

Turandot, or the Whitewasher's Congress

(1954)

by Bertolt Brecht

***Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories***

Characters:

The Emperor of China · Turandot, his daughter · Yao Yel, his brother · The Dowager Empress · Her doctor · A cleaner · The Prime Minister · The Court Tui · The Minister for War · Xi Wei, Chairman of the Association of Tuis · Ke Lei, Dean of the Imperial University · Munka Du · His mother · His two sisters · His secretary · His portrait artist · Nu Shan, Secretary to Xi Wei · Wen, another Tui · Wang, Secretary of the Tui Academy · Gu, Ka Mü, Mo Si and Shi Ka · A Sha Sen, an old peasant · Er Fei, his grandson · A clerk · A waiter · Gogher Gogh, a bandit · Ma Gogh, his mother · Two bodyguards · Turandot's two maidservants · Two Union Tuis · The delegate of the Clothesmakers · The delegate of the Clothesless · A teacher · Si Fu, a pupil · Pupils · A scribe · Shi Me, a young Tui · Meh Nei, leader of a group of young Tuis · The geographer Pauder Mel · An unknown head on the city wall · The hangman · The Tui for General Education · The Tui for Economics · The Tui for Medicine · The Tui for Love-Life · A street-seller · Customers · Qiung, Su and Yao, washerwomen · A swordsmith · Woman at the window · Tuis · Armed men · Bandits · Officers · Soldiers · Members of the Clothesless

The Tuis are characterised by small hats after the style of Tibetan or European priests. The hats differ according to the importance of the Tui, more or less decorative, and of different colours.

IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE

A cleaner is scrubbing the floor. The Emperor sweeps in, followed by the Court Tui and the Prime Minister, both in Tui-hats.

EMPEROR: I'm beside myself. It's bad enough to have to hear how the state is being brought to the edge of ruin by mismanagement and corruption. But then to cancel my second breakfast pipe! That's too much! I'm the Emperor of China, I don't see why I should put up with it.

PRIME MINISTER: Your heart, Your Majesty! It was on account of your heart!

EMPEROR: My heart! If my heart is suffering, then it's because people don't take me seriously. Last week they took away two hundred of my racehorses – am I not to go riding any more? I was silent then . . .

PRIME MINISTER: Silent!

EMPEROR: Well, as near as dammit silent. And today I discover that my second pipe has been cancelled. My heart! The revenues are slipping away! They left it to me to choose between the silk monopoly and the cotton monopoly. I was all for silk. But they said, take the cotton. Nobody I know wears cotton, they all wear silk. But all right, I thought, maybe the common people wear cotton, all right, I'll wager on the people. And now I'm bankrupt! *To his brother, Yao Yel, who has just entered:* Yao Yel, I'm abdicating.

YAO YEL: And why, pray, this time?

COURT TUI: China without its Emperor!

PRIME MINISTER: Unthinkable! We'll have to adjust the revenue accounts.

EMPEROR: They shouldn't cancel my morning pipe, if they value me even a little bit.

CLEANER *to whom the Court Tui has been whispering:* Emperor Sir, you mustn't leave us. *She kneels down, in response to a gesture from the Court Tui.* A simple woman of the people, I beg you to continue to bear the burden of the crown.

EMPEROR: I'm moved, but I can't do it, my good woman. I simply can't afford to be Emperor. *To Yao Yel:* And you're to blame, don't contradict me. If I hadn't agreed to transfer the monopoly to you . . .

PRIME MINISTER *with a glance at the cleaner:* Your Majesty formally abjured the monopoly, so that no one could maintain . . .

COURT TUI: . . . that His Majesty had anything to do with business.

EMPEROR: Exactly! So that someone could make a decent profit. And are we making a profit? I demand to see the accounts.

YAO YEL *angrily:* I've heard enough of this. *He pulls the cleaner forward.* What did you pay for the headscarf?

CLEANER: Ten yen.

YAO YEL: When? When did you buy it?

CLEANER: Three years ago.

YAO YEL *to the Emperor:* And do you know what it would cost now? Four yen.

EMPEROR *feels the scarf, interested:* This is cotton?

PRIME MINISTER: Cotton, Your Majesty.

EMPEROR *darkly:* And why do they sell it so cheaply these days?

PRIME MINISTER: Majesty, you'd better know the truth. We've just had one of the most awful years in the history of China. The harvest . . .

EMPEROR: So what about the harvest? Has the weather been bad?

PRIME MINISTER: It's been very good!

EMPEROR: So were the peasants lazy?

PRIME MINISTER: They worked very hard!

EMPEROR: So what is wrong with the harvest?

PRIME MINISTER: It's massive! That's the misfortune! There's too much of everything, so nothing's worth anything any more!

EMPEROR: Do you mean to say, I've got too much cotton to get a decent price for it? – Well then, just get rid of it!

PRIME MINISTER: But, Your Majesty, public opinion!

EMPEROR: What? You don't mean to tell me that you, in your great big Tui-hat, are fearful of public opinion? You'd better prepare the text of my abdication! *Exits.*

PRIME MINISTER: Dear God!

EMPEROR *returning*: And I refuse to permit anyone, this time, to do anything which might damage my public standing. *Finally exits.*

PRIME MINISTER: Make me an omelette, but don't break the eggs! Friends, I grew up in the best Tui academy in the country, I'm familiar with all the Tuistic literature, for thirty years I've debated with the leading Tuis every idea which might save China. My friends, there is no solution.

THE DOWAGER *enters, carrying a small tea service*: Now here's a pretty cup of tea. Where's my son?

YAO YEL: Gone. Have they let you . . . *She hurries to the door.* It's dreadful the way the doctors keep letting her escape. The tea is sure to be poisoned again.

COURT TUI: The doctors are always taken in, she mostly seems so sensible.

YAO YEL *sighing*: Sometimes I understand her all too well.

THE DOWAGER *has turned back. To Yao Yel*: You have some at least.

YAO YEL: Mama, you're impossible.

The Dowager makes to leave, disappointed. A doctor rushes in.

DOCTOR: Please, give me the cup, Your Majesty.

He takes it from her. Exit both.

PRIME MINISTER: I give China two years, at most.

THE TUIS' TEAHOUSE

Tuis are sitting at small tables, reading and playing board-games. Boards with notices: 'Two minor formulations, three yen', 'Opinions changed. They'll seem like new', 'Mo Si, king of excuse-makers', 'You want to bargain? We've got the arguments', 'Why you're innocent - Nu Shan reveals all', 'Whatever you say - it's the way you say it'. Potential clients, mostly from the country, study the notices.

MO SI: I'd better hurry, I've got some hard wording to finish today. For a cashier in the city bank. About the inflation.

KA MÜ: I'm taking a day off today. Yesterday I sold a cat-gut dealer an opinion about atonal music.

MO SI: For or **against**?

KA MÜ: **Against**. I don't just sell opinions off the peg, opinions that'll do for anyone. I only sell tailored stuff. My clients don't want to express an opinion that anyone might have. But I hear your notions for the little man are also selling well, Shi Ka?

SHI KA: Indeed, I've introduced a purchase scheme. You know how I thought of it? The wife of one of my clients was set on getting a baking tray. He consulted me for an excuse. She told him she could get the baking tray by instalments, and he wanted to know if he could have the excuse by instalments too. It might have come cheaper to buy her the tray. Hard times. What's this?

A waiter sets up a notice: 'No service for customers in rags. By order.' A Tui in rags leaves with dignity. Groans.

A TUI: The price of clothes the way it is!

ANOTHER TUI: Soon the little folk won't be able to afford opinions!

QUIET VOICE: Long live Kai Ho.

Laughter.

FIRST TUI: No politics in here, please.

SECOND TUI: So no tea prices here either.

FIRST TUI: Do you really suppose Mr Kai Ho, seditious

agitator that he is, can achieve what the greatest of the Tuis have failed to achieve, to make China a land fit to live in?

SECOND TUI: Yes.

General hilarity.

BUXOM CUSTOMER: What would you charge for a little formulation, about an affair?

MO SI: Up to four yen, depending . . .

She sits down next to him. Enter Turandot with the Court Tui. She is not recognised.

TURANDOT: So this is one of the 'Tuis' most famous teahouses!

COURT TUI: Only for the most lowly, Imperial Majesty. The more important, who maintain the law, write the books, educate our young, in short, those who lead humanity, according to their ideals, from their tribunes, pulpits and professorial chairs, they don't come here. Nonetheless, even these lesser Tuis do their best to lend intellectual support to the population, in all its dealings.

TURANDOT: By telling people what they should do?

COURT TUI: More by telling them what they should say. Why not try it?

TURANDOT *lazily*: So why am I innocent?

NU SHAN: Of what? Ah yes. *He laughs loudly.* Ten yen. *He takes the payment.* Would you demand your ten yen back, Madam, if I were to confess that I don't know why you're innocent, but that you may nonetheless always maintain that you are innocent?

TURANDOT *lazily*: I'm a sensual creature. Hui, explain to the man what my weakness is.

COURT TUI: Here?

TURANDOT: Absolutely.

COURT TUI: The particular personality, of whom we are speaking, simply cannot resist intellectual qualities. A certain kind of elegant formulation arouses her.

TURANDOT: Physically.

COURT TUI: New ways of presenting . . .

TURANDOT: . . . problems . . .

COURT TUI: . . . completely enslave her.

TURANDOT: Sexually. — Tell him about the blood!

COURT TUI: The blood rushes to her head at the sight of a domed forehead, an eloquent gesture, at the sound of a well-turned . . .

TURANDOT: . . . sentence.

A WAITER *passes between the tables calling out*: Whitewasher needed for the La Me department store!

Three Tuis rush off backstage.

A TUI *at the next table*: There's only one problem here that's really hard: who's going to pay for the tea?

Gogher Gogh enters, accompanied by a bodyguard who waits at the door.

TURANDOT: Who's that handsome fellow?

COURT TUI: An infamous bandit called Gogher Gogh.

NU SHAN: Not so loud, sir. He likes to call himself a Tui.

Although he's failed our lowest grade exam twice . . . You'll hear, he's still studying.

GOGHER GOGH *has joined the Tui with the sign, 'Two minor formulations, three yen'*: Here's your three yen, now listen.

I needed money for my studies.

WEN: You'll never get through the exam.

GOGHER GOGH: You mind your own business. In any case, I've finished with school, it's a load of nonsense. But, like I said, I had to have money.

TURANDOT: Why would a bandit want to become a Tui?

NU SHAN: He only became a bandit in order to become a Tui.

TURANDOT: He caught my eye right away.

GOGHER GOGH: For the first exam I took the money from the company till.

WEN *bored*: Borrowed.

GOGHER GOGH: Borrowed. I could only get the money the second time by taking the company's machine-guns and all the ammunition to a pawnbroker.

WEN: To be cleaned. If you need any more you'll have to pay again.

Gogher Gogh fumbles in his pockets for coins.

TURANDOT: Is life so much easier as a Tui, rather than as a bandit?

NU SHAN: There's not so much difference. But he doesn't really live off banditry. Not since the inflation started

anyway. He and his gang make their living from protecting the laundries in the suburbs.

TURANDOT: Against what?

NU SHAN: Against attacks.

TURANDOT: By whom?

NU SHAN: By his gang. You see: as long as they pay, they don't get attacked.

COURT TUI *cynically*: Just like the state. Pay your taxes, and you get no trouble from the police.

TURANDOT *enamoured*: Hui! Not in public! Everyone can see us!

GOGHER GOGH: Three yen. I just want one more formulation. How do I explain it to my people?

WEN *pointing to the bodyguard*: You mean people like him over there? Let me think about that.

Sen, a peasant with a white beard, enters with a boy. The Tui Gu leads him to Nu Shan's table.

GU *to the whole assembly*: It's an outrage! This man is from the province of Szechwan. He's been on the road for two months with a small handcart laden with cotton. This morning he was on his way to sell the cotton at Threefinger Market, when they confiscated it!

General protestations.

WEN: And there's such a shortage of cotton, you can pay fifty yen for a neckerchief!

ANOTHER TUI: The mills have long since shut down. For lack of cotton. The Union of Clothesmakers has been threatening trouble if the government won't say where all the cotton has gone.

WEN: Peking is in rags.

GU: Allow me. *He sits down with the old man, the boy remains standing behind him.* What brought you to Peking?

SEN: My name is Sen. This is Er Fei. I've come about studying.

GU: The young man wishes to study?

SEN: No, I wish to study. He has time enough. First of all he can become a sandal-maker. But for myself, I think I'm sufficiently mature, sirs. For fifty years I've dreamt of joining the great brotherhood who call themselves the Tuis

— after the initial letters of Tellect-Uell-In. It is in accordance with their great thoughts that the whole state is governed. They lead mankind.

GU: They most certainly do. And with the profit from the cotton you intended . . .

SEN: To attend a Tui school.

GU *stands up*: Gentlemen! I've just learnt that this old man here, who's had his cotton confiscated by the organs of the state, was intending to use the profit to attend a Tui school! He thirsts after learning, and the state robs him! I have a proposition: let all of us here present adopt the cause of our future colleague.

NU SHAN: There's no point! Everything to do with cotton is determined by the Emperor.

Turandot, responding to a gesture from the Court Tui, gets up and leaves with him.

A TUI: Not by the Emperor! The Emperor's brother!

Laughter.

NU SHAN: There's nothing doing, old man.

A waiter, to whom the Court Tui has whispered something in the doorway, comes up to Sen's table and speaks quietly in his ear.

