

Up A Mountain, In Search of Master Tung*

By a special correspondent

Bordered by swampy reclaimed land to the east, the mountainous Motherland to the north and the Dormitory Areas to the West, the Territories has long been the haven of mystics, oddballs and rural folk.

“It’s the fashion these days to search out these old-handover types for their interesting views,” Wong Fat-choi an American-Chinese who works for the local Cyberbrain Trust, when I visited him in preparation for my visit to noted Eccentric, Master Tung. “It’s amazing really, people had never considered him interesting when he was in public office. Now that he has outlived the Northern Capital’s usefulness people are beating a path to his door. ”

To find the Eccentric, you set out from the extremely long avenue up into the Barrier Mountains, and drive north to the tiny village of Lion Rock till you come to a dirt track. A four-wheel-drive vehicle was the only way to negotiate the mountain, with its switchbacks and hairpin turns through tunnels carved out of rock. At the end of the track there was a dilapidated hut. The Eccentric was stirring a copper cauldron over a wood fire just outside the front door. Pressed ducks and some smoked pork ribs were hanging from a pole hanging out the window. It had an air of timelessness. “Master Tung?” I respectfully enquired.

“This used to be mine,” Master Tung said, looking down on the harbour and waving hand in a limp-wristed manner

Master Tung abruptly asked: “What do they say of me?”

They say: “That you were a vessel.”

“What kind of vessel?”

“A sacrificial vessel of the Motherland.”

Master Tung paused before saying “Do you know the meaning of loyalty?” Without waiting for my answer the Eccentric continued, “It means ‘not diverging.’” He went on. “When the Ruler is in office, serve him with propriety; when they get chucked out, go down with them with propriety, and then when they die, continue to worship them with propriety.”

There was a rustling in the bushes. Three vaguely familiar figures scuttled over and sat at the Master’s feet. The Master said: “Although I am much wiser than you guys, forget

* Apologies to *The Confucian Analects*

about it for the time being. You are all always saying: ‘Our talents are unrecognized.’ Suppose your abilities were fully acknowledged. What would you do then?”

The former Keeper of Security, Queeny Leaf jumped up first, saying: “I would like to have the power to throw people in the clink without bothering with courts. If I were in this position, within three years there would be no Falungong or right-of-aboders. My people would be fearless and know how to take care of liberals, protesters, and Emily Lau.”

The Master laughed at her.

He turned to the former Keeper of the Coffers, Mr. Lexis Nexis and said, “What about you?”

Lexis Nexis replied, “Let me have the government reserves for three years, and the people would have all they need. No deflation, higher stock prices, free maids. As for handling the housing situation, I would seek the help of Superior Men.[†]

“Bow Tie, my son, what about you?” The Master’s favorite disciple replied, “I am less capable than the other two. At the services at the ancestral hall, or audiences with your Esteemed Patrons, I would like to serve as a minor assistant, dressed in the ceremonial grey suit and bauhinia medal. And bow tie of course.”

The Eccentric turned and pointing to a shadowy figure amongst the trees said, “Now, that is a Superior Man.

“What is a Superior Man?” I asked.

“A Superior Man is ‘One whose every touch turns to gold. One who can cause the people to hand over vast amounts of cash for a shoebox, convincing them it is the best lifestyle choice available.’”

“Master Li Cash-in!” Master Tung jumped up robes flying.

Master Li set his abacus down on a stool and languidly sauntered over. “What I would like to do,” he said, “is quite different from these three.”

He continued, “At the height of a housing shortage, all decked out in my Pierre Cardin suit, I would like to take some of my cronies and watch the masses line up at new housing development Open Days, looking at show Flats and guzzling free food at the sausage sizzle, and make our way back home, stopping for some karaoke singing.”

Tung sighed and said, “Ah, lovely. I am with you, friend.”

[†] Property-developers in the vernacular

The three Acolytes left and I asked the Eccentric: “What did you think about the words of those three?”

The Master said, “Each just told his wish.”

“But why did you laugh at Queeny Leaf?”

“Because to do what she wants to do, you need to be a little less gleeful, a bit more subtle and her words are totally lacking in humility. That’s why I laughed at her.”

“But you weren’t exactly known for your humility.”

“No”. Master Tung “but I was born with wisdom. And I love the ancient teachings of the Motherland and have worked hard to serve them. ”

The Master stopped speaking, sat down and lowered his head. He appeared to have fallen asleep.

The past was very much present there in that Eccentrics’ lair at Lion Rock, and rather touching it was, too.

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