

The Big Wall

By Jacob Louie

“Children, gather around and let me tell you the story of the most respected emperor Da Huang Di of China,” the grey-bearded storyteller said and then paused to stuff more tobacco into his earthen pipe. “A long time ago, in a time that no one can remember for certain, Da Huang Di was the most revered emperor in all of China. This is the story of the man who built the Big Wall of China...”

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Clutching a scroll in hands, the imperial messenger strolled into the imperial courtyard. Officials solemnly followed him in groups. The messenger stepped onto the raised platform in the center of the courtyard. He cleared his throat and declared in a loud voice, “Lang Po, subordinate to Heaven and son of Hao Po, has accepted Heaven’s mandate to undertake in his sacred duty to accept his position as Sovereign in this Imperial Edict. Your new emperor is Emperor Lang Po! Long live Emperor Lang Po of the magnificent empire of the Chin people! May the emperor live for ten thousand years!”

“Ten thousand years! Ten thousand years!” the people bowed and chanted.

Up on the balcony of the imperial palace overlooking the royal courtyard, the court herald stepped out while thousands of his people watched in silence. The adorned curtains of the stage opened, and a somewhat chubby middle-aged man garbed in a golden robe embroidered with a yellow dragon stepped from behind the curtains. “Behold, your new emperor!” The crowd bowed to the ground and chanted, “May the emperor live for ten thousand years!”

“From this day forth, I, Lang Po, son of Hao Po, shall be addressed by my people as Da Huang Di, the Great Emperor! I am going to make our ancient empire great again!”

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“I can’t believe how much the people adore their new emperor. But wait until they find out that he comes from a family of merchants, the lowest class?” whispered an elderly court official.

“Quiet, my friend, for even the walls have ears. Po would not take kindly to his lowly lineage being discussed,” murmured his friend. The next day both officials disappeared along with their families and clan, and none of them were ever seen again.

Meanwhile everyday Emperor Po woke up at the crack of dawn and worked until the sun went down. As an emperor, Po produced ideas none before him had come up with. First he started firing the scholar officials and replaced them with members of his family and other merchants. Word soon got around that the new emperor was employing a new plan of using carrier pigeons dubbed the “tweeters” to deliver imperial edicts. Each day the townsfolk eagerly watched the skies for messages from these carrier pigeons. Some villagers even started raising pigeons to communicate with their friends in other villages.

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It was a misty morning when the messenger pigeons arrived at their destination towns. The leader official of each town untied the string attached to the pigeon's legs and read out the edict signed with a royal stamp, “On this day, the Great Emperor has reduced the tax on money made by merchants to 3%!” As more and more edicts were issued by Emperor Po, more and more people came to honor him as the greatest emperor.

The people started painting elaborate portraits of their emperor while removing the blemishes on his features. Every time the emperor traveled in his royal chariot through the land, he was greeted by choruses of “May he live for ten thousand years!”

One day as Emperor Po ventured through the land he had united, he saw people of darker-colored skin. “This is not right,” he thought, “the people living in my land must be of the untainted and greatest Chin race.”

The next day a meeting was called of all the officials, and thousands of Chinese waited in anticipation for the news from the court. Nearly past midnight on the new moon, a pigeon arrived with a message: “The royal emperor Da Huang Di has decreed that every man or woman whose natural descent is not purely of the Chin people will be deported.”

Back at the palace the meeting was adjourned, but as everyone was standing to leave, Po cleared his throat and said, “But that is not all, I am going to build a big wall, and the foreigners are going to pay for it!”

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The storyteller frowned, “But it is getting late, children, and it is time for you all to run home and sleep now. I’ll finish the story tomorrow.” A chorus of groans and complaints followed as the children wandered home.