demographic change.

The moment Hong Kong opens its gates, a billion Chinese from the mainland will storm in from the north. And in order to avoid being crushed to death, the five million people who live in Hong Kong will have no choice but to flee in the other direction.

31 December 1984

## The Legalization of Rape

*They say that a certain civilized country has an unwritten law which states that a person who is raped may neither cry out, offer any resistance or report the incident to the police, but that the victim is obliged to lie back and bear the assault in silence.*

*Later it was realized that this unwritten law was an offence against decency, and instead of enhancing the reputation of this civilized country among the family of nations, had the effect of bringing discredit upon it. At this point, someone challenged this law by raising the following allegations: first, rape is a savage and barbarous act that should be outlawed; second, individual rapists should be punished without exception, with more severe punishment being prescribed for perpetrators of gang rape; third, victims of rape should be permitted to scream during the performance of the act; and fourth, in cases where there is an obvious difference in the physical strength of the victim and the rapist, and thus the victim could not resist at the time of the crime in order to avoid physical violence on the part of the rapist, a discussion should be held upon the completion of the act in order to ascertain the precise cause and effect of the rape. For example, was the victim young and beautiful? Was her behaviour in any way provocative or lewd? Did she manage to incite the rapist to action? Was the rapist psychologically disturbed? Should the victim demand hush money from the rapist, or should she demand a free operation to mend her damaged hymen?*

THE ABOVE is my own translation of an ancient Greek text dating from the New Stone Age. If there are any errors in this translation, the Greek text should be taken as official. I have heard recently that the unwritten law quoted above is now applicable to Hong Kong: The Sino-British talks closely resemble two men gang-raping Hong Kong, with the victim being denied the right to scream or protest. After the event, a member of a certain legislative body appeared on the scene and demanded a detailed enquiry into the background of the rape. But a number of staunch supporters of rapists' rights stood up and called for the legalization of rape, shouting at the victims that they were entirely without shame. This accusation of shamelessness naturally upset a large number of former rape victims, who then rose to the occasion and expressed support for their fellow victims.

It is said that the pro-rapists have good reason to call for the legalization of rape; they believe that the legislator mentioned above can only speak for himself, and has no right to represent all rape victims, and thus no right to scream or protest during the rape. But the opposition states that even though the legislator could only speak for himself, he too is a victim of rape, and has the right to demand a discussion and an investigation into the precise cause and effect of the rape. Now everybody is shouting: "Rape victims of Hong Kong, unite!" As a result, the pro-rapists are completely isolated, and the only course left for them is to call in a few

people who put up a scholarly appearance but whose IQs are down around zero. Having just polished off a Patriotic Chinese New Year's Eve Banquet and a Patriotic Spring Tea Luncheon, these scholars can naturally be depended upon to say a few kind words and cite a few well-worn clichés in support of the legalization of rape to suit the occasion. Most curious is the fact that a number of people who have not had their political appendixes removed have made grandiose statements suggesting that everyone simply sit back and silently allow the rapists to proceed, and that offering any protest is negative and destructive, and will not accomplish any constructive goal.

2 March 1984