

丁西林：壓迫
Oppression

By Ting Hsi-lin

Translated by Joseph S. M. Lau

Dedication

December 7, 1925

Dear Shu-ho:

This short play is dedicated to you. While I am not sure myself if the charming idiosyncracies of the protagonist in this play can in any way be seen as a reflection of your personality, there can be no doubt that you are the very cause for the effect of this play. Last winter (perhaps you can still recall) you had indicated your wish to leave us and look for an apartment of your own. One evening, while we were chatting by the fireside, you brought up this subject again and I said to you in a joking manner, that if you didn't get married first, you wouldn't get an apartment. This is because to rent an apartment in Peking you have to satisfy two requirements: a guarantor and a wife. It then occurred to me that this was certainly an interesting subject, and I told you that I would use it to write a short play and dedicate it to you. More than a year has passed since then, but all my attempts to write this play have come to no avail. Now that this play (in spite of its faults) is finally finished, you are already dead. You used to read all my experimental pieces before they were published; it is indeed a sad thing that I cannot profit from your comments on a piece that is written specifically for you.

This short play is only a fantasy: it contains neither "question" nor "lesson". It has, however, taken on a special meaning now that you are dead. Do you know how you died? Your illness was cholera but your death was caused by fly-bites. Flies don't bite people, but when you were at the hospital, every time friends came to see you they had to swat the countless flies on your bed, your body and your milk glass. You wouldn't dismiss it as an exaggeration if I say you died of fly-bites in such an unprotected state, would you? Hence the thought came to me that if you had the same good fortune as the protagonist of this play to run into such a sympathetic person [as the female tenant] while you were earnestly looking for an apartment, to resist "hand in hand" with you not only the "oppression of the landed class" but also all sorts of bullying and oppressions in our society—I am sure you wouldn't have died.

Being a man with a sense of *humor**, you certainly wouldn't feel offended by my offering a comedy as a memorial to a dead friend. I am by nature no pessimist, but this time is an exception: when I thought of you after the completion of this play, I was touched by a deep sense of sorrow and grief.

Yours,

Hsi-lin

*Originally in English.

CHARACTERS:

MALE VISITOR
 FEMALE VISITOR
 LANDLADY
 WANG MA, an old maid-servant
 POLICEMAN

SCENE:

A room in an old-fashioned Chinese house. A door in back opens to the courtyard, and doors to left and right lead to side rooms in the wings. In right center of the room stands a square table surrounded by a few chairs. There is a white table-cloth, and in the middle are placed a kerosene lamp and a tea-set. Toward the left, against the wall, is a tea-table with two chairs. A raincoat is flung over the back of one of the chairs and a leather suitcase stands by its side. At rear left can be seen a small table with a mirror that looks something like a wash-stand; on top of it are a clock and a vase. There are other furnishings in the room, and some painting and calligraphy scrolls on the walls, all simple and unpretentious.

When the curtain rises, a man in a Western-style worsted suit and leather boots is seated in one of the chairs by the tea-table, smoking a pipe. WANG MA, the maid, is standing outside the door, reaching her hand beyond the eaves to see if it is raining.

WANG (*entering*): The rain has stopped. Why isn't *t'ai-t'ai*¹ back yet? (*She takes the tea-pot from the table and pours some tea for MALE VISITOR.*)

MALE (*getting impatient, standing up*): Would you fix me something to eat?

WANG: Well, we do have something in the house, but again we'll have to wait for *t'ai-t'ai* to come back.

MALE: Even for something to eat?

WANG (*heaving a sigh*): Yes, for something to eat and about the apartment, too.

MALE: All right, so I'll wait till your *t'ai-t'ai* is back. It makes no difference after all whether she comes back or not. (*Sits down again.*)

WANG (*shaking her head*): Looks as if *t'ai-t'ai* isn't going to rent you this place.

MALE: Not going to rent me this place? Then why did she accept my deposit?

WANG: True, but our *hsiao-chieh*² is to blame for this. In fact—Um—our *t'ai-t'ai* is a bit strange. What's wrong with a gentleman like you? It would be safer to have a man around the house in the middle of the night in case something happens.

