

Source: Patricia Ebrey, ed., Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook (Free Press, 1993)

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LEI FENG, CHAIRMAN MAO'S GOOD FIGHTER

In traditional China, tales of individuals who exemplified extremely virtuous or self-sacrificing behavior formed a regular part of moral education. Young people were instructed in the tales about filial sons and steadfast women; adults enjoyed stories and plays in which characters were either paragons of virtue or totally evil. In contemporary China this method of moral instruction has continued, albeit with significant changes in the characteristics of the people to be admired.

Of the many men and women held up for emulation in the last three decades, the one who has become best known undoubtedly is Lei Feng (1939-1962). The first of many campaigns to "learn from Lei Feng" was launched by Lin Biao in 1963. Lei Feng's life had the makings of a legend. He was born into a poor peasant family in Hunan, and his childhood was a series of tragedies. When he was five, his father died, having been pressed into service as a coolie by the Japanese army. The next year his elder brother, a child laborer in a factory, died of tuberculosis. Then his younger brother perished from typhoid fever and malnutrition. His mother took a job as a servant, but hanged herself after being raped by her employer, leaving Lei Feng an orphan at the age of eight. The bitterness of Lei Feng's past intensified his enthusiasm for the social reforms introduced in the People's Republic. As a worker and soldier he was exemplary in his adherence to revolutionary attitudes and spartan living, qualities China's leaders have encouraged for their value in combating selfishness and promoting industrialization.

The following anecdotes about Lei Feng's sincerity, devotion, and good deeds come from a biography published in 1968.

When Lei Feng finished his studies in the senior primary school in 1956, a nationwide movement of agricultural collectivization was surging forward like a spring tide, and the industrialization of the country was being pushed forward on a large scale. Life with all its richness was beckon-

ing to every young person, and many took up jobs in industry and agriculture after they left school. Like a fledgling bird Lei Feng was anxious to try his wings, so he took a job as a messenger in the local authority offices, dispatching letters and notices and helping to compile statistics, charts, and

forms. Whenever there was some work which he thought he could do, he would always volunteer to do it, so everyone was pleased with his work and attitude.

Later, at the age of seventeen, Lei Feng was transferred to work in the party committee office of Wangzheng county, where he began a new life. During the day he worked hard and in the evening he attended a spare-time middle school run by the county government. "The party has rescued me from the depths of misery and enabled me to lead such a comfortable life," he often thought to himself. "How shall I repay its kindness?" He provided the answer by the excellent way he worked—taking good care of public property and making himself a driving force in the office for the sale of government bonds. It was not surprising that his comrades later cited him as a model worker.

Lei Feng worked under Zhang, secretary of the county party committee, a friendly and kind man to whom he became very attached. . . . Once, when he accompanied Zhang to a meeting, he saw a screw lying on the road. Thinking it a useless thing, he kicked it away. When Zhang turned round and saw what he had done, without saying a word he bent down, picked it up and put it in his pocket. Lei Feng was surprised. "What does a party secretary want with a screw?" he wondered. Several days later Lei Feng was about to send a letter to an agricultural machinery plant when Zhang handed him the screw and told him to send it to the workers there. "Ours is a poor country," he said. "We have to work hard to build it up. A screw is a small thing but a machine can't work if it is missing one. Remember, drops of water go to make a stream and grains of rice fill a bin." Lei Feng stared at the secretary with wide-open eyes. From that time on he never squandered a single cent and deposited all his savings in the bank. . . .

In 1958 Lei Feng had begun to study Chairman Mao's writings regularly. He had made it a rule to study one hour every morning and in the evenings up to ten or eleven o'clock. Every spare moment at work in the coal yard of the Anshan Iron and Steel Company he would study Mao's *Selected*

Works. After joining the army he had managed to complete volume three while boiling water for the amateur cultural troupe. Then the army leadership called on the men to "study Chairman Mao's works, follow his teachings, act in accordance with his instructions, and be his good soldiers." Lei Feng took this call to heart and wrote it down on the front covers of his copies of Chairman Mao's works. But where the authorities had asked the men to "study Chairman Mao's works," he added "every day" so that he would study them more diligently. Lei Feng's job as a driver often took him to various places, but wherever he went he always carried a satchel containing different essays by Chairman Mao, which he read at every opportunity. Soon his comrades described his satchel as a "mobile library."