GU: Gentlemen, something extraordinary has just happened.

A benefactress, who would like to remain anonymous, has offered Mr Sen the price his cotton would have fetched on the market. Let's join Mr Sen and celebrate this unexpected opportunity to join our brotherhood!

Several of the Tuis surround Sen and congratulate him.

GOGHER GOGH: You've thought about it long enough. What should I say to my firm?

WEN *gives him his three yen back*: I don't know.

3

IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE

The Emperor is stuffing his second morning pipe. Enter Turandot with the Court Tui.

TURANDOT *lifts up her skirt and shows her father her cotton pants*: How do you like the pants? They're cotton. Hui says it's scratchy. That may be true, but these days it's just so chic, expensive and yet traditional. Go on, say something. When you have a bright idea and I don't say anything, like when you thought up the salt tax, you put on a face for days on end.

EMPEROR: Yes, the cotton prices have been picking up quite nicely. Here, have a brush and make a list of whatever you want. In view of my newly stabilised financial circumstances I can inform you: you may now follow the dictates of your heart in your choice of a husband. At last we can send that Mongolian prince packing. I could never have brought myself to force a husband on you, never. Only in extreme circumstances.

Distant march music.

TURANDOT: When I marry, I'll marry a Tui.

EMPEROR: You're perverse.

TURANDOT *happily*: You think so? When someone says something witty it just goes right through me.

EMPEROR: Don't be indecent. So early in the morning. I'd never permit you to waste yourself on a Tui. Never.

TURANDOT: Grandmama is indecent too when we get chatting. You'd never believe what she says about . . .

EMPEROR: And I won't permit you to talk like that about your grandmother. The Dowager is a great patriot, it says so in all the schoolbooks. In any case, you're too young to be thinking about that sort of thing.

TURANDOT: Hui, am I too young? 'Scratchy!'

EMPEROR: What's that music?

COURT TUI: A demonstration by the Union of Clothes-makers, Majesty.

TURANDOT: That's why I'm so dressed up. I'm going with Hui to watch the demonstration. But there's no hurry. It'll go on for eight or ten hours.

EMPEROR: Why eight or ten hours?

TURANDOT: Until they've all marched passed!

Enter the Prime Minister with a fly-bill.

PRIME MINISTER: Your Majesty might care to take a look at

this leaflet, it was found in front of the La Me department store. The contents are most unedifying. *He reads.* 'Where has China's cotton gone? Must China's sons go naked to their parents' funeral when they die of hunger? The first Manchu Emperor had only enough cotton to make a soldier's tunic. So how much has the last Emperor?' - The style of this vile rubbish suggests the hand of Kai Ho.

EMPEROR: Damn Tui!

COURT TUI: Please! By all means, Sire, give us all a good thrashing, but don't, please, call that filthy rogue a Tui! A troublemaker, with no breeding, who consorts with scum! I beg you . . . I must . . . *He wipes the cold sweat from his brow.*

EMPEROR *listening to the distant music during the following exchange:* No one takes the fellow seriously.

PRIME MINISTER: This fellow, Sire, has managed to stir up twenty million people in the province of Ho. It may please you to take him seriously.

TURANDOT: What's that about a tunic?

COURT TUI: It's the cotton tunic of the first Manchu Emperor, who was himself a peasant. It's hanging in the old Manchu temple, and there's a legend amongst the people: as long as it hangs there on its cord, the people will be bound to the Emperor. A superstition which Mr Kai Ho, who studied in Canton, gleefully exploits.

PRIME MINISTER: And which is believed by millions.

TURANDOT *sings:*

However strong and thick
One day the rope will break
And yet that's not to say
That every thread must fray.

EMPEROR: That's gutter-talk. - What are the likely consequences?

PRIME MINISTER: A new scandal. The Union of Clothes-makers, with its two million members, will band together with the Union of the Clothesless, who number fourteen million. The Clothesmakers don't have any cotton left to make clothes, or clothes for themselves either. There'll be

an outcry against the Emperor: 'The Emperor's got our cotton!' and the people will all rally round Kai Ho.

Enter Yao Yel.

YAO YEL *unaware*: Good morning. How sweet is your pipe this morning?

EMPEROR *yells*: Not at all! And where's the cotton?

YAO YEL: The cotton?

EMPEROR *holding the leaflet under his nose*: Look, insinuations and insults, and what is anybody doing about it? I'll abdicate. If this can't be cleared up immediately, with proper explanations, I'll resign, once and for all.

PRIME MINISTER: Kai Ho has uncovered the whole story.

EMPEROR: Incompetence! Indifference! Stupidity!

YAO YEL: Gentlemen, please, could you leave me alone a moment with my brother.

EMPEROR *while all exit except Turandot*: I demand that the culprits be punished, with the full force of the law. The full force.

TURANDOT: That's right, Papa.

YAO YEL: Stop yelling. They've all gone.

TURANDOT *writing furiously*: That's right, Papa. Be polite.

EMPEROR: Where's the cotton?

YAO YEL: I understand that you yelled at the others, but now you have to stop yelling.

EMPEROR *louder still*: Where is the cotton?

TURANDOT: Yes, where is it actually?

YAO YEL: You know the answer to that. It's in your warehouses.

EMPEROR: What? You dare to tell me that? I'll have you arrested!

TURANDOT: Ooh, yes please!

YAO YEL: But you agreed, remember?

EMPEROR: Should I call the guards?

YAO YEL: All right then, we'll put the cotton on the market, is that what you want?

Pause.

EMPEROR: I'll abdicate.

YAO YEL *yells*: Go on then, abdicate, and get yourself hanged!

Pause.

YAO YEL: Call a conference of the Tuis. Promise them something that won't cost you anything, if only they can whitewash the whole business. What do you keep your two hundred thousand whitewashers for? Why do you maintain all those fifteen thousand academies?

TURANDOT: A Tui conference! Now that would be entertaining!

EMPEROR: The Tuis! No one values them more highly than I do. They do what they can, but they can't do everything. What are they supposed to say? The Union of Clothesmakers knows the dirt already.

PRIME MINISTER *enters*: Your Majesty, the delegates of the Union of Clothesmakers – together, unfortunately, with the delegates of the Union of the Clothesless.

EMPEROR: What, they already turn up here together? No Tui conference can help with this.

TURANDOT: Serves you right.

YAO YEL: You'll just have to hand over the cotton.

TURANDOT *still writing*: It serves you right because you're an unintellectual man.

Enter the delegates of the Clothesmakers and the delegates of the Clothesless. Two Tuis follow them.

EMPEROR *bad-tempered*: What is it?

FIRST UNION TUI *before any of the other delegates can speak*: Your Majesty! According to the testimony of the great classic Ka-Me, there is nothing that can withstand the power of the people, if they are united. Your Majesty, the question of the whereabouts of the cotton is a question on which the Union of the Clothesmakers, which I represent, and the Union of the Clothesless, represented by my honoured colleague, have achieved a united front.

SECOND UNION TUI: But not like you think, from above, but from below!

FIRST UNION TUI: That's right, from below. Our leadership is elected from below . . . *The second Union Tui laughs.* Only in freedom can freedom be won. *He gets a book out of his briefcase. Turandot applauds.* Ka-Me!

SECOND UNION TUI: Leave the quotations! Whoever heard of an army in freedom winning a battle! *Turandot applauds.*

Since when has discipline been the same as unfreedom? *He also pulls out a book.* What does Ka-Me say?

FIRST UNION TUI: A battle, huh! Violence! That sounds like your Kai Ho talking!

SECOND UNION TUI: And that sounds like your purse talking, the fee your cheating leaders of that union of treacherous treaty-dealers . . .

FIRST UNION TUI: Are you calling me a bought man?

SECOND UNION TUI: Bought by traitors!

The delegate of the Clothesmakers, who came with the first Union Tui, gives the second Union Tui a slap. Whereupon the latter thinks for a moment, then, with his Ka-Me, hits the first Union Tui who hits him back with his own Ka-Me. Enraged, the delegate of the Clothesless slaps the other delegate, and the brawl spreads.

TURANDOT *breathing heavily*: Kick him! – Parry, can't you? – On the chin, yes!

EMPEROR: That's enough of that! *The fighting stops, but the first Union Tui has sunk to the floor.* Let me thank you for your enlightening remarks, and assure you that I concur with your eloquent arguments, especially the last one. Besides, I am much moved by the music that's been playing outside my palace. It seems there's a question of a certain shortage of cotton. However, since you have been unable to achieve total accord, I suggest – *enter the Dowager with a plate of sweet pancakes, which she offers to her son, who – without interrupting himself – declines* – that the question 'Where is the cotton?' should be debated and resolved by the cleverest and most learned men in the land. I proclaim and summon herewith an extraordinary Tui Congress, which will surely be able to explain satisfactorily to the people where it's all gone, all the cotton in China. – Oh, Mama, stop it! And so, good day.

The delegation, with the exception of the unconscious Tui, bows and withdraws, in some confusion, taking the body with them.

EMPEROR: Did I go too far?

PRIME MINISTER: You were admirable.

EMPEROR: I think a Tui Congress will be quite enough for these good folk. They can't even agree amongst themselves.

TURANDOT: I just don't understand what the people want from you this time. In any case, my cotton reserves are exceedingly skimpy. *The Emperor prevents her from showing everybody.*

PRIME MINISTER: Has Your Majesty already thought of a prize for the Tui who can explain to the people where the cotton has gone?

EMPEROR: No. My financial situation is still far from secure. — Leave it, Mama, you know I don't eat cake when I'm smoking.

PRIME MINISTER: Majesty, to answer this question, without compromising Your Majesty's position, will call for the cleverest head in all of China. What can you promise?

TURANDOT *bursts out gleefully*: Teeheeheehee! Me!

EMPEROR: What on earth do you mean, you? I'm not about to gamble my own flesh and blood.

TURANDOT: Why not? You find the cleverest head, and I marry him.

EMPEROR: Never. *Listens.* It is a very long procession.

3a

IN THE OLD MANCHU TEMPLE

In a decaying round tower, hanging by a thick rope from the ceiling, an ancient, patched coat. Around it stand the Imperial Family, the Prime Minister, the Minister for War and some of the high Tuks.

EMPEROR: My dear Turandot, this is it, the revered tunic. Your ancestor wore it in battle and, being a poor man, he sometimes had to patch the bullet holes himself, as you can see. Every Emperor wears this tunic at his coronation, because of the old prophecy associated with it. The confidence of the people in their Emperor is indispensable, I'm convinced; you only have to think of all the soldiers who turn out to be somehow related to all the rest of my

subjects, or so they tell me. Anyway, in consideration of all this, I am resolved to grant to the one amongst my beloved Tuis who succeeds in restoring the faith of the people in the paternalistic government of their Emperor the hand in marriage of my only daughter. *Abs and Ohs in surprised applause, Turandot bows.* And as I am led in all things, even material things, by my deep respect for ancient customs, I hereby decree that my future son-in-law should put on this famous coat before the wedding ceremony. So, that's enough of the affairs of state.

4

THE TUI ACADEMY

During the scene change a town-crier calls out: 'Important announcement: the Emperor has promised the hand of his daughter Turandot to the Tui who can tell the people where the cotton's gone.' In the Academy there is much to-ing and fro-ing. A scribe is putting up a notice: 'Emperor's future son-in-law a Tui'. A teacher in a Tui-hat is instructing a class.

TEACHER: Si Fu, tell us the principal questions of philosophy.

SI FU: Are the objects of the world outside ourselves, for themselves, independent of ourselves, or are they in ourselves, for ourselves, and dependent on ourselves.

TEACHER: And which is the correct opinion?

SI FU: No decision has yet been reached.

TEACHER: And which opinion has lately enjoyed the support of the majority of our philosophers?

SI FU: That they are outside ourselves, for themselves, independent of ourselves.

TEACHER: And why does the question remain unresolved?

SI FU: The congress which was supposed to deliver the answer was held, as it has been for two hundred years, in the monastery of Mi Sang on the banks of the Yellow River. The question was formulated thus: Is the Yellow River real, or does it exist only in our heads? However, while the congress was debating this question, there was a thaw in the

mountains, and the Yellow River broke its banks and swept the monastery of Mi Sang away, along with all the congress delegates. So the proof that things are outside us, for themselves and independent of ourselves was never reached.

TEACHER: Good. That concludes today's lesson. And what is the most important event of the day?

THE CLASS: The Congress of the Tuis.

The teacher exits with his class. Enter Gu, who is also a Tui, and Sen accompanied by his boy.

SEN: But the Yellow River does exist, surely!

GU: So you say, but can you prove it?

SEN: Will I learn here how to prove things like that?

GU: That's up to you. Which reminds me, I haven't asked you yet why it is you want to study.

SEN: It's such a pleasure to think. And pleasures must be carefully learnt. But perhaps I should also say: it's so useful.

GU: Hmm. Maybe you should take a look around, before you pay the dues and register yourself. Here's a student learning the art of public speaking.

Shi Me, a young man, approaches with Nu Shan, who is a teacher at the Academy. Shi Me climbs up to a small rostrum. Nu Shan positions himself at the wall and operates a pulley arrangement by means of which a basket of bread can be raised and lowered in front of the speaker's face.

NU SHAN: The topic is: 'Why Kai Ho's position is false'. Whenever I raise the bread-basket, then you know you're saying something wrong. Off you go!