MALE: Has this place been rented before?

WANG: It's been vacant for more than a year now.

MALE: It isn't a bad place, why is it that nobody wants it?

WANG: Nobody wants it? Everyone who has looked at it would like to have it. It's clean and bright and it has such a nice garden in front.

MALE: Then why hasn't it been rented for more than a year?

WANG: Since you're no longer a stranger, I guess there's no harm in telling you this. Well, you know, our *t'ai-t'ai* loves nothing more than a game of *mah-jong*. So she's out all the time, only *hsiao-chieh* and I stay at home. Whenever someone came to see the apartment, it was *hsiao-chieh* who answered the door and she turned down anyone with a family. She'd accept only bachelors, but as soon as *t'ai-t'ai* returned and found out it was a bachelor she'd turn him down. If they keep on doing this, I wouldn't be surprised this place is not rented for ten years!

MALE: Isn't that interesting! Has something like this happened before?

WANG: I don't know how many times! Every time *t'ai-t'ai* and *hsiao-chieh* would have a fight over renting the place. But up to now *hsiao-chieh* hasn't gone so far as to make a decision on her own. The trouble this time is that she has accepted your deposit without consulting her mother.

MALE: You mean if she had her way, this place would have been taken long ago?

WANG: Yes, but normally people wouldn't say another word once they were told that the apartment was not available. They weren't like you, Sir, so . . .

MALE: Strange, you mean. Yes, your *t'ai-t'ai*'s temperament is a bit strange and mine is too, so when we two run into each other there won't be any easy way out. Really, I find this a nice apartment, especially with that little garden in

¹Servant's address for mistress of the house; also, when following surname, used as "Mrs."

²Young Mistress; also used as "Miss".

front.

WANG: I can see that you love quiet; day in and day out you wouldn't hear any racket in this place. It's close to your office too, so . . . so I've been thinking. . . .

MALE: Yes?

WANG: Just tell *t'ai-t'ai* that you have a family, and that they're coming to join you in a few days. If you say that, *t'ai-t'ai* wouldn't have any objection to renting this place to you.

MALE: Fine, but what if after a few days I don't have a family to join me?

WANG: By that time *t'ai-t'ai* should have found out that you're all right. She wouldn't bother you then.

MALE: That's no good. An unmarried man isn't a criminal. Why can't I even rent a place to live?

WANG: Well, I only thought that since you love this place so much you'd feel bad if you can't have it, so I thought of this wild plan, sorry if I said anything improper. Ah, that must be *t'ai-t'ai* now. (*Moving toward the door, aloud*) *T'ai-t'ai?* (*An answer from outside*) Yes, in here. (*The maid goes out; MALE VISITOR also stands up. After a while, the landlady enters from the back door followed by WANG MA.*)

LANDLADY: Sorry to have kept you waiting.

MALE: I should apologize for disturbing you. I asked Wang Ma not to trouble you, but she wouldn't listen.

LANDLADY: That's all right. (*Taking a bill from her purse*) Here, it's your deposit, please take it back.

MALE: I'm sorry, but I've come to stay, not to take my deposit.

LANDLADY: What? Didn't I make myself clear to you yesterday that I couldn't rent this apartment to you?

MALE: Oh yes, you did.

LANDLADY: Then why did you still have your baggage sent here?

MALE (*happily*): It was you who asked me not to come; I didn't promise you that I wouldn't come, did I?

LANDLADY (*gradually becoming more resentful*): I don't quite follow you. You seem to be saying that you're the one to decide whether this apartment should be rented or not. Is that what you mean?

MALE: Oh, no! It's naturally up to you to decide

whether this apartment should be rented or not, but since you've accepted my deposit, it becomes my decision to accept your return of the deposit or not. You know, the question is no longer to rent or not to rent, but to accept the deposit or not to accept the deposit.

LANDLADY (*getting angry*): When did I rent this apartment to you?

MALE: When you took my deposit.

LANDLADY: The devil! Just when did I take your deposit? It was my daughter who took it, and she didn't know what she was doing.

