

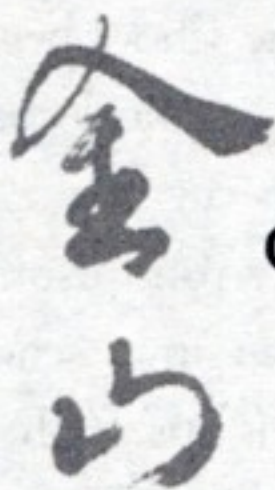
金山

LAURENCE  
YEP

# Dragon's Gate







## CHAPTER | I

*The sixth month of the third year of  
the era all in order, or July 1865.  
Three Willows Village, Toishan County,  
Kwangtung Province, China.*

“**T**hey’re coming!” the servant cried from the pass.  
“They’re coming!” The cry traveled up the  
valley faster than the stream.

“They’re coming!” the sentry announced from the  
watchtower.

All over the village of Three Willows, doors and gates  
slammed as people tumbled into the street. It was a clear  
day between summer storms, and the sky was a bright  
blue.

In the schoolroom, I could hear the slap of their feet  
on the dirt. Though I was only fourteen, I sat in the back

of the schoolroom with the older boys because I was ahead of my level. I rose eagerly from the school bench.

At the front, Uncle Blacky, our teacher, was lecturing about some ancient words that might occur in the government exams. The exams would qualify you for office.

He was a slender, middle-aged man in a scholar's robes. There were small black marks on his lips, for he had an absentminded habit of licking his brushes to a point. "Yes, Otter."

"Master, may I be excused?" I asked. "I think my father and uncle have arrived."

"Of course." What else was he going to say? Most of the subscription for his new school had come from my own family.

When I got ready to run excitedly, he looked at me sternly. "With dignity," he reminded me. That look was enough to intimidate my other classmates, but not me.

"I'm sorry, master." I started to walk away.

Behind me, I heard Stumpy laugh. He was the sixteen-year-old son of one of our tenants, and he was always trying to play the bully or to mock me when he thought it was safe.

When he wasn't playing one of his pranks, I almost felt sorry for him. His father, Stony, often needed Stumpy in the fields. As a result, Stumpy's schooling was sporadic;



but he was sharp enough to make up for the lost time.

Immediately, Uncle Blacky strode down the aisle and grabbed Stumpy's frayed collar. "You should thank Heaven for people like Foxfire and Squeaky. Without their sacrifices, we'd all be starving."

As he lifted Stumpy to his feet, his son, Cricket, brought him his bamboo rod. A young man in his twenties, Cricket acted as his father's assistant while he pretended to study for the government exams.

Uncle Blacky shook the boy as though he were a rat. "I'll teach you some manners, you little pig. Hold out your hand."

Reluctantly, Stumpy held out his hand, palm upward. There were two groups of boys in our school: those whose fathers had stayed here and those whose fathers had gone overseas to *America* to become guests of the Land of the Golden Mountain, as everyone called it. The difference was often between the poor and the rich. Since the guests paid for the school, their sons led a privileged life. The other boys, though, were fair game.

Determined to do the right thing, I turned. "It was my fault, Master. You should hit me."

"Why can't you be a gentleman like Otter?" Uncle Blacky asked. He gave Stumpy six of the best across his palm, even though I had been the insolent one.



# The Land of the Golden Mountain is not what he'd expected.

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
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