SHI ME: Kai Ho is wrong because he doesn't divide humanity into the clever and the not-so-clever, but rather into the rich and the poor. He was excluded from the Association of Tuis because he incited the barge-haulers, crofters and weavers to rebel against the violence which was – *the basket rises* – allegedly – *the basket wavers* – employed against them. So he's clearly in favour of violence! *The basket sinks*. Kai Ho speaks of freedom. *The basket wavers*. But in reality he wants to make the barge-haulers, crofters and weavers his slaves. *The basket sinks*. It is said that the barge-haulers, crofters and weavers don't earn enough – *the basket rises* – to support – in order to live in ease and luxury

with their families – *the basket stops* – and that they have to work too hard – *the basket goes on rising* – because they want to spend their days in indolence – *the basket stops* – which is natural enough. *The basket wavers*. The discontent of many – *the basket rises* – of a mere few – *the basket stops* – is exploited by Kai Ho who, as we see, is therefore an exploiter! *The basket drops quickly*. Mr Kai Ho is distributing land in Hu Nan to the poor peasants. But first he has to steal the land himself, so he's a thief. According to the philosophy of Kai Ho – *the basket wavers again* – the purpose of life is to be happy, to eat and drink like the Emperor himself – *the basket shoots up* – but this only goes to show that Kai Ho isn't a philosopher at all, but just a loudmouth – *the basket sinks* – a troublemaker, a power-hungry good-for-nothing, an irresponsible gambler, a muckraker, a rapist, an unbeliever, a bandit and a criminal. *The basket is hovering just in front of the speaker's mouth*.
A tyrant!

NU SHAN: Well, there you are, you're still making mistakes, but you have a good heart. Now run along and take a shower, and have a massage.

SHI ME: Mr Nu Shan, do you think I have a chance? I wasn't very good at fudging and only seventeenth in the art of lick-spittling. *Exit*.

GU: Nu Shan! A new pupil! *Nu Shan hurries over*. And by the way, what do you think about Kai Ho?

SEN: In cotton country we only hear what the landowners say. He's a bad man, not on the side of freedom.

NU SHAN: Do you like what we teach here?

SEN: It was a good speech. With new ideas. Is it true that Kai Ho wants to redistribute the land?

NU SHAN: Yes, to steal it and then supposedly redistribute it. Can we register you for the Academy then?

SEN: Soon, of course. I'd like to hear a bit more. It's all free for now, isn't it?

Enter Gogher Gogh with his mother, three of his gang and Wen.

MA GOGH: My son would like to take the exam.

SCRIBE: Ah, you again? This is the third time, isn't it? I don't think we have time today. Since the announcement that the Emperor's son-in-law will be a Tui we've had hundreds of new registrations. But why do you want to be a Tui so badly?

GOGHER GOGH: Both my general disposition and my early education have destined me for the civil service.

The scribe looks at him pityingly and, after bowing respectfully to Ma Gogh, he hurries away.

FIRST BANDIT: You've got to understand. You have to get the ammunition back. The inflation will level off and business will pick up again. We've got to raid every new business right from the start, so they get used to the idea of paying for protection.

GOGHER GOGH: I don't want any more shooting. I have other plans.

SECOND BANDIT: OK, but what are they?

Gogher Gogh maintains a grim silence.

MA GOGH: You know you can trust my son.

FIRST BANDIT *uncertainly*: Sure we can.

MA GOGH *points at the notice*: Krukher, a man with education has opportunities, more than ever. I have faith in Gogher.

Enter the great Tui, Xi Wei, with scribes. He sits down.

SEN: Who's that?

GU: That's Xi Wei, Chairman of the Tui Association. He is conducting an examination.

WEN *has stepped up to the examination desk, quietly*: My candidate is here for the third time. In two previous examinations he was asked, both times, what 3 times 5 is. And both times, unfortunately, he answered 25. He has such a steely determination. On the other hand, he's an excellent businessman and a good citizen, and he has a great thirst for knowledge, so permit me to supplicate, Chairman, that the question 'What is 3 times 5?' is asked of him one more time. Intense study has enabled my candidate to take the correct answer, 15, to his heart. *He hands over a purse of money.*

XI WEI *laughs*: Let me consult with my assessors.

FIRST BANDIT: What did you always say that made them fail you?

GOGHER GOGH: 25. And that wasn't right. Because the answer to the question 'what is 3 times 5?' is 15, or so I'm told.

FIRST BANDIT: But it's the right answer if the question is 'What is 5 times 5?'. They'd just better ask the right question. *He pulls a revolver from his jacket, walks over to the desk, shows it to Xi Wei and, after a short exchange, comes back over.* You stick with 25, it's all under control.

WEN *meanwhile, to Nu Shan*: I've paid over five times the fee.

A CLERK *calls out*: Mr Gogher Gogh.

Gogher Gogh steps forward.

XI WEI *with a twisted grin, looking over at the first bandit*: Candidate, what does 5 times 5 make?

GOGHER GOGH 15.

Xi Wei shrugs and lifts his arms. Exits quickly.

FIRST BANDIT: But it was all sorted.

GOGHER GOGH: Of course, if they keep switching the questions . . . It's a scandal, how they cheat a man out of his hard-earned cash. *Loudly*: I demand to be admitted immediately to membership of the Association of Tuis, on account of my carefully considered answer. The examiners were evidently not able to set the correct question for my answer. They're incompetent. As a matter of fact, I should perhaps consider whether I still want to belong to such an association. Everyone knows they're dangerous opinion-mongers. They'd sell their own grandmothers for a well-turned point of view! They'd better all watch out. I'll be back!

MA GOGH: Come along, you just get cheated here. *Exit with Gogher Gogh, Wen and the bandits.*

SEN: Come along Er Fei. I want to ask something.

GU: So don't you want to register?

SEN: I may already have learnt the better part of what's on offer. I'm just wondering about Kai Ho, that troublemaker, rogue and rapist who wants to redistribute the land. *Exits with the boy.*

4a

A STREET

Streetwalking Tui solicit clients. Sen and Er Fei. The Tui in rags who was thrown out of the teahouse addresses Sen.

TUI: Care for an opinion about the political situation, old man?

SEN: I don't need one. Sorry.

TUI: It'd only cost three yen, and we can do it while we walk along, old man.

SEN: How dare you solicit me, in the presence of a child too!

TUI: Don't be so stuck-up. It's a perfectly natural urge, to have an opinion.

SEN: If you don't leave us alone I'll call the police. You should be ashamed of yourself. Is this what thinking has come to? The most noble of human activities, and you turn it into a dirty business transaction. *He shoos him away.*

TUI *running off*: Filthy bourgeois!

ER FEI: Leave him, grandfather, perhaps he's just too poor.

SEN: That's an excuse for most things, but not for this.

5

THE HOUSE OF A GREAT TUI

Munka Du, who is being attended to by a barber, and his mother.

MOTHER: But will anybody believe you? Since they know where the cotton really is? My four maids talk about it without the least embarrassment.

MUNKA DU: They'll believe, if they want to. Just as there's always a tennis court for people who want to play tennis, so there's always an explanation for people who want to believe. Mimimimimi. Tennis is a must; belief is a must.

MOTHER: So you don't think there'll be a problem putting this across?

MUNKA DU: Oh, there's a problem all right. It will require a

true master. You always need a master to demonstrate that two times two makes five.

MOTHER: Your family expects. Don't go bringing shame upon us.

MUNKA DU: I take exception to that. You know full well that those who fail to deliver a compelling formulation will have their heads cut off. Mimimimi.

MOTHER: Only the second-rate heads will fall.

MUNKA DU: And I suppose they'll only be mourned by the second-rate families! *He stands up briskly.*

The mother pulls a bell. Enter the two sisters of Munka Du, followed by a secretary.

MUNKA DU: Have you brought the quotation?

SECRETARY: I've brought two, a choice. *He hands him two sheets.*

MUNKA DU *with his eyes closed, takes one sheet*: How much?

SECRETARY: Two thousand.

MUNKA DU: That's scandalous.

SECRETARY: The quotations are almost unknown.

MUNKA DU: That may not be such a good thing. *He turns to his family*: Are the creases gone from the back?

MOTHER: Yes dear. Say goodbye to your family now.

MUNKA DU: Mimimimimimimi. My dears. In agony and despair - wait, where's the artist who's supposed to immortalise the scene of my departure for the great competition? *His mother rings. An artist enters. He quickly starts sketching.* In agony and despair, the land looks to its intellectual leaders. What can they tell them? Mimimimimi. Indeed, it is the force of intellect that holds sway over the destinies of the nations, and not political power. Oh, I feel the responsibility weighing on my shoulders. Our lords and masters are going to hear something to remember from me, oh yes. I may perhaps be repudiated ...

ARTIST: Hold the pose, please.

MUNKA DU *holds the pose for a while*: ... but I will not be shaken in my opinion. Mimimimimimi. I may not return to you. But in the annals of history my uncorruptible efforts will live on: to stand by my country in its hour of need and

offer it – mimimimimimimimi – my word, my unambiguous, uncompromising word. *He exits in pomp.*

5a

THE PALACE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TUIS

The debating chamber.

The first day of the great Tui conference. Sen is introduced to the Imperial Family and to the Congress by Chairman Xi Wei.

XI WEI: It is an honour and a privilege to present to their Majesties, the Imperial Family, and to this great Congress, a guest, whose presence here today must strike us as symbolic. This simple man – *applause* – a mere peasant – *applause* – from cotton country, journeyed with his mulecart piled high with cotton, here to the capital where cotton was scarce. But with the profit – and this is what is so uplifting about this tale, so beautiful, so exemplary – with his takings, Sen, the man from the north, was resolved to study Tuism! *Applause.* His greatest desire was to set eyes on the great Tuis who inspire and illuminate mankind. *Applause.*

The foyer.

The great Tuis Ke Lei and Munka Du are having a row, in the presence of the Prime Minister. An announcement comes from a huge wooden pipe: 'Attention! The Congress is about to begin.'

KE LEI: I was to be first to speak, that's what I was told. I know it's hard to get the ball rolling, but I accepted, and so I should speak first.

MUNKA DU: I must insist, I am just as content to speak first.

KE LEI: Of course, I don't really want to.

MUNKA DU: I have no wish to impose myself.

KE LEI: But if it's what the people demand, I'll do it.

MUNKA DU: I am ready to accede to the request.

KE LEI: But no one's asking you.

MUNKA DU: And who's asking anything of you?

KE LEI: We all know your game.

MUNKA DU: Your tricks are the talk of the town.

KE LEI: This is beneath my dignity. It's not for my own amusement you know. I . . . *He pulls himself away from Munka Du, who tries to hold him back, and enters the debating chamber.*

PRIME MINISTER: Come along, I'll introduce you to the Emperor for your pains. *They exit.*

At the entrance there's a little struggle going on. Gogher Gogh and two bodyguards are trying to get in.

GOGHER GOGH: I demand to have a turn. You cannot exclude a man of the people! *He is excluded.*

The debating chamber.

XI WEI: Your Majesty, Gentlemen! It is my heartfelt pleasure to present to you our first speaker, our much beloved Dean of the Imperial University, Mr Ke Lei.

THE TUIS *sing the Tui-Hymn:*

By thought we flower!

Knowledge is power.

Yours is promotion

Earth-shaking commotion

Devotion, emotion!

Cometh the hour.

KE LEI: Revered Imperial Family, Honoured Congress! Cotton, *lana arboris*, is the seed-floss derived from the Bombax genus of the Bombacaceae, the so-called cotton-tree, a shrubby plant with narrow finger-shaped leaves and creamy-white blossoms on both trunk and branches. It is a fluffy, fleecy mass which may be spun to produce cloth for the manufacture of clothes, especially for the poorer folk. Honoured assembly, the paucity of this said mass, *lana arboris*, in our market places, and hence the scarcity of cotton cloth, is what brings us here together. So. Let us consider first our nation, our people. And consider it boldly, unflinchingly, without prejudice. From time to time

scholars have been reproached for discovering differences, that is to say for believing and maintaining that, amongst the people, there were inequalities, if we may permit ourselves that expression, inequalities, differences of interest and so forth. Now. Permit me to confess that I, irrespective of whether I am reproached for it or not, I share this opinion! Please, I beg you. A forest is not simply a forest, it consists of different trees. And so the people is not simply the people. Of what does it consist, you may ask? Well. We have civil servants, plate-washers, land-owners, foundry-workers, cotton-dealers, doctors and bakers. We have officers, musicians, carpenters, wine-growers, lawyers, shepherds, poets and blacksmiths. Not to mention the fishermen, serving maids, mathematicians, artists, butchers, fine grocers, chemists, night porters, glove-makers, language teachers, policemen, gardeners, journalists, ceramic tile-makers, basket-weavers, waiters, astronomers, furriers, fruit-sellers, icemen, newspaper-boys, pianists, flautists, drummers, violinists, accordionists, zither-players, cellists, viola-players, trumpeters, woodwinds, wood-dealers, woodsmen and woodsmiths. And who has not heard tell of the tobacco-workers, metal-workers, forest-workers, farm-workers, textile-workers, building-workers, architects and sailors? Other occupations include the weavers, roof-thatchers, actors, footballers, oceanographers, stone-masons, knife-grinders, dog-catchers, publicans, hangmen, clerks, postmen, bankers, carters, midwives, tailors, mountaineers, butlers, sportsmen and navigators. *Unrest in the audience.* So. Perhaps I have been too exhaustive, too precise, too scholarly. And to what purpose? In order to demonstrate that all these people, different as they may be, are, or let us be circumspect, that an overwhelming majority, the poor, are in one respect all alike, namely that they -

A VOICE: . . . are poor.