MALE: Didn't know what she was doing? She's not a child, is she?

LANDLADY: Well, there's no point in going over all this, I do want to rent this apartment, but I want to rent it to someone with a family. Now if you have a family to stay with you, then I wouldn't mind renting it to you.

MALE: You're being unreasonable. Did you say anything about a family when you advertised for the apartment? And did I lie to you?

LANDLADY (*taking a conciliatory approach*): No, it's true I didn't mention it, but as I told you yesterday, we don't have a man in the family. . . .

MALE (*stopping her*): Eh! Eh! Let me ask you. Did you have a man in the family when you put this apartment up for rent? Why hasn't this occurred to you until now?

LANDLADY: You're just being unreasonable! I don't have time to argue with you any longer.

WANG (*trying to be a peacemaker*): *T'ai-t'ai*, it's too late for this gentleman to go out and look for a place to stay now. Besides, it's raining. Wouldn't it be all right if you let him stay for the night and try to find a way out tomorrow?

MALE (*stubbornly*): No, it wouldn't do. If this isn't my apartment, I'll be leaving this minute, but since my deposit has been accepted, this place has to be rented to me.

LANDLADY: Then I'm telling you: you've got to leave tonight.

MALE (*with a sneer on his face*): Huh! (*Sits down.*)

LANDLADY (*confronting him*): Are you leaving?

MALE: No.

LANDLADY: Wang Ma, go and call a policeman.

WANG: Uh, *T'ai-t'ai*.

LANDLADY: I'm telling you to call a policeman!

MALE: What if a policeman comes? He has got to listen to reason too.

WANG: *T'ai-t'ai*, I think. . . .

LANDLADY: Call the police! Did you hear me? Are you going?

WANG: All right. (*Leaves by the back door.*)

LANDLADY: Tell him to come right away. (*Goes out the back door and slams it shut.*)

MALE (*feeling helpless; fishes out a pipe and a tobacco pouch from his pocket. Finding the pouch empty, he takes out a can from the suitcase, fills up the pouch first and then the pipe. Just when he is about to light the pipe, there is a knock on the door. He hollers*): Come in! (*Remains standing with his back to the door.*)

FEMALE VISITOR (*Pushes the door open, enters in light steps. She is wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella in one hand, a small handbag in the other. She begins to speak as soon as she enters and once she has opened her mouth it seems nothing can stop her from talking*): Oh, I'm sorry. Do forgive me. (*MALE VISITOR makes a swift turn and only now does he realize that the one who has just entered is such a person.*) This is very impolite, I know, but I can't help it. Your front door is open, I knocked on it several times, no one answered, so I just came in.

MALE (*though still angry, he does not forget to remove the pipe from his mouth and put it on the table*): What do you want?

FEMALE: Me? I've come to work for the Ta Cheng Co. In fact, I just arrived from Peking today. I took the 3 p.m. train and got here at 6, only ninety miles and it took three hours, just think! Now I'm looking for a place to stay. I jotted down several addresses at the train station and I've looked over several places but I couldn't find one that suits me. I was told that there's an apartment here. . . .

MALE (*taking her to be a rival*): So you've come to rent an apartment.

FEMALE: Yes, I wonder if it's still available.

MALE (*heartlessly*): You're out of luck, the rooms have just been rented.

FEMALE: It's just like what you said, I'm indeed out of luck. The country roads have been hard on my feet, especially in this kind of weather. Look, I'm soaked all over and my feet are sore. (*Heaves a sigh.*) Ah, can I sit on your chair for a while?

MALE: Sorry, please do. (*All his anger has vanished.*)

FEMALE (*puts down her handbag and umbrella*):

Thanks. (*She sits on a chair by the tea-table and looks around.*)

MALE (*beginning to feel an interest; takes a seat on a chair by the square table*): Just now you said you've come to work for Ta Cheng Co.; what will you be doing there? Oh, perhaps I shouldn't ask.

FEMALE: Shouldn't ask? Why not? There isn't anything to hide about this. Two weeks ago they advertised in the newspaper for a secretary. That advertisement appeared in all newspapers; I'm sure you have seen it.