About this time one of his comrades grumbled, "There's so much work to do we haven't got enough time for our personal affairs or even rest." Lei Feng did not agree, and to encourage himself to work and study even harder he wrote this passage in his diary, which he remembered from a book he had once read:

How do you put a screw into a piece of wood which is perfectly smooth and has no holes? You use force and screw it in. Then just as a screw has to be forced and screwed in, so when you study you should bore firmly into the subject.

It was with this spirit that Lei Feng was able to complete Chairman Mao's *Selected Works*, from volume one to four. Among the many essays he read over and over were: "In Memory of Norman Bethune," "Serve the People," "Carry the Revolution Through to the End," "On Practice," and "On Contradiction." Some of the volumes were so worn that the edges of the pages were tattered and frayed, but he still kept reading them over and over again, and every time he read them he got something new out of them. As he read the essays he marked them in all kinds of ways, with lines and dots, with blue ink, and with red and blue pencil. He also made brief notes interpreting various passages. Once he came to this passage in

the essay "Rectify the Party's Style of Work": "Every party member, every branch of work, every statement, and every action must proceed from the interests of the whole party; it is absolutely prohibited to violate this principle." He underlined this passage heavily with a red pencil and wrote in the margin: "Take this to heart!"

Lei Feng found an inexhaustible source of strength and wisdom in Chairman Mao's works, and he gradually came to understand the meaning of life, of revolution, and of the laws of social development. He learned how to treat one's enemy and one's comrades, and what attitude one should take toward work. He felt he could see things more and more clearly, that his vision of life was broadening, and that a big new world was opening up before him. Following the teachings of Chairman Mao, Lei Feng gradually became a dedicated proletarian fighter. This is what he wrote in his diary:

After having studied volumes one, two, three, and four of the *Selected Works*, I feel most deeply that I know how to be a man and the purpose of my life. . . . I think one should live to make others live better.

Lei Feng studied Chairman Mao's works in three ways. He applied what he studied as he went along; he studied and applied creatively; and he used Chairman Mao's teachings to remold his ideology and guide his actions. Whenever he came across a difficult problem in his life, he would immediately turn to Chairman Mao's works to draw strength from them.

One day Lei Feng drove up to the barracks with a truckful of grain and the comrades came out to help him unload it. Among them was Old Wang who belonged to Lei Feng's squad and was known for his great strength. He could carry a sack of grain weighing more than two hundred catties and run fairly fast with it. As Lei Feng was small and unable to carry such a heavy load, he and another comrade stayed on the truck and passed the sacks down onto the shoulders of the rest of the men. When Old Wang's turn came, he leaned against the truck and teasingly said to Lei Feng,

"If you're a better man than I am, why don't you come down and carry a sack?"

Lei Feng did not reply. Then Old Wang added, "Ah, I knew all along that you didn't have the guts to compete with me. Of course not—you're so small!"

"Stop trying to needle me," Lei Feng replied calmly. "We need people to carry the sacks and we also need people to hand them down from the truck. Let's see if you can carry as much as I can move. How about that?" Lei Feng had not meant to challenge him, but his pride had been hurt by Old Wang's cutting remarks about his size.

That night he reread the essay "In Memory of Norman Bethune" by Chairman Mao until he came to this passage:

We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him. With this spirit everyone can be very useful to the people. A man's ability may be great or small, but if he has this spirit, he is already noble-minded and pure, a man of moral integrity and above vulgar interests, a man who is of value to the people.

When he read the passage, everything seemed to fit into place and he began to see things in a new light. No longer did he have a feeling of wounded pride or a brooding sense of grievance. "Although I'm small, I'll do my best," he pledged, "to emulate Comrade Bethune's spirit of utter devotion to others without any thought of self."

A few days later the men decided to collect fodder in the mountains. Their plan was to set out after breakfast and return in the early evening, taking their lunch with them. After breakfast the thought suddenly crossed Old Wang's mind that it would be a nuisance taking lunch with him, so he ate his quickly before they set off. As soon as they were in the mountains the men set to work quickly and diligently, collecting grass and hay. At noon they sat on the mountain slope in twos and threes and began to eat their lunch. Lei Feng opened his lunch box and was about to eat when he saw Old Wang sitting by himself without any lunch. "He must have forgotten it or lost it on the way," Lei Feng thought to himself. Offering his

own lunch he said, "Come on, take this." Old Wang looked at the lunch box, then at Lei Feng, shook his head, and refused to accept it. "Take it," Lei Feng said as he forced the lunch box into Old Wang's hand. "You'll be able to work better on it."