KE LEI: Not at all, that they need cheap cotton. They are crying out for cotton! So. We all know, my friends, it is the Emperor who commands the cotton - *muffled disquiet in the audience* - not in terms of ownership, but in terms of

decreeing, deciding, disposing – and there is no one who would distribute it more generously, unselfishly, paternalistically than the Emperor. Yet still it is not to be had. Now. If so many people have need of it, must it not be somewhere to be had? Honoured assembly, let me give you my response, again at risk of making myself unpopular: No! Nature, my dear colleagues, is an unruly goddess. We intellectuals are wont to shy away from simple assertions, lest they appear simplistic, lest they seem crude. Well, I shall not be shy. Where is the cotton? Here is my unimpeachable, incorruptible response: the harvest, the harvest has failed. Too much sun, too little sun. Too little rain, too much rain. The detail is still to be determined. But in short, there simply is no cotton to be had – because nothing grew.

He steps down from the rostrum with dignity. The Imperial Family leaves the hall.

XI WEI: Let me thank Mr Ke Lei. The prize judges will broadcast their decision.

The cloakrooms.

The Emperor, the Dowager, Turandot and the Prime Minister. Munka Du stands to one side, waiting.

EMPEROR: Have you spoken to the union representatives?

PRIME MINISTER: Briefly, Your Majesty.

The Emperor looks at him questioningly. The Prime Minister shakes his head.

EMPEROR: That man is making it far too easy for himself. Stupid lies like that won't be enough. Just the opposite. It arouses the people's suspicion that there's something fishy going on. Just five minutes ago we were paying our respects to a peasant who'd carted cotton into the capital! No sense of realities!

At the entrance there has been an exchange. Gogher Gogh is trying to force his way in with two bodyguards.

GOGHER GOGH: I'll remember you, and you. I have a very important communication. *He is removed forcibly.*

TURANDOT: I adore a bit of intellect, but that . . . !

EMPEROR: And the cheek! 'Regardless whether I am reproached for it . . . ' – And 'the overwhelming majority, the poor'! Get rid of the fellow!

PRIME MINISTER: Sire, he won't bore us again.

TURANDOT: Grandmama, it's no fun any more. *She throws herself into the Dowager's arms.* I won't let myself be married off. Not to something like that! *She gives the Prime Minister a kick.* He's the one to blame. I'm the laughing-stock of the whole teahouse. Off with his head! And yours too! *She sobs.* No one cares about me! Off with his head! Off with his head! Off with his head! *She buries her head in the Dowager's bosom.*

PRIME MINISTER *after a short pause*: May I introduce to Your Imperial Majesty the speaker for the fifth day, Mr Munka Du?

Turandot looks up.

The foyer.

Sen, the boy Er Fei, and Gu.

SEN: The man's got it all wrong. There was more cotton this year than last. Where can I find him? I should tell him.

Ke Lei is led past by policemen.

SEN: What's happened? What's he doing with the police? Can't I talk to him?

GU *holding him back*: Better not be seen with him, it could be to your disadvantage.

SEN: Do you mean to say he's been arrested? Just because he doesn't know the truth?

GU: He knows the truth all right.

SEN: So he's been arrested because he lied!

GU: Not because he lied, but because he lied ineptly. You've still got a lot to learn old man.

The cloakrooms.

The Prime Minister is introducing to Turandot Chairman Xi

Wei, who is accompanied by his secretary Nu Shan. Munka Du is with Turandot. From the debating chamber the strains of the Tui-Hymn.

XI WEI: Imperial Majesty, allow me to dedicate this suit of clothes to your revered family. I designed it myself.

Nu Shan takes out of a cardboard box an outfit made of paper, printed with verses.

PRIME MINISTER: In the light of the unsatisfactory progress of the Congress, and in response to the unruly surge of applicants, Mr Xi Wei, the Chairman of the Tui Association, will speak himself, on this, the third day of the Congress.

TURANDOT: Oh, how witty! It's made of paper!

XI WEI: The most noble of fabrics!

TURANDOT: 'Such noble stuff as noble dreams are made on.'
Calls to the maids. I'll wear it this very day.

A screen is brought, she changes.

PRIME MINISTER to Xi Wei: Come along, let's go!

Announcement from the pipes: 'Announcement: the geographer Pauder Mel has set out from the monastery of Tashi Lumpo in Shigatse in order to take part in the Congress.'
Applause.

The debating chamber.

YAO YEL: How did it go yesterday?

EMPEROR: Dull. A theologian. All he had to say was: the fewer the clothes, the healthier the man. The sun. You know - Where were you?

YAO YEL: In the country. I tried to burn a couple of bales.

EMPEROR: What on earth for? I won't permit that. Have I no authority?

YAO YEL: How else do you expect to drive the price up?

EMPEROR: Surely not by burning the stuff. What good is a higher price if I've got nothing left to sell?

YAO YEL: You should study a bit of economics, and then we could have a sensible conversation. Let's suppose we have five million bales . . . *Xi Wei has entered the chamber. Yao*

Yel continues explaining quietly during the following speech.

XI WEI: Your Imperial Majesties, Gentlemen! At the beginning of this Congress it was basely claimed that China had produced no cotton this year. An insult to the Chinese people. Let me inform you that no less than one and a half million bales were produced. And attend, by what means our people, the most industrious people of the entire globe, produced such prodigious quantities of cotton! We know all about the sweat that was sweated in the rigours of cultivation by the great monasteries and the feudal estates. But think also of the millions of lesser peasants and farmers who work their fingers to the bone on their tiny plots. Let us pay our respects to them, praise be to the smallholder! The heroic producers of clothes for the little man!

Applause.

YAO YEL: Just remember, in case something happens, you've got no head for business: we've got to destroy half of it before we can even start thinking about selling the stuff. All the same, I can't have it burnt. And why? Because it stinks.

EMPEROR: It does not, only wool stinks.

YAO YEL: But it makes an awful lot of smoke.

XI WEI: And now you will ask, and the whole population joins you in asking: so where is it? Where is the cotton? Let me explain: it is vanishing.

Unrest.

YAO YEL: Has he gone mad? Stop the proceedings at once!

XI WEI: And where does it vanish? Where indeed? I can explain that too: it vanishes in transit. *The unrest increases.* Honoured assembly! You suspect terrible wrongdoings, you are justly enraged. But you couldn't be further from the truth in your suspicions. Permit me to regale you with a tale, a new tale of the greatness and virtue of the Chinese people. I refer to the progress made under the enlightened regime of our great Imperial House. Gentlemen, it is not so many years ago, the population of the flat lands were a sorry spectacle. Ghosts in rags, half naked, almost bestial in their nakedness, peopled the villages. Decent clothes, tasteful cloths were unheard of, and scarcely dreamt of.

And today? Gentlemen, the rationalisation of the cotton industry in the hands of a member of the Imperial Family has changed all that. Culture has come to our villages. Culture! *Leaflets come raining down from the ceiling.* The disappearance of the cotton on its way from the fields to the cities can be explained by the steady advance of culture through our land: it is being bought by the people themselves! I don't know what's in these leaflets -

CRIES: Kai Ho's leaflets! Police!

XI WEI: . . . but I do know that it's lies. The truth is: the cotton has all been bought already!

YOUNG MEH NEI *in a group of young Tuis*: By the peasants who have no fields, who have to plough their tiny plots with penknives and plant out cotton in their grandmothers' earwax? *He is dragged off by policemen.* They can't afford cotton clothes!

EMPEROR: He's an ass, this Xi Wei!

PRIME MINISTER: The union representatives are leaving the chamber, taking the leaflets with them.

XI WEI *in desperation*: Silence, please. China stands poised on the brink of an abyss! *He is interrupted by applause. Turandot, followed by Munka Du, has entered the Imperial box. She is wearing Xi Wei's paper costume.* Your Imperial Majesties, Conference! In response to the shortage of cloth, which has been brought about by the growing cultural expectations of the general populace (let me repeat that), I propose that, immediately and without bureaucratic delay, notwithstanding previous decrees, our capital city be permitted to fashion clothes from the most noble of all fabrics, that sacred material by means of which our great thinkers and writers have achieved their immortality, their sublimity: paper!

CRY: And to banish rain!

Laughter. The police seek out the heckler, then the laughers. Renewed applause: Turandot has demonstratively opened her parasol.

ANOTHER CRY: Our labourers will work armed with parasols!

AND ANOTHER: It'd be better to dress yourselves in Kai Ho's leaflets!

The Imperial Family leaves the debating chamber.

The cloakrooms.

YAO YEL: The cotton disappears in transit! Now we only need someone else to blurt out where it really goes, and we can pack our bags!

TURANDOT: And I'm the laughing-stock of the land, yet again! Miserable fool! *She tears off the paper clothes.* There and there and there!

EMPEROR: Don't cause another scandal, I've quite enough with the scandal we've got already. *Exits with Yao Yel.*

PRIME MINISTER: You're the new chairman of the Tui Association.

NU SHAN: I can't do that, I'm his pupil.

PRIME MINISTER: You'll have to settle that with your conscience. *They exit.*

DOWAGER: Off with his head, off with his head, off with his head! *Exits giggling.*

The maidservants, giggling, set up a screen for Turandot. Only the Court Tui and Munka Du remain. Announcement from the pipes: 'The competitors for the fourth day are requested to report in the Grand Chamber.'

TURANDOT *behind the screen*: Munka Du! You'll wait, won't you?

MUNKA DU: I have to report in the Grand Chamber, Imperial Majesty.

TURANDOT: There'll be time for that. There'll be dozens queuing. I want you to speak last.

MUNKA DU: Very well, Imperial Majesty.

TURANDOT: Munka Du! Come to the palace with me today, I'd like to show you something.

MUNKA DU: Imperial Majesty, nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I shall have to prepare for my great speech.

TURANDOT: Hui Zhe, you're still there too, aren't you?

COURT TUI: At your service, Imperial Majesty.

TURANDOT: You may stay. Munka Du, this evening I'll show you a little cotton something.

The maids giggle loudly. The announcement comes over the pipes again.

MUNKA DU: Imperial Majesty, I beg your leave, please let me go and prepare my speech.

TURANDOT: Hui Zhe, go to the Chamber and see how many applicants are still there.

Hui Zhe goes to the Chamber.

TURANDOT: Munka Du!

The debating chamber.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary Nu Shan look up and see the Court Tui approaching.

PRIME MINISTER: This is not good. No one else has come forward, and it's only the third day! Of course there'll still be the speakers from the provinces. Let Mr Munka Du know, he's on first thing tomorrow morning. *To Nu Shan:* And you, get rid of this idiot.

The Court Tui hesitates to go back to the cloakrooms.

The foyer.

Secretary Nu Shan finds his boss, Chairman Xi Wei, completely alone and desolate. At the door, watched over by police, Meh Nei and other young Tuis. On their way out, old Sen and Gu.

GU: And what do you think of the whole affair, my dear Sen?

SEN: The gentleman was very eloquent, but it's not enough, the fields are far too small.

XI WEI: Please, send a message immediately to the authorities, I demand the firmest measures against these young fellows, blatant supporters of Kai Ho, the full rigour of the law, death! *The Secretary gestures to the policemen, and the*

young men are led away. Thank you. What have you heard? What are they saying about my speech? The leaflets detracted a little from the effect, don't you think? But the demonstrative appearance of Turandot in my outfit made up a lot of ground, I think. Are they satisfied? *Hoarsely:* Are there any messages for me? No one has said anything, presumably they don't yet know the reaction of the court. Check the abstracts against my speech very carefully before they're published. The heat in the chamber had a bit of an effect on the mood, don't you think? Why don't you say something, man? You've been my pupil for eleven years, I make you responsible for the abstracts. I understand. Tell my sons . . .

The foyer.

The fourth day. The Prime Minister, Nu Shan and the scribe of the Tui Academy. Announcement from the pipes: 'The candidates for the fifth day are to report in the foyer to the Prime Minister's committee.'

PRIME MINISTER: He dares to keep us waiting. Are the entrances all under surveillance, the walls checked, the basements searched?

NU SHAN: The Minister for War took personal control of the operation.

PRIME MINISTER *restlessly:* That doesn't mean much. Only thirty years ago, the man was a member of the Society for Moderate Progress Within the Law. – The geographer of the Tashi Lumpo monastery has announced his candidacy now. But he won't be able to get here before the day after tomorrow. – Have the hooligans from last night been disbarred from the Tui Association?

NU SHAN: They've been executed.

PRIME MINISTER: That's beside the point. I asked if they'd been disbarred from the Association.

Enter Munka Du, in a hurry, with Turandot and her maids. Munka Du clearly hasn't slept much. They bow in greeting.

TURANDOT: Congratulate him, gentlemen, he told me during the night what he's going to say.

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Munka Du, I am sure you understand, after yesterday's events, it has been decided that the candidates, whoever they may be, should be tested for Un-Chinese attitudes.

TURANDOT: He doesn't have any of those.

PRIME MINISTER *bows*: Of course not. *To Munka Du*: You're prepared to submit to this formality? *They sit down*. Do you wet your bed?

MUNKA DU *helplessly*: No.

PRIME MINISTER *to the maids*: Please, don't giggle. It's a question we have to ask. – Are you, or have you ever been a member of the Society of Friends of the Armed Struggle? *Munka Du shakes his head*. The Plague for Human Rights? *Munka Du shakes his head*. Are you for peace, in any form whatsoever? *Munka Du shakes his head*. Do you have dependants or relatives? *Munka Du shakes his head, then thinks better of it, and nods*. In the northern provinces? *Munka Du shakes his head*. Say the name Kai Ho!