MALE (*nods.*)

FEMALE: Last Friday, an announcement by the same company appeared in the newspapers saying: "Notice is hereby given that the post for a secretary earlier advertised in this paper has now been filled. No more applications will be received." Did you see that?

MALE (*Nods again.*)

FEMALE: The one who filled that post is me. Are you surprised? Did it ever occur to you that the one who got that job might be a woman?

MALE: No, it didn't

FEMALE (*quite proud of herself*): But what am I going to do now? Just think, I shall have to report for duty day after tomorrow and I still haven't found a place to stay! I haven't had any rest since I started walking at half past six today. To tell you the truth, I haven't even eaten. (*Stands up to adjust her dress and walks to the mirror to take a look at herself.*)

MALE (*seemingly sympathetic*): You haven't eaten? That won't do! Maybe I can be of some help in this matter. (*Stands up to pour her some tea.*)

FEMALE: Thanks. I merely wanted to tell you the truth. I didn't mean to ask you to feed me.

MALE: Oh, I'm sorry. Anyway, have a cup of tea first.

FEMALE: Thanks. (*Returns to her seat.*)

MALE (*fishes out a cigarette case*): Do you smoke?

FEMALE: No, I don't, but I don't mind if others smoke. (*Sips her tea.*)

MALE: Thanks. (*Replaces his cigarette case and pipe; turns his back and lights a cigarette.*)

FEMALE (*touches her feet*): Good Heavens! Look at my feet! What a sight they make!

MALE (*turns toward her*): What's the matter?

FEMALE: They're not only soaking wet, but also muddy.

- MALE (*attentively*): That's too bad. Do you want to change socks? If you want, I can go out.
- FEMALE: No, thank you. Even if I want to, there's no need for you to go out.
- MALE: No matter. If you don't have socks with you, I can loan you a pair.
- FEMALE: Many thanks. I really appreciate your kindness, but what's the use of changing since I'll soon be walking in the water again?
- MALE: Walking in the water? Why?
- FEMALE: How can I help it? It's so dark, how can I tell where there's water and where it's dry once I step outside?
- MALE (*as if lost in thought.*)
- FEMALE (*takes another sip of tea; heaves a sigh and stands up to take leave*): Oh well, sorry for troubling you. (*Holding her umbrella and hand-bag, she is ready to go.*)
- MALE (*stopping her*): No need to rush, stay another minute. A while ago you said you want to rent an apartment, didn't you?
- FEMALE (*facing him*): What? You still haven't understood me after all I've said?
- MALE: Well... Yes, I have. But... Ah, what do you think of these three rooms?
- FEMALE: But didn't you say they have been rented?
- MALE: They're indeed rented, but perhaps they can be released to you.
- FEMALE (*happily*): Released to me? Do you mean it? (*Puts down her umbrella.*)
- MALE: Of course I mean it. (*Pours another cup of tea for her.*)
- FEMALE (*sits down, taking the tea-cup from him*): Thank you. How can they be released to me? Do you mean that if I'm willing to take them you can get out of renting it to the other person?
- MALE (*shakes his head.*)
- FEMALE: Or perhaps you were just kidding me. This place has never been rented in the first place. Is that it?
- MALE: No, I told the truth. This apartment has been rented and it isn't being taken back. When I said it could be released to you, I meant that the one who rented it is willing to release it to you.
- FEMALE: This I don't understand. Why would he want to release it to me?
- MALE: That you don't have to know.
- FEMALE: Is this house haunted?
- MALE: Are you afraid of ghosts?
- FEMALE: Oh no. I mean perhaps that person is afraid of ghosts.
- MALE: He isn't, but ghost or no ghost, let's take a look at the rooms, shall we? (*He takes a lamp to lead the way. This is a bedroom. He opens the door at the right and lets her in.*) Matted ceiling, cement floor, foreign-style bed with sheets and blanket. Outside the window is a little garden and you can hear the chirping of the birds early in the morning. In the daytime the sunlight will flood in as soon as you draw the window curtains. (*She comes out. He takes her to the side room on the right.*) This is also a bed-room with bedding and furniture. It's the same size as the one you've just seen, only not as bright. If you stay here by yourself, you can use this one as a bedroom and the other as study. (*She walks out.*) This space in between can be used as dining room and sitting room. (*Puts the lamp down.*) The house is bright and clean, day and night you wouldn't hear any noise. Besides, it's close to your office; I don't think you can find a better place.
- FEMALE: What is the rent?
- MALE: Very reasonable. These three rooms for only five dollars a month.
- FEMALE: It's really a nice place and the rent is reasonable (*pauses*). Are you sure I can take it?
- MALE: Of course I am. Why should I lie to you?
- FEMALE: But I can't possibly move in tonight, can I?
- MALE: Why not? (*Pauses, as if something suddenly comes to mind*) But, eh, are you married?
- FEMALE (*jumps up, stiffens herself with raised eyebrows*): What?
- MALE (*repeat*): Are you married?
- FEMALE (*angry*): Your question is ridiculous!
- MALE: Ridiculous?
- FEMALE: It's an insult!
- MALE (*happily*): An "insult," yes, that's right, that's exactly what I said, but the first thing the landlords or landladies ask nowadays is if you're married or not.
- FEMALE: What has it got to do with you if I'm married or not?
- MALE: Yes, you're right there. What business is it of theirs if I'm married or not? But that's what they keep asking you, isn't it strange?
- FEMALE: I don't understand.
- MALE: Who expects you to? Of course you don't.

