

Pig in the Mud

December 31, 2021

Dynastic decline signs abounded in China. The Mandate of Heaven was passing from one dynasty to another. Corruption was rampant, the dikes and levees not maintained, bandits from Mongolia ravaged the land and internal bands of marauders undermined royal authority. Famine and disease covered the land increasing unrest. When China is hungry China rebels and a new Mandate is established.

The sage worked with the old emperor to arrest and reverse this process. The sage was known for his applied wisdom even if many in the court did not comprehend nor understand his sayings. He had been proven prescient many many times.

The old emperor died and a very young one installed in his place. The old sage retired to his home near Guangzhou. Overwhelmed by the growing catastrophe endangering rule and country the emperor asked who might help. His advisers recommended he bring back the retired sage.

An imperial summons was prepared. The summons was placed in a special sedan and a troop of royal guards dispatched to return the sage to court.

Summer in South China is hot and humid. As the troop headed south Chinese bowed before the sedan as it passed through villages. The sedan represented imperial authority. Silk worn by the guard a bright crimson in the sun made for extreme heat endured by the troop as they traveled.

The sage lived in a small village. The river that flowed through and circled the town. A large bluff arose on one side centered around a Horseshoe bend. The sage lived in a small house at the top of the bluff scenically overlooking the water below. A pig trough or trail ran from the bluff's crest to the river's Horseshoe bend below. Pigs used it to reach the cool mud found at the bend. You could see only their snouts as they rooted and covered themselves with the river mud.

No one rejected an imperial summons. The troop arrived at the sage's home one morning. It was steamy hot. The commander was received by the sage and presented the summons. The sage broke the imperial seal and read the contents. He then looked at the commander and instructed him to follow as he headed toward the top of the bluff overlooking the river. This irritated the commander because it

was hot, and he wanted to begin the return trip to the imperial palace. Frustrated he still obliged the sage as respect and deference. At the bluff's edge the sage stopped and looked out silently for over a minute. This added to the commander's agitation. Finally, the sage turned to him and asked him what he saw. The commander replied the river below.

The commander did not mention the pig snouts sticking out from the river mud. The sage repeated the question several times until the commander exasperated declared he saw pigs in the mud. The sage slowly began to smile and handed him back the summons. Tell the young ruler to leave the pig in his mud he instructed the awe-struck commander. He then walked off.

Months later a titter of excitement ran through the court in Peking. The sedan and troop had been sighted and soon would arrive with the sage to help the emperor rule the fracturing country effectively. The emperor sat on his throne as the sedan arrived. He bounded down the steps to greet the sage, threw open the curtains and opened the sedan door. Inside he found not the sage but a pig in a bucket of mud. He whirled to the commander who responded that the sage replied to the summons by saying to leave the pig in his mud. Full of sorrow the emperor walked slowly back up the steps and sat on his throne. It is said he troubled the sage no more.