CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SURVIVAL IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

Dogl dih nees samp soh, nyix ov wox sup sinp.

A child cries three times when it is born; worry begins then and lasts a lifetime.

The people of Xiangye yearned for a safe environment, always vulnerable as they were to invasion from outsiders. The village was situated in a mountain valley. Visitors from the counties of Jianhe, Jinping, Sansui, Tianzhu and Taijiang could only enter via one road, the government road from the east. After government offices were established in Taiyong in the 1930s, visitors from Leishan, Danzhai, Rongjiang and Liping also travelled along that way and the road was altered so that it led into the west of the village.

The village had no man-made defences. Some winters, villagers built fences made of logs at either end of the village. These functioned as village gates, but anyone could easily climb over them or even knock them down. They were only good for restricting the movements of the water-buffalo. Normally even such basic fences were non-existent and strangers could enter the village completely unimpeded and unchallenged.

There were many strong young men in the village, fast runners who could carry heavy timber (weighing over 50 kg), but there was not a single weapon for resisting bandits or robbers. There were no air guns using gunpowder and no sabres or swords. Older people said that Xiangye villagers used to have such weapons, but then they were confiscated by the emperor, including kitchen knives. Only scissors were allowed. Some years later, the elders begged for the Kam people to be allowed to make a livelihood with knives and hatchets, and they were again granted permission to own such implements.

Before Liberation, Xiangye people had no means whatsoever to resist aggression from outside. Their only way of dealing with such invasion was to run away.

Old people said that men from a former military outpost about 15 kilometres away came to loot the village sometime around 1933. In
Inviting a debt-collector for a meal.