- But be patient, let me tell you and you'll understand—you said a while ago that you've come to work for Ta Cheng Co., right?
- FEMALE: You really have a short memory, how can you forget so easily what I told you just a minute ago?
- MALE: Don't get mad. I only want to tell you that I also have come to work for Ta Cheng.
- FEMALE: You also work for Ta Cheng?
- MALE: Yes, that never occurred to you, did it?
- FEMALE: What do you do there?
- MALE: I'm an engineer.
- FEMALE: Then you're not the landlord.
- MALE: Who told you I was? Did I say that? Do I look like a landlord?
- FEMALE (*interrupting him*): Oh, I get it now! You're the tenant of these three rooms, and you don't like them, so you want to give them up!
- MALE: Want to give them up? Who said I wanted to give them up?
- FEMALE: Didn't you just say that these rooms could be released to me?
- MALE: I did, but I only said "release," not "give up."
- FEMALE: You've got me completely confused. If you don't want to give them up, why release them?
- MALE: You really don't understand?
- FEMALE: I really don't. (*Sits down.*)
- MALE: Because—when I saw you—Oh, well, because the landlady wouldn't rent them to me.
- FEMALE: Why not?
- MALE: Because it's a question of marriage. Now we're getting to the point. A week ago, I came here to take a look at this apartment and I ran into the landlady's daughter. As soon as she saw me, she cross-examined me, asking me if I'm married, if my mother is with me, whether I've children and brothers and sisters, etc. She was not satisfied until I told her in so many words that I'm single, then she agreed to let me have this apartment without even bothering to talk much about the rent.
- FEMALE: Don't you understand? It must be that she knew you're an engineer and wants to marry you.
- MALE: Really? Why didn't I think of that? Anyway, when I came yesterday afternoon, the old lady told me if I don't have a family with me, she wouldn't rent this place to me. Outrageous, wouldn't you say? She knew that I'm single and she used this excuse to keep me out.
- FEMALE: Why wouldn't she rent it to you if you were single?
- MALE: I don't know. She said they don't have a man in the house.
- FEMALE: Nonsense.
- MALE: It's an insult, isn't it?
- FEMALE: Yes—but what happened afterwards?
- MALE: I gave her a good talking to.
- FEMALE: And did she see the logic in it?
- MALE: The logic in it? I tell you, there isn't any room for any logic in the mind of a person over forty, only old-fashioned ideas.
- FEMALE: What are you going to do now?
- MALE: Now? I'm not leaving.
- FEMALE: What about her?
- MALE: Her? She has sent for a policeman.
- FEMALE: Sent for a policeman? What for?
- MALE: To throw me out.
- FEMALE: Really?
- MALE: Why should I lie to you? If you don't believe me, see for yourself. The police should be here any minute.
- FEMALE: This is really interesting, but what would you do if the policeman really wants to throw you out?
- MALE: I didn't have any idea before you came, but I've got one now.
- FEMALE: What is it?
- MALE: I'll beat him up, so he'll have to take me to the police station. Then I'll ask the landlady to release my apartment to you so that you and I both have a place to stay.
- FEMALE: That won't do. (*Appears to be thinking.*)
- MALE: Why not?
- FEMALE: Because you wouldn't have a chance to get even with the landlady—Oh, I've got an idea.
- MALE: Yes?
- FEMALE (*pauses*): How about taking me as your wife?
- MALE: What?
- FEMALE: You needn't be so frightened. I'm not asking you to marry me.
- MALE: You've misunderstood me. I . . . I . . . I really haven't thought about this as a way out.
- FEMALE: This is the best way out. She said she wouldn't rent the apartment to you because you aren't married. Now you can tell her you

