CHAPTER NINE

THRIFTY PEOPLE

Ongl qaenp eis yuw jenl, ongl qat eis xup sinc.

Heavy work doesn’t cost gold; small jobs don’t cost money.

The fertile soil around Xiangye sustained paddy fields and dense forests. There was an abundance of growth everywhere that helped to satisfy everyday needs. Generations of people depended on the local resources that nature provided, gaining from them a livelihood, an education and an affinity with their surroundings.

In and around the mountain-ringed valley, gardens were created and land was opened up for farming. Men farmed the land for food while women grew, spun and wove cotton for clothing. People were thus self-sufficient in food and clothing. They were born into nature and survived courtesy of nature’s endowments.

Houses were built with columns and beams of China fir, with bark from the trees to cover the roofs. Except for wild vine that tied together the bark on the roofs, everything in the houses was made of China fir. If in former ages it was true that in the mountain forests ‘Trees were used as pillars and people lived upstairs’, then in later generations the China fir trees from the wild forests were moved to the villages to create wooden ganlan buildings. Traditionally, houses could not be built without China fir.

The people did not purposely clear the land and plant China fir, but if they ever encountered China fir saplings as they were clearing ground around the paddy fields, they left the young trees untouched. Thereafter, they pruned the branches every year and after a decade or more, the trees would have grown sufficiently to be used for building purposes.

When people collected firewood in the mountains, they also treated China fir saplings with respect. Therefore whether beside paddy fields or by mountain paths, China fir trees were ever-present, growing straight up; sometimes only a few, sometimes a little copse with 10 or more, and sometimes a whole hillside. They belonged to whoever took care of them.
Weaving straw sandals in the evening.