MUNKA DU: Kai Ho.

PRIME MINISTER: You're shaking.

MUNKA DU: I'm very tired.

TURANDOT *pushes aside the maids, who have been doing her hair*: That's enough.

She gets up, beckons Munka Du, and exits with him and the maids. The Tui-Hymn is audible, feebly and out of tune.

The debating chamber.

Armed guards all over the place. Enter Munka Du and Turandot. The former makes his way reluctantly to the rostrum, the latter trips nimbly to the Imperial box. She throws off a shawl and sits there, half naked.

EMPEROR: How can you make such a spectacle of yourself!

TURANDOT: Don't complain, it's for your own sake.

NU SHAN: As Chairman of the Association of Tuis, it is my

honour to present to you the supplicant of the fourth day,
Mr Munka Du, Professor of the Philosophy Department.

Turandot applauds.

MUNKA DU: Imperial Majesties, Gentlemen! In this historic hour . . .

A scuffle at the entrance, and four men enter, half naked. They stamp their way to centre stage, singing.

THE FOUR:

Sun and rain, sun and rain
It's all you need to know.
If the cold is in your bones
Kai Ho! Kai Ho! Kai Ho!

The armed guards move in on the four with batons, and drive them out.

THE FOUR *holding up a cotton pennant on a stick:*

If you can't afford a coat
Naked you must go.
There's enough to make a flag
Kai Ho! Kai Ho! Kai Ho!

MUNKA DU *as the four are driven outside:* Imperial Majesties, Gentlemen . . .

YOUNG SHI ME *throws his newly won Tui-hat to the ground and stamps on it:* Let them go free! Or take me too! *He is led away.*

MUNKA DU: In this historic hour . . .

SHI ME *at the door:* What are you doing, the god of the Philosophy Department!? The time for words is past. The power of speech will never clothe their naked bodies! *He is dragged away.*

NU SHAN *furious:* I'll have you struck off, Shi Me!

CRIES: Get on with it, Munka Du! – The Palace of the Tui Association has become a fishmarket. – It stinks a darn sight worse than that.

MUNKA DU *by now grey in the face:* I'll tell you why I'm speaking here, Shi Me, I am speaking because I shall not let anyone rob me of the freedom to speak, wherever I will, and whatever I will. Oh yes, here I stand, to defend freedom, my freedom, your freedom, the freedom of all men.

CRY: And the freedom of wolves!

MUNKA DU *while the policemen seek out the heckler*: Yes!

CRY: And of sheep?

MUNKA DU *while the policemen seek out the heckler*: Yes, of sheep too! I am not of the opinion, I am not of the opinion – *he mops his brow* – I am not of the opinion that one should deprive the naked of cotton for their clothes, but if I were of that opinion, of that opinion, I would wish to be permitted to express it, it, that is the opinion, which I don't share, with anyone. It's not a question of cotton, it is a question of the freedom of beliefs about cotton, which itself is not at issue, which is not our business here. Here, at this hour, it's not a question of business, but a question of opinions. *Unrest*. Opinions are the question, not businesses!

At the door, Gogher Gogh and his two bodyguards have forced their way in.

GOGHER GOGH: So, perhaps a man may express an opinion here, a man who doesn't possess a Tui-hat but who has demonstrated by his deeds that he . . . *He is dragged away.*

CRY: Oppression. They're oppressing the pickpockets!

MUNKA DU: Your Imperial Majesties, Gentlemen! Let us speak no more of cotton, but instead of the virtues which a people needs in order to go without cotton. Not: where is the cotton? That is not the question, but rather: where are the virtues? What has become of that happy spirit of renunciation, the legendary patience, with which the Chinese people has borne so many misfortunes? That eternal hunger, that grinding labour, that rigour of the law?

EMPEROR: He's rambling. And after such a promising beginning!

MUNKA DU: That, Your Majesties, Gentlemen, was – *reading from his notes* – the inner freedom. That, Your Majesties, Gentlemen, is lost.

CRY: What about the outer freedom!

MUNKA DU: Let me pay my respects to the simple folk of former generations who, dressed in rags – for we didn't always have cotton then – who, satisfied with a handful of

rice, lived out their lives in dignity, without recourse to begging or to violence. I've heard it said, Kai Ho, you may be sitting here amongst us. *Agitation.* I don't know if that's true. But if you are here, then let me ask you this: what have you done with freedom? You who would enslave the whole world. You demand of everyone that they scream and brawl over cotton, as if there were nothing better!

CRY: Like silk!

MUNKA DU: But I demand of you the freedom to express my opinion, do you hear me? I'm not concerned with the cotton stashed in the Emperor's warehouses, I am concerned with freedom!

Serious unrest.

YAO YEL: Now the cat's out of the bag. These idiots have given the whole game away!

The Imperial Family leaves the chamber.

MUNKA DU: Freedom! Freedom! Free . . .

Singing intones from the pipes: 'Sun and rain, sun and rain / It's all you need to know. / If the cold is in your bones / Kai Ho! Kai Ho! Kai Ho!' - The police move in on Munka Du.

The foyer.

Tuis are jostling in the exit.

CRIES: He's brought ruin on the Association. - He didn't seem himself to me. - That's why he was so vehement. - The warehouses, that was a slip of the tongue. - A slip of the tongue or a slip of the noose.

GU to the old man, Sen: Don't be cast down.

SEN: On the contrary, I am uplifted. As they say: the cat is out of the bag, and has spied the rat.

ER FEI: Grandfather, it was a good song.

SEN: Shh! He means the melody, the tune, it was a pretty tune.

Slyly. You see, I've already learnt something from the Tuis.

In the presence of the police, you have to be a Tui.

GU suddenly throws his Tui-hat to the ground: I begin to despise my own vocation, old man. *He looks around*

anxiously, and picks his hat up again, beats the dust off it:

All the same, there's still much wisdom to be learnt here.

SEN: There are many wisdoms. I am for the wisdom which redistributes the fields.

6

BY THE TOWN WALL

A hangman and his assistants are impaling the severed head of Munka Du next to other heads.

HANGMAN: Nothing is more terrible than the reversals of human fortune. Just yesterday Yen Fai and his assistants were setting up the last heads on the west side. They were happy, without a care in the world. They had chosen the west side because the Tibetan caravan was passing by, with the Pilgrims of the Seventh Purification. It was all a great success. The pilgrims proclaimed themselves well satisfied with the spectacle, and Yen Fai's happiness seemed complete. But over night the rains came and a storm blew up from the west, and this morning the whole thing looked a right mess. Heads, good heads, such as it's hard to find in China these days, had become pitiful shadows of their former selves. Yen Fai shouldn't have chosen the west side for such a display. They say the Princess Turandot wept for two whole hours this morning. *They finish their work and move on.* Ah yes, happiness and disaster, they're close cousins for men of our estate.

A MAN'S VOICE *sings in the distance:*

Tell the man who draws the cart

He's soon to die.

Tell him, who'll live on?

The man who's sitting in the cart.

Evening approaches.

A handful of rice

And a fine day

Would draw to its close.

The scribe of the Tui Academy arrives with the boy, Si Fu.

They look at the heads and stop in front of an unfamiliar face.

SCRIBE: That is my teacher, the great light of Chinese grammar. He talked a load of nonsense at the Congress, but now there's no one left who can explain the poems of Po Chu-yi. Oh, why can't they just stick to their own subjects! — There's someone coming.

They exit. Enter Turandot, going for a walk with her maids. Armed guards follow her.

TURANDOT *seeing Munka Du's head*: Dudy! And there's Xi Wei too, the paper-tailor. I suppose I should be wearing mourning, but that would be so off-putting for the other candidates. There are so many heads on the wall; anyone would think our politics was indefensible. Who's that approaching?

FIRST MAID: It's the bandit Gogher Gogh, he's a figure of fun in the Tuis' teahouse.

SECOND MAID: Oh no he's not. The ladies of Peking all swoon over him, he's a real man.

TURANDOT: I see, a handsome fool.

FIRST MAID: It looks as if those two men are following him. Let's go.

TURANDOT: We'll stay right where we are.

Enter Gogher Gogh, looking around anxiously, as if he's running away. When he sees the women he stops. Turandot smiles.

GOGHER GOGH: You're out for a walk.

TURANDOT *laughs*: To buy a chicken.

GOGHER GOGH: That's nice. May I walk with you?

The first maid looks in the direction he's come from, and laughs.

TURANDOT: By all means.

Gogher Gogh's bodyguards approach, looking threateningly at Gogher.

GOGHER GOGH *offers Turandot his arm in a gentlemanly fashion, and leads her past the bodyguards*: You'll need closer protection, miss. There are all sorts of rogues round here.

TURANDOT: Do these gentlemen have some business with you?

GOGHER GOGH: All kinds of people turn to me, failures and outcasts the lot of them.

TURANDOT: Perhaps they just want to ask something?

GOGHER GOGH: I'm sick of questions. I won't answer any more questions, it's a matter of principle.

TURANDOT: Are the questions perhaps uncomfortable questions?

GOGHER GOGH: I've no idea; I won't even listen.

TURANDOT: Ah, a politician! – And what do you think of the conference so far?

GOGHER GOGH: Nothing. This here is the result. I tried in vain to prevent the whole thing, but they wouldn't let me in, just because I'm not as much a scholar as the other gentlemen. And now there's all this trouble. If the state tries to answer every question that's asked, it's bound to come to no good. And why? Because there'll be trouble. That's why. How long do you think you'd put up with your poodle if he trotted up every morning to ask: so where's the pork chop gone? He'd soon seem pretty unattractive.

TURANDOT: There's some truth in that. And what do you think about women?

GOGHER GOGH: The Chinese woman is loyal, hard-working and obedient. But she needs to be managed, just like the people, with an iron hand. Otherwise she'll go soft. *The bodyguards pass by, threateningly.* I'll give short shrift to recalcitrants.

TURANDOT: And what do you make of me?

GOGHER GOGH: You're a mysterious creature, if I may say so. Besides, I believe I must already have had the honour; where have I come across you before?

TURANDOT: I can help you there: it was in a literary setting.

GOGHER GOGH: A nation without literature is no proper cultural nation. But it has to be a healthy literature. I come from a respectable, simple family background. In school I was good at physical education and religious instruction, but I had certain leadership qualities too, from early on. I set up a business with seven like-minded associates; it took

iron discipline to make it what it is today. I demand of my followers a fanatical belief: in me. That's the only way I can attain my goals. *To the armed guard:* Arrest those people.

The bodyguards disappear. Where was it you wanted to go?

TURANDOT *amused:* Well, if you've nothing better to do, in the direction of the Imperial Palace. *To the second maid:* So my judgement wasn't quite right, after all.

They all exit in the direction from which Turandot and her train first came.

THE HEAD OF XI WEI: I fear there'll be rain again tonight.

UNKNOWN HEAD: My main argument was sound, but I acknowledge, in the detail I could have been a little more colourful.

HEAD OF KE LEI: Nothing, nothing grew.

HEAD OF XI WEI: There must be an answer. I think I was quite close last night.

HEAD OF MUNKA DU: If only I'd slept properly, then . . .

HEAD OF KE LEI: It's the Emperor who holds sway – holds sway, an unhappy choice of vocabulary – I needn't have expressed it quite like that.

HEAD OF XI WEI: True scholarship never tires! Of course there's an answer to every question. You just have to have the time to discover it.

UNKNOWN HEAD: We've got time enough now.

HEAD OF KE LEI: You could say, we enjoy a certain sort of freedom here.

The geographer Pauder Mel approaches, in a small carriage pulled by two young Tuis.

YOUNG TUI *shouts:* Clear the road for the great geographer Pauder Mel!

PAUDER MEL: Let's have no excuses, no tiredness! My greatest worry is that the Congress will already be over before I get there. Someone might discover the answer at any moment. And what then?

The young Tuis stop and point fearfully at the impaled heads.

PAUDER MEL: Criminals and traitors! Onwards, my young friends!

7

IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE

The Prime Minister is receiving the delegates of the Clothesmakers and their Union Tui.

UNION TUI: Your Excellency! A precise analysis of the situation reveals . . .

DELEGATE *impatiently*: Let me. Our Clothesmakers won't be restrained much longer, that's all there is to it.

PRIME MINISTER: Let me assure you: the Emperor will draw the consequences from the failure of the Great Congress.

DELEGATE *pleased*: That's more like it! As I say, I can't hold my people back any longer.

PRIME MINISTER *leads him out*: You can wait for the decision in the antechamber. I notice, by the way, that the delegate of the Clothesless hasn't turned up.

DELEGATE: They're playing their own politics.

PRIME MINISTER: So you don't see eye to eye with them?

DELEGATE: One thing's certain: you won't see me associating with that fellow any more.

Exits with his Tui. Enter the Emperor and Yao Yel.

EMPEROR: The Tuis are to blame for everything. I only ever wanted what was best.

YAO YEL: And got it too.

Enter the Court Tui, the Minister for War and Nu Shan.

COURT TUI: Majesty, there is no cause for concern.

NU SHAN: The populace is keeping a cool head, Your Majesty.

MINISTER FOR WAR: The city gates are securely in our control, Sire.

EMPEROR: Thank you. Just a moment. What's really happened?