- have a family and see what she can say.
- MALE: She can't possibly have anything to say.
But do you really want to do this?
- FEMALE: Why not? What would I lose, since I'm not your real wife?
- MALE: Oh, thank you, thank you.
- FEMALE: Please don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that there's something to lose in being your wife. That's an entirely different question.
- MALE: Yes, that's an entirely different question, but I want to thank you nevertheless. After all, you've helped me solve my housing problem.
- FEMALE: Thank me? Why? Since neither of us is qualified to rent this place, it is only logical that we unite together to fight them. *(Cocks her ears to listen.)*
- MALE: You're right, yes, you're right.
- FEMALE: I hear someone talking outside.
- MALE: Then it must be the policeman. *(Hastily)* What shall I say now, since I already told them that I'm single?
- FEMALE: Just tell them we've had a fight, you ran away and you don't want people to know. . .
- MALE *(The policeman is already at the door outside; he gives a nod and signals her not to speak any more.)* Shh! *(He sits by the square table, pretending to be angry. FEMALE VISITOR sits by the tea-table. The back door is pushed open from outside, a policeman enters carrying a hurricane lamp, followed by WANG MA and the LANDLADY. They are surprised to see a woman in the room. No sooner have they entered than FEMALE VISITOR stands up to greet them. The policeman puts the hurricane lamp on the table and makes a bow to the angry MALE VISITOR.)*
- POLICE: May I have your name, please?
- MALE *(rudely)*: Wu.
- POLICE *(nods)*: Thank you. And your address?
- MALE: Address? I have no address.
- FEMALE *(begins to play the role of an abused wife)*: So you've decided to disown your family?
- POLICE *(beginning to take notice of the interrupter; turns to MALE VISITOR)*: This lady is . . . What's her name?
- MALE *(not being able to answer, throws a glance at FEMALE, who is fully aware of his embarrassment; he can only resume his role as a sulky husband)*: I don't know. Ask her yourself.
- POLICE *(following his suggestion)*: What's your name please?
- FEMALE *(cheerfully)*: Me? My name is also Wu.
- POLICE: Oh, also Wu.
- FEMALE: Yes.
- POLICE *(can't think of anything to say)*: And your address?
- FEMALE: My address? I live in Peking, No. 375, Taiping Alley, West Four Memorial Arches opposite the Kuan-ti Temple, telephone W 4692. . . Oh, you'd better take it down because you might forget it afterwards.
- POLICE *(pulls out a notebook as told)*: Peking . . . *(Writes.)*
- FEMALE: Taiping Alley, West Four Memorial Arches *(Pauses for the policeman to write)*, opposite the Kuan-ti Temple.
- POLICE: House number?
- FEMALE: 375, telephone number is W 4-6-92.
- POLICE *(finishes writing)*: Thank you. *(Replacing the notebook, turns to MALE VISITOR)* You're here to rent the apartment, right?
- MALE: Wrong! I've come to take up residence here. I rented this apartment sometime ago.
- POLICE *(stumped; finding no way out, turns to FEMALE VISITOR)*: And you're here to . . . ?
- FEMALE: Me? I've come to look for someone.
- LANDLADY *(cannot control herself any more)*: Who're you looking for?
- FEMALE *(nods to her very politely)*: I've come to look for my husband.
- LANDLADY: Look for your husband? Who's your husband?
- FEMALE: I think you should have known, since you've rented the rooms to him.
- LANDLADY: What? So he's your husband?
- FEMALE: I don't know. You ask him. See if he admits it.
- WANG *(she too cannot control herself any longer)*: *T'ai-t'ai*, see what I mean? Didn't I tell you in the beginning this gentleman must have a family and you didn't believe me.
- POLICE *(confusedly)*: What? Just now you told me this gentleman didn't have a family, why is he all of a sudden a married man?
- WANG: Don't be foolish. This lady was not here a while ago, so how could we know? If she had come earlier, it would have saved me a trip in the rain.
- FEMALE: I'm sorry, but really I can't be blamed for this. My train was late and I arrived here only at six.