"If I take it, what are you going to do?" said Old Wang, handing it back.

"My stomach is a bit upset and I don't feel like eating," Lei Feng replied. Then he walked away pressing his hand against his stomach as if it hurt.

Holding the lunch box in his hand, Old Wang stared into space as Lei Feng slowly went away. Then he thought to himself, "Imagine, I actually said he's a small fellow and can't do anything big. I'm a big fellow all right, but I've never given my lunch away to anyone." . . .

Because Lei Feng earnestly studied Chairman Mao's writings, worked hard, remained loyal to the party and the revolutionary cause, and because he made strict demands on himself, he was given the honor of membership in the Chinese Communist Party on November 8, 1960. It was the greatest day in the twenty-two years of his life. With gratitude he wrote this in his diary:

November 8, 1960, I will never forget this day. This is the day when I had the honor of being made a member of the great Chinese Communist Party, thus realizing my highest ideal. Oh, how thrilled my heart is! It is beating wildly with joy. How great the party is! How great Chairman Mao is! Oh, Chairman Mao, it is you who have given me a new lease on life! When I was struggling in the fiery pit of hell and waiting for the dawn it was you who saved me, gave me food and clothing, and sent me to school! I finished my studies in the senior primary school, put on the red scarf, and then was given the honor of being admitted to the Communist Youth League. I took part in the nation's industrial construction and later became a soldier in the armed forces of the motherland. It was under your constant care and guidance that I, a former poor orphan, became a party member, a man with some knowledge and political consciousness.

Now that I have joined the party, I have become stronger and my vision has broadened. I

am a party member and a servant of the people. For the freedom, emancipation, and happiness of mankind and the cause of the party and people, I am willing to climb the highest mountain and cross the widest river, to go through fire and water. Even at the risk of death I will remain forever loyal to the party. . . .

In Lei Feng's company there was a man named Xiao Jiao who had enlisted at the same time as he. Xiao never complained about his work or drill, and his behavior was exemplary in every way. His only flaw was that he lagged behind in his studies, being particularly backward in arithmetic, which often gave him a headache. Gradually, however, he became resigned to the situation, a fact which soon began to worry Lei Feng. Once when Lei Feng was helping him with his arithmetic, Xiao said, "I've had little education. I can't get the hang of all these things—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division."

Trying to boost his confidence, Lei Feng told him, "Nothing is too difficult if you have the will to do it. Where there's a will, there's a way. To a revolutionary no difficulty is too great to overcome." Later he got hold of a copy of an old newspaper which carried a story describing Chairman Mao's concern for the education of soldiers. Showing it to Xiao he said, "Look, here's a story written just for you!"

"Just for me?" Xiao Jiao was puzzled.

"Listen to how really concerned Chairman Mao is about our studies!" Lei Feng said as he began to read the story, explaining it bit by bit in the hope that this would encourage his comrade. Xiao Jiao listened attentively, nodding his head from time to time. When Lei Feng had finished it, Xiao decided on the spot to buy some pencils and exercise books as soon as possible.

"You don't have to bother with those things," said Lei Feng, handing him a fountain pen and an exercise book which he had anticipated he would need.

Xiao Jiao was moved by Lei Feng's generosity but hesitated to accept the gifts. "If you give those things to me," he told Lei Feng, "what are you going to use?"

"Take them, I've got more," smiled Lei Feng. "If you want to be a part of the modernized Liberation Army, you must get an education."

Grateful to Lei Feng for his help and encouraged by the interest he had shown in him, Xiao Jiao began to study arithmetic with much more concentration and initiative. And whenever he came up against something he could not grasp, he would go to Lei Feng and ask him to explain it. Checking up on his progress, Lei Feng asked him

a few days later to solve a number of arithmetical problems. Running his eye over them Xiao Jiao was sure they were easy. Then he took out his pen and got to work on them. A few minutes later he had answered all the questions correctly. Lei Feng's eyes lit up. "You've made marvelous progress," he said with a broad smile.

"But without your help I wouldn't have gotten anywhere," Xiao Jiao acknowledged. . . .