MINISTER FOR WAR: Your Majesty, Kai Ho is getting restless in the northern provinces, he's started to march on the capital.

YAO YEL: Certain . . . erm . . . stores must be destroyed immediately.

EMPEROR: In that case, I abdicate.

PRIME MINISTER: How?

EMPEROR: How am I going to abdicate?

PRIME MINISTER: No, how can the stores be destroyed.

YAO YEL: Burning won't do. Cotton makes too much of a stink.

EMPEROR: All right, I'm abdicating then.

MINISTER FOR WAR: We can't get the army to do it. There'll be a mutiny.

EMPEROR: I abdicate.

Silence. — The Emperor looks at them in disbelief.

EMPEROR: You can think it over if you wish, but . . . *Since no one is taking any notice, he exits slowly.*

MINISTER FOR WAR: Your Majesty is impossible.

YAO YEL: You don't expect *me* . . . I would never dream . . . against my own brother . . . There's no point even asking . . . So they could say I'd usurped, in the hour . . . Don't press me, I've not the least ambition . . . Perhaps in an extreme emergency, for dynastic reasons, let us say . . . Can I depend on you? Arrest my brother, General. *Exit.*

PRIME MINISTER: Your Majesty!

They all bow and exit.

EMPEROR *enters by another door*: I've been thinking . . . *He sees that they've all left.* This is ridiculous. Is this the way you treat your Emperor? *Drums off-stage. The Emperor rushes to the window.* Why are the guards shouldering arms? Yao Yel! He's . . . Before you know it . . . You have to weigh every word, and in my own house! I must . . . immediately . . .

Enter Turandot with her maids and Gogher Gogh.

TURANDOT: Father, I've brought you one of the most intelligent men I've ever met.

EMPEROR: Have you got any small change?

GOGHER GOGH: Not on me, no.

TURANDOT: What do you need change for?

EMPEROR: I'm going to have to leave. I abdicated, in a moment of absent-mindedness. Yao Yel immediately usurps the throne. Of course it's against the law. The people have to be able to choose their rulers, after all.

GOGHER GOGH *glancing from time to time out of the window*: What's that supposed to mean: the people have to

be able to choose their rulers? Can the rulers choose their people? I think not! Would you have chosen this particular people if you'd had the choice?

EMPEROR: Of course not. They're an idle lot, think only of their own good, and they live scandalously beyond our means.

GOGHER GOGH: The people are a danger and a threat to law and order. They're undermining the state.

TURANDOT: Clever, eh? *To Gogher Gogh*: Tell him what you think he should do.

GOGHER GOGH: That's simple. It's just that, unfortunately, I have problems of my own, and they're not so easy to solve. On the other hand, they are connected with yours. To keep it brief, we haven't got much time, the question about the cotton, you mustn't answer it, you must have it outlawed. — The guards, they're leaving!

EMPEROR: I see. Makes sense. It would be a whole lot easier.

GOGHER GOGH: If the guards withdraw I've had it.

TURANDOT: Stop them, forbid the guards to leave, Daddy!

EMPEROR *pacing up and down in excitement*: There's something in what you say. It's the first sensible advice I've had, and you're not even wearing a Tui-hat. I can't stop the guards, not any longer.

TURANDOT: I'd just like to observe, Father, these ideas are Mr Gogh's intellectual property. I know you. Mr Gogh is herewith admitted to the Tui Association's competition, and reserves all rights. I hope you've understood that?

Enter Yao Yel, the Minister for War and the Court Tui.

YAO YEL: There, you see. Why isn't my brother under arrest? Shoot him! Get on with it!

MINISTER FOR WAR *to the Emperor*: There's a mob advancing on the palace. Have you been conspiring with the people?

EMPEROR: Not another one of those questions? And not even the prescribed form of address!

GOGHER GOGH: It's all over. Kru Ki and the others.

TURANDOT: What makes you think you know what the mob wants?

YAO YEL: They want to lynch us, chicken-brain. What else

does a mob ever want?

EMPEROR: He's right.

GOGHER GOGH *suddenly*: I beg you, your attention please.

These people, they're excited, they've been incited. As soon as they discover that I'm in here . . .

YAO YEL: You mean, they know you?

GOGHER GOGH: They certainly do.

EMPEROR: Then you've got to speak to them, for God's sake man.

GOGHER GOGH: Impossible. If I fall into their hands, I mean, if I appear before them with nothing to show . . .

EMPEROR: What does that mean? Promise them whatever you like.

MINISTER FOR WAR: Yes, promise anything.

YAO YEL: Everything!

GOGHER GOGH: That's all well and good. But who am I?

EMPEROR: My dear, good man, I've assessed your proposals most carefully, and I herewith charge you to act according to them, immediately. You have my full confidence. For myself, I'll withdraw to my chambers for a few minutes, and take a little sustenance.

GOGHER GOGH: Your Majesty, I shan't forget this.

Exit the Emperor with Yao Yel, Turandot and the Court Tui. Alarms backstage.

GOGHER GOGH *to the Minister for War*: Excellency, I need your sash. *The Minister doesn't understand*. Your Excellency, lives may depend on your presence of mind. Give me your sash, please. Don't make me humiliate myself kneeling, Excellency. A desperate man stands here before you, and he needs a sash. *He rips the sash off the reluctant Minister and tears it into ribbons.*

Enter the two bodyguards with three other bandits.

FIRST BODYGUARD: Hah, so we've got you?

GOGHER GOGH: Been looking for me, have you? *To the Minister for War*: They've been looking for me. Comrades, China expects . . .

FIRST BODYGUARD: Don't joke.

SECOND BODYGUARD: Enough nonsense.

GOGHER GOGH: Quite right, enough nonsense. The time for

jokes has passed. Excellency! Lawless elements, who quite openly seek to damage the property rights of their fellow citizens and shamelessly endanger the sacred order of the state – walk free, while rough but honest, loyal subjects look on unarmed and powerless. In accordance with my Imperial commission, I demand weapons for these men here. From the Imperial arsenals. *He goes up to the bodyguards and formally invests them with the rags of the sash as armbands.* As defenders of the public order, and inspired by your fanatical resolve, you will kick anyone in the guts who dares to rebel. Your reward: twice the normal police wage.

SECOND BODYGUARD: Sure thing, boss.

The Emperor and the others return, drinking from small cups.

EMPEROR: And now?

GOGHER GOGH: Your Majesty, in this historic hour let me present my old brothers-in-arms – and they really are brothers: the Krukher Kru brothers. I've discovered that the mob that was seen in the neighbourhood of the palace turn out to be my own trusted fellow-warriors – who now put themselves at Your Majesty's disposal, body and soul.

EMPEROR: My dear Mr Gogh, I'm moved. But above all it's a question of the Imperial storehouses, they urgently need protection.

GOGHER GOGH: Majesty, give me twenty-four hours and you won't even recognise your capital city.

YAO YEL: What's to happen to the warehouses?

EMPEROR: No questions. *To the Minister for War:* Arrest my brother, General!

Turandot applauds.

YAO YEL: But you'd abdicated!

EMPEROR: Not irrevocably. *Mischievously:* Didn't you issue an order to have me shot?

YAO YEL: Nonsense. There's always a lot of talk when people are excited.

GOGHER GOGH *keen:* Majesty, allow me to carry out your commands, without compromise.

MINISTER FOR WAR *anticipating him:* Imperial Majesty ...

YAO YEL: You'll make a fine mess of business without my help. *He exits, furious, with the Minister for War, followed by the first bodyguard and two bandits. On the threshold he meets the Prime Minister and Nu Shan. They bow respectfully, then catch sight of the Emperor and bow nervously to him.*

EMPEROR: I have resumed the reins of government, my dear fellow, you'll be hearing from me. At the moment things are happening rather thick and fast.

Behind the Prime Minister the delegate of the Clothes-makers appears with his Tui.

DELEGATE: His Excellency the Prime Minister hinted at this morning's audience that Your Majesty would draw the full consequences of the failure of the Tui Conference.

EMPEROR: Quite right. You're under arrest.

GOGHER GOGH: Follow me. *He sees Nu Shan.* And who is this gentleman?

PRIME MINISTER: Mr Nu Shan, Chairman of the Tui Association.

GOGHER GOGH: A Tui. *Roaring:* You're under arrest! There are, as we all know, dangerous opinion-mongers at work here. To be precise, people with dangerous opinions. I have nothing against it if a man takes money for an opinion. Under my leadership the state will spend even more on opinions. On opinions which suit me. This endless thinking, this way and that, it disgusts me. Just have a bit of decency and respect for the people who know better. *Roaring:* Take him away!

TURANDOT *beaming:* Oh Goghy!

The Dowager Empress comes running in with a jar of ginger.

7a

IN THE COURTYARD OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE

Gogher Gogh addresses his followers.

GOGHER GOGH: It's just been discovered that the Imperial

warehouses are stuffed to the rafters with cotton. Only a few days ago, certain dishonourable wretches were spreading the lie that there was no cotton. They've had their punishment. Equally, the Emperor's own brother, Yao Yel, who'd been stockpiling the cotton behind the Emperor's back, has been arrested and shot. He was going to burn some of the cotton to cover up his crime. But he didn't manage to carry out his monstrous plan. Comrades! A dishonest military clique attempted to persuade the Emperor that your services were no longer needed. And so I find myself, with the approval of the Emperor of course, compelled, as I was in the early years of our movement, to set an example, a beacon visible from afar, from which even the stupidest rogue may recognise that, in the absence of sufficiently energetic protection, no property is secure. To this end, this very night, you will set fire to one half of the warehouses. – Do your duty!

8

THE LITTLE TUI MARKET

On great easels the Tuís are setting up open books. For one yen passers-by may read one page.

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI:

The poor fool sweats and labours night and day
But still he can't improve his situation

All he has to call his own are: troubles –
And that's because he's short on education.

The rich man gets to lord it in his palace

The poor man scrapes a living in a hut.

It's knowledge always makes the real difference

And if you've got it – then you'll take your cut.

A very old woman pays a yen and looks into the book. Enter Sen with the boy, Er Fei.

ER FEI: So will I have to be a Tui like him, grandfather?

SEN: We've still got our money.

ER FEI: Can't we buy a frog instead?

SEN: Er Fei, what have you got against the Tuis?

ER FEI: I think they're bad people.

SEN: Look at that bridge over there. Who do you think built it?

ER FEI: The Emperor.

SEN: No. Think again.

ER FEI: The stonemasons.

SEN: Yes. But think one more time. *Pause.* The masons built it, but a Tui told them how to do it. We've only heard how they talk, we haven't yet got through to their real knowledge. There's knowledge on display here. I'm just a bit disappointed how expensive it is. Er Fei, if there's still no sign of progress this time, then, fair enough, they must be driven out with fire and sword. *He walks indecisively from easel to easel.*

Enter four washerwomen, amongst them Ma Gogh.

QIUNG: So, now I've bought it, and that's that. *She shows the Economics Tui a new headscarf.* Cotton.

SU: A millionairess.

QIUNG: Four weeks' pay, but it's worth it. *To Yao:* Everyone thinks it suits me. You think so too, don't you, Yao?

YAO: No. You're too bony for that look.

QIUNG: That's rich, coming from you. You cow, I suppose you're the only pretty one? You think you're pretty?

YAO: No, I'm not pretty either.

MA GOGH: Why do you ask her? You know she always tells the truth.

Qiung laughs loudly.

ECONOMICS TUI: How can we help? What are you young ladies after?

QIUNG: We're from the Almond Blossom Laundry, we're out shopping.

ECONOMICS TUI: Ladies! How can we make a success of business? Take a look in my book, and for just a yen you too can find out what the science of economics has to say about it:

Imagine business isn't going well -

The big fish keep me wriggling in the dark.

Why then I scratch my last remaining hairs out

And ask how I can get to be a shark.

I know what folk endure to earn their bread

And, for their pains, they get it up the butt.

They're good for nothing, or they're good for fleecing –

I know the score – and so I take my cut.

QIUNG: That's something for you, Ma. – She's got her own
laundrette, and she wants to buy her son a big laundry.

You might learn how to make a bit of cash.

MA GOGH: Could you open it at the page where it says
something about loans?

MEDICINE TUI: What about your aches and pains? Maybe
you're sick and just don't know it? Want to find out what
the doctor knows? Just one yen!

Let's say you're wracked by shooting stomach cramps:

The doctor takes one look . . . he's seen enough.

The patient staggers out in pain, but first

He pays. Because the doctor knows his stuff.

He knows the Latin names but, more important

He knows the rate for such a painful gut.

Unless you know, you'll ache and ail and sicken

But if you know – why then you'll take your cut.

MA GOGH: I should really take a look in here too. I've got a
sore shoulder from the washing. But I'd better see how I
can get a proper laundry for my son. But the pain has been
quite bad lately.

QIUNG: A woollen shawl would be better for your aching
shoulder.

MA GOGH: But that would cost fifteen yen.

*Gogher Gogh's second bodyguard enters with two other
bandits and Turandot's two maids.*

SECOND BODYGUARD: There you are, Mother Ma. And in
such an unhealthy part of town. Do you know what we are
now? *He points to his armband.* Policemen! Don't worry,
it's all the other way around now, from today. Mother Ma,
your son has made quite a step-up, he's waiting for you in
the Imperial Palace. There, you see.

MA GOGH: Tut, don't you go talking to me in public, Scarface.
You'll embarrass my friends.