WANG: No, I didn't mean you. I only want to say that the policeman should have known better.

POLICE: Now, this must be made perfectly clear.

It was *t'ai-t'ai* who asked me to come, saying that this gentleman has rented three rooms and is staying here all by himself. She said that since only womenfolk live here, it would be quite inconvenient to have a male tenant around. Now that Mrs. Wu has arrived, then there shouldn't be any more problems, because if Mr. and Mrs. Wu are staying here together, I don't have any more business. But in case Mrs. Wu is not staying, then I . . .

WANG: Don't talk such nonsense. Of course Mrs. Wu is staying, can't you see a thing as simple as that? Mr. and Mrs. Wu are just having a quarrel over some small matter, and you're talking nonsense when you should be helping them to make up. Where is Mrs. Wu to stay if not here? All

right now, no more business for you, you can go back to your *mah-jong* game. (*Hands over the hurricane lamp to him.*) Go! Go!

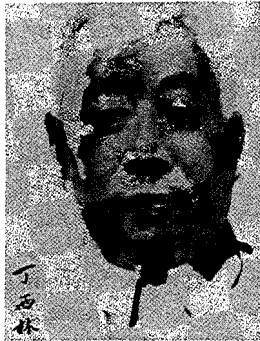
POLICE: Well, if that's what it is, I really don't have any more business here. Good-bye! Good-bye!

FEMALE: Good-bye! and don't you worry. I'll let you know when I'm not staying here any more.

POLICE: I'm sorry for the disturbance. (*Exit. WANG MA cheerfully follows him with the teapot. The LANDLADY is now reconciled to her defeat, takes a look at her tenants and retreats with a long face.*)

MALE (*closes the door, then it occurs to him that he has not asked a question which should have been asked at the beginning; he suddenly turns around*): Er, what's your name?

FEMALE: I . . . Oh . . . I . . .



Ting Hsi-lin, 1893-1974, was a professor of physics who will be best remembered as the writer of some of the more successful one-act plays in the early years of the Literary Revolution. His first play "A Hornet" (一隻馬蜂) was written in 1923, four years after the May 4th Movement of 1919. He wrote six others, all situational comedies, of which "Oppression" is the best known. The mock-seriousness of the title is explained in the epistolary preface. Ting Hsi-lin's sorrow for his friend did not obliterate what struck him as a good subject for comedy, which he once differentiated from farce as something that "appeals to our rationality." He also succeeded in creating a heroine that must

have been an early Chinese version of Nora—prototype of the New Woman who was introduced to China's intelligentsia almost simultaneously with the modern spoken drama.

To the present translator, Ting employed a stagecraft akin to that of a Scribian well-made play, relying on "the machination of peripety" for the desired surprise effects. "The happy surprises in 'Oppression'," Prof. Lau wrote, "are so well-planned that they seem to come off casually in the form of an after-thought." Again, the character of the Female Visitor "must have been amazed at her own unconventionality: she could not have done it under other circumstances." It is this kind of dramaturgy that caused one contemporary critic to say: "Each time I re-read Ting Hsi-lin's plays, they never failed to give me the same pleasure."