CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

INTIMIDATING SITUATIONS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Yeel laos sedl suic hap wox yum, nyenc laos biax sunl nanc gonh xep.

Only when the frog bumps into the tail of the snake is it terrified; when a person chances into a clump of thorn bushes it is difficult to get out.

Men who had attended school in the Han areas and returned to live in the village were different from everyone else. They wore Han-style clothing, shoes and socks; parted their hair in the middle; brushed their teeth in the mornings (ordinary villagers did not do this); enjoyed singing Han pop songs; mixed more Chinese language with their mother tongue; and generally observed more Han customs. Most villagers did not welcome such young men home.

Young women in particular were sensitive to such changes in the men and generally felt apprehensive about meeting them. As soon as women realized that a ‘returnee’ was among a group of men wanting to chat with them, the women suddenly went silent. Those who were spinning cotton abruptly stopped and quietly found a place out of the way to sit down and hide. They certainly did not open the window and start conversing.

If a returned scholar approached women outside in the open, the women would branch off to avoid meeting. If a girl was by the river washing clothes or vegetables and a returnee approached her and talked to her, she immediately ran away. Bolder women called back as they fled: “You (plural) look down on us.”

When a returnee accompanied other young men to chat with the women, the women ignored him and he simply had to sit there and keep quiet. If he threw in a word of flattery, the women would not react, behaving as though they had not heard. They simply did not dare to converse with him, treating him as though he were a Han person. They deliberately built a gulf between him and them, creating deep feelings of estrangement. If his parents sent a matchmaker to ask for a woman’s hand in marriage, the woman and her parents demurred and did not dare to agree.
Returned scholar pleading for attention.