SECOND BODYGUARD: Mother Ma, these young missies will

be telling their children and their children's children how, once upon a time, they used to know you. Come on, let's go. *He takes hold of her.*

FIRST MAID: My lady, a personality such as yourself, so elevated that it would be improper to address you by name, belongs by the side of her great son.

MA GOGH: Something must have happened to Gogher. I'd better see how he's getting along. *She makes to leave with them.*

FIRST MAID: Permit us, dear lady, to accompany you to the corner, to the sedan chair. The bearers didn't want to enter this filthy market street.

The first bodyguard returns with five other bandits, all carrying torches.

FIRST BODYGUARD: So you found her. Great times, Mother Ma! *Ma Gogh makes a dismissive gesture and goes off with the second bodyguard.* Hey you, say, where are the Emperor's warehouses?

QIUNG: Over Tanners' Bridge. *Exit the bandits.* What's going on? I have a bad feeling. We'd better go home, Su!

SU *has reached the Love-life Tui's stall:* I'll catch you up.

LOVE-LIFE TUI: The mysteries of love! Happiness or broken hearts? How should I behave towards my love?

The game of love has two quite different players
The one adores, the other one's adored.

One partner gives, the other one just takes it
One plays his heart, the other looks on, bored.

So hide your face if e'er you feel it blushing
And keep your pretty, pouting mouth tight shut.

For if you give him leave, he'll have your heart out
And if he knows you love - he'll take his cut.

Come along, miss. Find out the truth, before it's too late.
One yen.

SU *pays:* Should I throw myself at his feet, or behave as if I didn't even fancy him?

LOVE-LIFE TUI: The latter, miss, always the latter! *He reads to her in low voice.*

QIUNG: Why do you bother with that rubbish, Su? If the man

who wrote it had understood enough to get himself a girl, he wouldn't have had time to write a book at all.

SEN *who has been standing undecided in front of the Economics Tui's stall*: Ladies, don't make jokes about knowledge. If I wasn't so drawn to this book, I'd certainly make a study of that one. It's my opinion you should never deny anyone a pleasure, and least of all yourself. Why is the young lady laughing? *He smiles at Yao, who was laughing.*

QIUNG *alarmed*: Yao, you're not answering.

SEN: Indeed. You should always answer.

YAO: I'm laughing because, old man, you can't do it any longer anyway.

SEN *laughs as well*: That may be true, but don't tell anybody. If you can't catch the tiger, maybe you can still catch the hedgehog, as they say. And if you don't learn for yourself, maybe you should still learn for others. *Gesturing to the boy.* He's growing fast.

Unrest amongst the Tuis. They all look towards the rear.

QIUNG: Look, something's burning. Over Tanners' Bridge.

SEN: It smells of burning cotton.

TUIS: We'd better move our stalls out of the way. When the fire brigade come they smash straight through everything. — There'll be no fire brigade. — What do you mean?

Gogher Gogh and the Prime Minister arrive, with armed troops.

GOGHER GOGH: That conflagration must have been started by the Clothesmakers and the Clothesless, along with the disaffected Tuis. It's a beacon for the rebel Kai Ho, no question. This calls for rigorous measures. Above all, we must root out the intellectual arsonists. Search through the books, and discover how they undermine the state. *Exits with the Prime Minister.*

FIRST SOLDIER *to the Medicine Tui*: What does it say in this book?

MEDICINE TUI *shaking*: All you need to know about tuberculosis, or broken bones.

FIRST SOLDIER: What? Broken bones? We've had enough of that, broken bones indeed. That's a direct assault on the

authority of the police. Arrest him! *He throws the book to the ground and stamps on it.*

SEN *tries to stop him*: Don't stamp on it, it's useful.

FIRST SOLDIER *strikes him down*: You swine! Daring to resist state authority. *To the General Education Tui*: And what's this filth here? Confess!

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: Knowledge, Officer, sir.

FIRST SOLDIER: Knowledge about what? Anything about cotton, eh?

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI *shaking his head*: That's not a part of general education, Officer.

FIRST SOLDIER: You crooks, you're all in cahoots with the arsonists. Inciting people against the Emperor.

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: That's only the great Tuis, if at all, and not them either.

FIRST SOLDIER: Did you see anybody come through here with torches?

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: Some men with armbands passed through.

A bandit with an armband and torch comes from the other direction.

BANDIT: Captain, two Kai Ho supporters have been spotted down at the Tuis' teahouse.

FIRST SOLDIER: Like him here?

The General Education Tui shakes his head in alarm.

FIRST SOLDIER: So, have you seen anyone with torches?

QIUNG *standing in front of Yao*: Not us, no.

YAO: But he's got one over there, Qiung.

QIUNG: That's just a truncheon, like the police have. We'd better go, Yao. Su, we're just leaving.

FIRST SOLDIER: Not so fast! Maybe you've seen someone else round here? Like him?

YAO: Five of them. And that's not a truncheon either.

FIRST SOLDIER: But this is. *He strikes her down and the soldiers drag her off.*

LOVE-LIFE TUI *helps Sen to his feet*: Don't cry little one, he's alive. They set fire to the warehouses themselves, and now they're arresting everyone who saw them do it.

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: And now they want to ban this

book, by which I make my meagre livelihood. It's rubbish anyway, and not a word against them, hardly a true word in it! The poets, sucking up to their iron fists, the nation's great thinkers, worrying about their salaries! It's all rubbish anyway. Rubbish, stuff and nonsense!

SEN: Don't exaggerate, you made your living from it.

THE SCRIBE *from the Tui Academy comes running, he's bleeding from a head wound*: Oh Su, I've been looking for you for hours.

SU *throws herself in his arms*: Oh Wang! I shouldn't embrace you, I know. He's the one, I'm sorry, I just can't play it by the book.

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: You're hurt, what happened?

SCRIBE: I'm a scribe at the Tui Academy. Or I was. The Palace of the Tui Association has been stormed by Gogher Gogh's men. They've been incorporated with the police, and they've got new armbands with insignia stamped on them. The Tui Association is accused of insulting the Emperor, because a state secret was revealed at the Great Congress. At this very moment they're burning the three thousand theses about the history of China, just because they mention defeats in the seventh century. Nu Shan has been hanged because he's supposed to have said that Gogher Gogh, who's been Chancellor since five o'clock, didn't know what three times five makes. I'm in danger myself, because I witnessed it all. And it's all because Kai Ho is already in Szechwan.

QIUNG *to the Tuis*: You'd better get rid of your hats.

LOVE-LIFE TUI: Where shall we put them? I live at the other end of town.

ECONOMICS TUI *to Qiung*: Take mine. I live quite a way away.

LOVE-LIFE TUI: I asked first.

ECONOMICS TUI: It's for the life of the mind, my dear.

QIUNG: Give them here, you poor things. *She hides the hats in her skirts*. If my Sun sees me like this he'll think I'm expecting, he'll run a mile.

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI: But the unions won't stand for it. They'll get together now.

Soldiers bring on the delegate of the Clothesmakers and his Tui, in chains.

SOLDIER: We'll teach you to ask the Emperor questions.

DELEGATE: You'll be teaching a lot of people then. *They beat him.*

Bandits bring on the delegate of the Clothesless and his Tui, also in chains.

BANDIT: So, do you still think our leader set fire to the warehouses?

They beat the delegate.

SOLDIER: Hey you! Why don't you come with us to the slaughterhouses: these two should get together.

The bandits turn round, and both sets of captives are led off.

DELEGATE OF THE CLOTHESLESS: We didn't know anything about it!

SCRIBE: Where can we go?

QIUNG: To the laundry. Maybe Ma will send someone. They fetched for her from the palace, her Gogher's been made a minister, so perhaps she can save poor Yao. She told the truth again, I couldn't stop her. But we should take the old man too. They can see by his bruises that he's been beaten once, they might just drag him away as a state criminal.

SEN *to the Economics Tui, who is busily ripping pages out of his book*: What are you tearing out?

ECONOMICS TUI: The pages about low earnings.

SEN: Can I buy them off you?

GENERAL EDUCATION TUI *beckons to Sen, in a low voice*: I understand what you're after, old man. But I've got something better for you. *He draws a little book from his pocket.* Don't show it to a soul, it's by Kai Ho.

SEN: I see, yes, I'd like to buy that.

QIUNG: Come with us to the suburbs, old man. You can't read it anyway.

SEN: Others can read it for me. Here's the money I got for my cotton. My journey has been worthwhile.

He gives him the purse and leaves with the girls and the scribe. The Love-life Tui joins them, dragging his book with him. That leaves only the General Education Tui, who is

undecided, and the Medicine Tui, who is crouched over his battered book, sobbing.

8a

IN THE COURTYARD OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE

Turandot's two maids enter with a copper bath.

FIRST MAID *sets down the bath*: I'm not crossing the courtyard like this. *She loosens the top of her smock.*

SECOND MAID: If that cow sees you she'll have you whipped.

FIRST MAID: She's so jealous about that bloke!

SECOND MAID: I managed to brush past him on the way to the conference hall, you know, where it's so narrow. And do you know what he said? 'I beg your pardon.' There's manners for you.

FIRST MAID: She says she loves him because he's so clever.

SECOND MAID: She says he's clever, just because she fancies him.

FIRST MAID: That's for sure. There's clever ones as many as fish in the sea, but not so many fine figures.

They take up the bath again and carry it inside.

9

IN FRONT OF THE ALMOND BLOSSOM LAUNDRY

Old Sen is sitting on a barrel outside the laundry, the boy is damping his head bandage. Next to them Qiung is altering a Tui-hat for herself. On the other side, in front of a tall narrow house, a swordsmith is standing directing operations, which proceed invisibly on the first floor. Next to him, a Tui, Ka Mü with parcels of music scores. The district is very poor.

KA MÜ: Sir, they're all masterworks! You must look after them, as I have to go away for a while. This is ancient music. It's endangered because it's not Chinese, and the government we have now ...

SWORDSMITH: I can't store anything more. I've already had a statue dumped on me, a goddess of justice, two storeys high. We had to break through the roof. Hey, slower there, turn it slowly!

KA MÜ: And this is new music. It's in trouble because it's not 'true to the spirit of the people'.

SEN: That's so unnecessary. The people don't want 'true spirits' anyway.

SWORDSMITH *sighing*: All right, I'll put them in the bedroom. As they're in danger. *He lets him into the house.*

A WOMAN *calls from the upper floor*: I'm sorry, Mr Lü Sheng, you'll just have to stand on your head, the children are so scared of your face.

KA MÜ *comes back out without the packages*: Thank you! Thank you! *He embraces him.* It's for China! *Exits quickly.*

SEN: When I was young like you I always wanted to hear just the one tune that the village carpenter used to play on his flute. These days I want variety in my music, something new all the time.

SWORDSMITH: How can they destroy something that took so much effort! All those little dots!

THE WOMAN *from the window*: Have you heard, they say the forbidden one is just a hundred miles from the capital.

SEN: Not so loud!

Enter Ma Gogh with Yao.

MA GOGH *calls from afar*: Qiung! Su! Good evening, Lü Sheng. So here we are again. *Qiung and Su come out of the house. Embraces all round.* She had the good sense to tell those thieves she worked in my laundry. And the stories she told me got me thinking all right. I couldn't have stood it much longer anyway. Gogher has gone mad, he's in charge now. I was proud of him in his old job, but now I'm ashamed. They wanted me to feel at home in the palace. This morning they brought a copper tub from the museum and set it down on the blue carpet in my chamber, which is that big you could stable fifty mules. And the Prime Minister says: Ladyship, your illustrious son says you only feel at home when you're washing. Please, wash - to your heart's desire! I gave him a kick, but I shouldn't have done

that. When he'd gone a servant came in and turned his backside to me, to kick – to my heart's desire. The only sensible person in the whole palace was the Emperor's mother, she told me what she thinks of her son, and gave me a recipe for a special sort of cake. And they all thought she was mad! I made note of the recipe though, for Gogher. Where's my tea? And who's that?

QIUNG: That's Mr A Sha Sen, he's from cotton country, he came to the capital to study.

SEN *apologetically*: They told me I didn't have the head for it, but it seems I do after all, as this bump proves.

SU: What a horrible bruise!

YAO: It's not that big, it'll soon heal.

QIUNG *gives her a hug*: You're so rude, Yao.

The paper window on the first floor rips open and an iron band pushes through with a huge upturned scale hanging from it.

SWORDSMITH: Careful you idiots!

VOICE *from inside*: There's not enough room for the arm!

SEN: They're stowing away the cultural artefacts, or whatever they call them. At the East Gate I saw a Tui at a temple where there's an invisible god. As we speak, he's probably leading it on a chain to the suburbs, where it can be housed in safety.

Three of the Clothesless come out of the narrow house with large bundles. Suddenly they begin to run.

ER FEI *tugs at Sen's arm*: Soldiers, grandfather!

They all run into the houses. The swordsmith just has time to throw a carpet over the arm of Justice, as two armed men come patrolling down the street. After they've passed by, a street-seller is heard in the background: 'Cotton! Cotton! Cotton for sale! Cotton from Yao Yel's warehouses, the enemy of the state!'. The woman looks out from the upper window. The street-seller comes down the street with a wagon loaded with cotton fabrics, guarded by an armed soldier.

STREET-SELLER: Cotton! Cotton! Cotton, from the burning warehouses of Yao Yel, hanged at the scaffold! Half a year's harvest destroyed by fire! Prices are soaring! Buy now,

while you can still afford it! *No one reacts, so he moves on, still calling 'Cotton! Cotton!'.*

WOMAN: You can keep it. We've got nothing to eat and no shoes to wear. Anyway, the forbidden one will take care of everything.

