

望子成龍 **Dragon Seed**

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I.

Dragging along his weary feet and clutching his heavy briefcase, Li Zhishun¹ entered the elevator to his apartment. He pressed the button to take him up to the 121st floor. The elevator remained still. Frustrated, he jammed the button again. Without warning, the elevator violently picked up speed, and Li Zhishun, who was caught totally off guard, felt his heart drop right out. That damn elevator never worked properly— fast one minute, slow the next— and people with heart problems would have a devil of a time riding it. One had to concede, however, that the elevator was in fact freakishly fast. 50th Floor, 60th Floor, 70th Floor... the lights indicating the floor numbers flashed by in quick succession. A minute didn't even pass and he had already reached the 120th floor. All of a sudden, the elevator performed an emergency brake, nearly launching Li Zhishun's heart straight out of his mouth. He re-composed himself, and then cursed the elevator as he stepped out.

Right away, he noticed that the door to his home was wide open. He couldn't help but suspect that something was amiss. The apartments nearby had recently met a series of robbery-homicides, so Li Zhishun had repeatedly reminded Xiangwen² to make sure the door was locked. It actually wasn't really necessary for him to worry about such a thing, for Xiangwen was already an extremely cautious girl, regular and thorough in taking care of all things. She still even held onto that ornamental couple

from atop the wedding cake they'd cut ten years ago, even though since then they'd moved a couple of times. Which is why Li Zhishun found that day's sight so especially strange; could it be that...

Suddenly nervous, Li Zhishun put down his briefcase and with hurried, giant strides, rushed into the house. Everything was the same as usual in the living room, and the furniture showed no traces of having been moved. He swept all four corners with a searching gaze, but saw no sign of Xiangwen. Right when he was about to let his vocal cords loose and yell her name, he heard the sound of someone crying coming from the sofa. It was only then that he saw his wife face-down, splayed across the long sofa. Li Zhishun treaded quietly over and sat by Xiangwen. Stroking her long hair, he asked, "What's wrong, baby?"

No answer emerged from her lips, but her shoulders heaved as she wept all the more plaintively. Li Zhishun then caught sight of an official notice lying on the floor by the sofa, and immediately understood what was going on. Clenching his fists and biting tightly down on his lip, he paused briefly and then exclaimed, "How can this possibly be? There's no way they can be so ignorant of our feelings. It's been ten years! Haven't we waited long enough? And yet once again... No, there's no way I'm going to stand for this. This is just too unfair!"

Xiangwen turned over and sat up, and her face was a cryptic mix of anger, sorrow, and something else. She retorted, "Zhishun, you've got to stop demanding that things go your way. Is there really any difference between having a boy as opposed to having a girl? It's already the 21st century, but you still insist on holding

onto your sexist ideas. Isn't that a bit outdated? Every year when we've applied for a child, we've checked 'boy', and every year has our name failed to come up. It's been ten years. You might be willing to hold out and wait, but I'm not. Next year, when we fill out the application form, can we please check 'no preference' for gender?

"No! I won't buy this. Ten years in a row without drawing the lot— that would be called strange by my book. The probability of failing to draw the lot ten years in a row is one in a thousand, and if we don't draw it for the eleventh time, that will be a one in two thousand chance... Whoever heard of such bad luck?"

"There just *is* such bad luck!" Xiangwen's tone turned icy. "From the way I see it, you're just fated to never get your boy. Just drop it, Zhishun. After all, how's a girl any different from a boy? And girls are even more filial."

"Girls have a hell of a lot of problems waiting for them in the future. But boys... Ah, forget about it; we've bickered over this problem for ten years already, and arguing about it even more won't help one bit. Since we've already waited for a decade, we can't just call it quits at this critical juncture! Tell you what— I'll pay a visit to the Population Planning Bureau tomorrow and get to the bottom of this business."