She slams the window shut. Su and her scribe emerge.

SCRIBE: Don't cry too much, a little bit tonight, but then no more tomorrow. Promise me.

SU: Tomorrow too.

SCRIBE: All right. If I'm not back in three weeks it'll be because I've gone a long way round, that's all.

SU: How will you find your way? In those old shoes!

SCRIBE: I know a weaver over on the other side, he's leaving today with three others. And there are thousands of them already. They'll be easy enough to find.

SU: But your shoes are so worn, Wang. What are we to do?

SEN *comes out with the boy and Qiung*: If you could wait a while longer, we could leave together, perhaps.

SU: But you're heading north, whereas Wang's business is here in the neighbourhood. But his shoes are useless, what are we to do about that?

SEN: I see, so his shoes aren't good enough for a little business in the neighbourhood.

QIUNG: But at least he has a warm shawl for his shoulders. *She gives him her new headscarf.*

SEN: Don't stop for every little injustice you see by the wayside, that's dangerous. The river floods the valley, but the dam must be built in the mountains.

SCRIBE: Perhaps you could come with me after all? But I have to leave right away, I'm expected.

SEN: I can't do that, I still have some thinking to do.

SCRIBE: I'm off then, to the Tibetan Gate. Farewell. *He exits to the rear.*

SU: See you tomorrow, Wang! *She goes back into the house. Two of the Clothesless come and knock on the swordsmith's door. The swordsmith beckons them inside.*

SWORDSMITH: I can hardly get to my forge with all this bloody culture. And upstairs there's a terrible draught

through the hole in the floor. And here come more of them, no hats on their heads. *He disappears quickly.*

Four Tuis from the teahouse approach: Wen, Gu, Shi Ka and Mo Si.

GU: Still here, Mr A Sha Sen? Is this the blacksmith's place, where we can hide the valuables?

QIUNG: The house is full. Besides, how can you walk around like that, with nothing on your heads? Any fool can see you used to have Tui-hats, and now they're rounding up everyone with a bare head!

WEN: It's terrible. They've closed the teahouse. Wit and wisdom have become homeless beggars.

GU: I have to try. If China loses its art it will degenerate into barbarism. *He knocks at the narrow house.* He's not answering. *He shows the others a scroll.* This is a Pi Jeng. Twelfth century. The hills of the Hoang Ho. Look at the line. Look at that blue. This is what they want to destroy.

QIUNG: Why?

GU: They say, real hills don't look like this. *He shows it to Sen.*

SEN: That's true, hills don't look like that. Not quite like that. But if they looked like that for everyone, we'd have no need of a painting. When I was a child my grandfather showed me what a sausage looks like. This whatsisname, the painter, shows me what hills look like. Of course, I can't see it straight away. But I guess, when I next climb a hill, it'll mean more to me. Perhaps it will be blue, and have such a line as this.

GU: Perhaps it will. But we haven't got time for long discussions. Get the swordsmith! This Pi Jeng is from the Imperial Museum!

SEN: If only it had been ours from the start! It would have been safer then.

MA GOGH *has appeared at the doorway*: I'll hide it for you. Gogher won't get a hold of it. He'd just tear it up. They should have sewn up my womb.

QIUNG: She's the Chancellor's mother, you know.

MA GOGH: There's no call to be afraid. I'll disown him. Give me the picture. He thinks he understands everything, and

now he's in charge. It's a bad time for pictures. He thinks he's a painter.

SHI KA: The architects are frightened too.

MA GOGH: Yes, my son's an architect as well.

WEN: We should all have been scientists.

MA GOGH: Possibly not. He's the biggest scientist of all.

MO SI *shows her a globe*: Could you hide the globe as well?

The fact the earth is round – it might matter one day.

ER FEI *tugs at Sen's arm*: Grandfather, a soldier!

THE TUIS: He mustn't see us, with our bare heads.

MA GOGH: Give the globe here. *She disappears into the house with the globe and the picture.*

The Tuis run away, with the exception of Mo Si, who has got held up.

SECOND BODYGUARD *looking for something*: And what is this my tired eyes espy? A Tui. Now where have you left your hat? No no, there's no need to be frightened this time.

Come here. Clear off, Qiung, you scumbag. *Referring to Sen*: You have some quaint guests here in the laundry.

SEN: I'm a peaceful peasant. Just sitting here doing some thinking. That takes time for me, you know.

QIUNG: Don't you dare go inside. Mother Gogh will smash you over the head with a frying pan. *She sets her new hat at a jaunty angle and goes inside.*

SECOND BODYGUARD *confidentially to Mo Si*: So what's your name?

MO SI: I'm Mo Si, the king of excuse-makers.

SECOND BODYGUARD: That's good. Erm, because we need something, you know, not urgently, but . . . What do you call it, those things you do?

MO SI: A phrase, a formulation?

SECOND BODYGUARD: Right. The boss, right? Is getting married, right? Don't gawp like that, why shouldn't he, with her? Right? But it's just that he can't, right? One smirk on your ugly little face and I'll knock your head off, right? So, what is he to say to her? You come with me, and get it right, right? *He leads him off.*

The Clothesless come out of the swordsmith's with big bundles. One of the bundles falls apart. Guns and swords

tumble out. Alarmed, they look at Sen, who just smiles and waves. They pack it all together again and hurry off.

SEN: Er Fei, I'm done thinking. Do up my sandals. The thoughts you can buy here stink. The whole country is governed by injustice, and in the Tui Academy all you get to learn is why it has to be that way. It's true, they can build stone bridges over the widest rivers. But the powerful are carried over them into indolent luxury, while the poor are herded into slavery. It's true, they have medicine. But the few are restored to health so they can commit injustice, while the rest are made fit in order to sweat on their behalf. Opinions are bartered like fish, and thought itself has fallen into disrepute. He's thinking, they say, what mean tricks is he brewing? And yet thinking is the most useful and pleasurable of activities. So what has happened to it? And then there's Kai Ho, I've got his little book right here. So far, all I really know about him is that the fools call him a fool, and the frauds a fraud. But wherever he has been and done the thinking, there are wide fields with rice and cotton, and the people seem to be happy. And if the people are happy when someone has been thinking, then, Er Fei, he must surely have done some good thinking, that's the proof. We're not going home, Er Fei, not yet. Even if I don't survive this new course of study. Good things demand a heavy price.

ER FEI: Will they be rooted out with fire and sword, grandfather?

SEN: No, it's more like with the soil: you have to decide what you want from it, barley or weeds. And act on your decision.

ER FEI *grumpily*: Will there always be Tuis, even when Kai Ho has shared out the fields?

SEN *laughs*: Not for long. We'll all get wide fields to plough and even wider fields to study. And just how we'll get the fields, it says right here. *Sen pulls out his book and flourishes it. They both exit to the rear.*

Qiung comes out of the laundry.

QIUNG *calls after them*: Hey, old man, home is over that way! You're taking the wrong road!

SEN: No, I think I'm taking the right road, Qiung!

IO

IN THE ANCIENT MANCHU TEMPLE

Marching up and down, back and forth, small companies of soldiers armed to the teeth, and bandits with armbands. The Prime Minister enters and cross-questions the soldiers.

PRIME MINISTER: Any news of the rebels' positions?

CAPTAIN: Still no news.

PRIME MINISTER: And tested officers were sent with the reconnaissance troops?

CAPTAIN: Indeed, Excellency.

PRIME MINISTER: And dependable agents with the officers?

CAPTAIN: Indeed, Excellency.

PRIME MINISTER: And still no reports?

CAPTAIN: No, Excellency.

PRIME MINISTER: My confidence remains undimmed, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Indeed, Excellency.

Exit the Prime Minister, then the soldiers. Enter the Minister for War and the Court Tui, without his Tui-hat.

MINISTER FOR WAR: Have you heard the latest scandal? They're saying the unmentionable one shot a little Tui. He'd sent him to Her Imperial Highness to explain something and he stayed in her chamber two whole hours. It was something to do with cotton and de-briefing, they say. Hahaha!

The company of soldiers returns.

MINISTER FOR WAR: Repeat your instructions!

CAPTAIN: Said personage is to be arrested immediately after the ceremony.

Exit the Minister and Court Tui, then the soldiers. Enter Gogher Gogh in ceremonial dress, and a company of bandits.

GOGHER GOGH to the first bodyguard: Repeat your orders.

FIRST BODYGUARD: Arrest everyone after the ceremony.

GOGHER GOGH: Your brother was on duty with me this morning. Have you spoken to him since? *The first bodyguard shakes his head.* Good. He's gone and shot somebody. Have him quartered, at once, understand? And have the drums beat, so no one can hear what he says.

FIRST BODYGUARD: Right away, boss.

GOGHER GOGH *takes his loyal guard's dagger and conceals it up his sleeve*: I'll be needing this; there's nothing but deceit and treachery in this palace. Another thing: immediately after the marriage you grab the Manchu coat and throw it over me. No one will dare touch me wearing that, except some complete degenerate. I'll make sure that scoundrel Emperor gets the message: you don't just bunk off when danger threatens, and leave me to face the music.

Enter the Emperor with the Minister for War and the Prime Minister, followed by the captain and his men.

EMPEROR: My dear Gogh, I'm a little late, I know. I had to approve some rather stringent measures, you know, the usual thing in such situations.

GOGHER GOGH: Request permission to countersign the measures.

EMPEROR: Beg your pardon? Ah yes, countersign, of course. And there she comes, on cue, the lovely young bride.

Enter Turandot with the Court Tui and her maids. They bow in greeting.

TURANDOT: Papa, I've just met a really nice man, I want to marry him. I don't mean the Tui from last night from the teahouse, he was intelligent as well, and I'm not at all pleased with you for what you did to him, Gogher, there's no need to be churlish. But I don't mean him, it's an officer, he's just explained to me how the palace is to be defended, you see, I consider the situation to be extremely serious, there's no time to lose. So can I marry him?

EMPEROR: No.

TURANDOT: What do you mean, no? This isn't just some passing fancy, it goes much deeper. Because it's all a question of defending ourselves now, every inch. He'd make a very good son-in-law, he knows so much about horses. *An officer enters and tries to communicate with the*

Minister for War, who waves him away because Turandot is speaking. An army without a cavalry, Papa . . .

EMPEROR: I can't have the palace defended by horses. Let's proceed to the ceremony.

Exit the officer.

TURANDOT: Papa, that's really very inconsiderate of you. You have to understand, Gogher. It'll hurt for a bit, but life goes on, and after all your war wound healed up all right didn't it. Just do me this one favour, and don't be obstinate. Can I, Papa?

EMPEROR *roughly*: I've already said, no. *To Gogher Gogh*: Of course, if you care to resign and step aside . . .

GOGHER GOGH: Your Majesty, Imperial Highness. In this historic hour we stand here, before the shrine of the first Manchu Emperor, in awe and excited expectation. I am a simple man. Not one for speeches. But Your Majesty has entrusted this man of the people with a holy mission, the protection of the throne. And Your Imperial Highness has given me your heart. It is not my part not to justify such trust, all the more as in these difficult times it is, above all, all a question of trust. When Your Majesty's honoured and departed brother, driven by unholy delusion, endangered the honour of the Imperial Family, then I acted with iron determination and took immediate control of the warehouses, and so regained the trust and confidence of the common people.

An officer with a bandaged head comes looking for the Minister of War.

OFFICER: Kai Ho . . . at the Tibetan Gate . . .

GOGHER GOGH *continues nervously*: I shall now discourse at a little length about the events of last week. The whole business has not just been about cotton, as some people think. There have been those who talked about cotton from dawn to dusk, and tried to undermine the confidence of the people, and they have received their deserts. *At a gesture from the Minister for War the soldiers leave.* It is due solely to my energetic intervention that the Emperor and the people are now united in unprecedented . . .

TURANDOT: Papa, I won't do it.

EMPEROR: You just shut up. Mr Gogh, we've received certain intelligences which suggest it might be wise to complete the ceremony as quickly as possible, or else to postpone it.

GOGHER GOGH: Out of the question. I assume responsibility for the protection of your Imperial person, and that of Her Highness.

EMPEROR: Minister . . .

MINISTER FOR WAR: Gentlemen, the situation has clearly deteriorated. *To the Emperor:* I've sent the palace guard to defend the gates.

EMPEROR *while Gogher Gogh's bandits take up positions at the doors:* What? You've sent them away. You had explicit orders . . .

GOGHER GOGH: Hand over the keys! Where's the temple guard?

FIRST BODYGUARD: He must have run away. *He rattles at the entrance door to the temple. It opens. Not locked! Cries from outside. The door opens into the inner temple. The Imperial Manchu tunic has disappeared.*

FIRST BODYGUARD: Treachery! The tunic has gone.

EMPEROR: Cut down.

PRIME MINISTER: The guard has disappeared: he's stolen it.

GOGHER GOGH: Gentlemen, let us proceed to the marriage ceremony. This little incident is happily of no consequence.

TURANDOT: Perhaps he was cold, Papa.

EMPEROR: But it was a poor coat, all patched up.

GOGHER GOGH: There's few enough these days, even poor quality coats. If you hadn't tried to corner the cotton market! The marriage ceremony, gentlemen!

Drums in the distance. Turandot screams shrilly.

EMPEROR: That was Yao Yel, it wasn't me.

Sounds of jubilation from a great crowd.

SOLDIER: It was the whole pack of you, and you're finished now!