For the whole night Xiangwen, still upset over that afternoon's disagreement, gave Li Zhishun the cold shoulder. Ever since they were husband and wife, Xiangwen had always said that either a boy or girl was fine by her. But that was when they had just tied the knot; they weren't yet financially stable and in no rush to have a child. Every time they applied, Li Zhishun had checked "boy", and Xiangwen

had gone along with it. When they failed to draw the lot, she'd actually felt a little relieved. Things were different now, though. They both had excellent jobs, they'd secured the house and the car, and it was the right time to start raising a child³. But while man proposes, Heaven disposes, and in this case Heaven apparently didn't see fit to grant them a boy. The couple was simply unable to draw the lot. For the past two years, Xiangwen had been nagging her husband to change tactics, but Li Zhishun was unwilling to give in. These days, families were only allotted one child, and he knew that if he flagged in his determination and listened to Xiangwen, then he would never get a son in this lifetime.

"No way! I can't give up, not at this point." Li Zhishun lay in bed thinking. "A one in a thousand chance... there's no way my luck can be that rotten! I've got to fight this until the bitter end. "

II.

The following morning, Li Zhishun, true to his word, took a leave from work and went to the Population Planning Bureau. A dumpy fellow with stubby arms and legs received him. Despite his appearance, this Mr. Fang was quite amiable, and after lending an ear to Li Zhishun's complaint, he pored over his files and records and then burst into laughter, saying, "Mr. Li, now don't get me wrong here, but you certainly are the stubborn one, eh? What age are we living in? Now aren't boy babies and girl babies one and the same?"

"That's exactly what my wife says, but there's no chance in hell I'm giving in. The simple fact of the matter is that each family is only allowed to have one child, so if it's not a boy for me, I...I'll regret it to my dying day!"

"Seems like we Chinese will never be rid of that old bad habit." Mr. Fang rubbed his double chin. "If everyone thought like you, wouldn't our next generation all end up male? But the way the government's got things set up now calls for a ratio of 538 boys to 462 girls out of every one thousand newborns. Aspiring parents draw their lots and, according to this ratio, see who gets chosen to have a boy or a girl, and who gets nothing. If you're one of the unlucky ones to come away empty-handed, yet still insist on landing a particular gender of child, the only thing you can do is wait until the next year to redraw. You, Mr. Li, happen to belong to this group of folks."

"But I've waited for ten years already, and I still haven't gotten my boy! The probability of not drawing the lot for ten years in a row is one in a thousand. Next year, it'll be one in two thousand..."

Mr. Fang interjected with a guffaw. "You can't calculate in such a manner. The thing is, every time you draw it's an independent event. So the probability that you'll fail to draw a boy again next year is a little less than one half. I ought to warn you, though, it's possible that you'll never draw the lot."

At these words Li Zhishun's hope was dashed to pieces. He slumped against the chair, pleading, "Are you telling me that you people have no way of helping us? Have pity, we've waited for a decade already! If we don't draw the lot next year, my wife is definitely going to leave me..."

"I really understand your pain," Mr. Fang intoned, his eyes brimming with sympathy. "To tell you the truth, I have a brother who's as dead-set as you, his heart just as fixed on seeing his own Dragon Seed blossom into its full-blown glory⁴. You know, I may actually have a solution for you. For the sake of population control, current law dictates that each family can only have one child. Presently, our nation's population has already reached thirty-five million, so policies have been enacted to bring that number down to approximately twenty-five million within a century. At that time, population policies will once again undergo readjustment, and families may very well be allowed to have two children— one boy and one girl..."

Li Zhishun exclaimed, "Oh, if I'd only been born a hundred years in the future!"

"That may be so. Even in this day and age, however, a more precise reading of the calculations means that each family is allotted 1.2 children, in actuality. But of course there's no way for the that remaining, incomplete fifth of a child to be allotted to each family, so that's where the Population Planning Bureau steps in. We're in charge of adding up and managing those "left-over" decimals of children and distributing them separately at the end of every year."

"Are you saying that every year you have extra quota to disburse?" Like a drowning man who suddenly discovered a lifeline, Li Zhishun pounced upon Mr. Fang's pudgy hand, grasping tightly and refusing to let go. A bit discomfited, Mr. Fang hastened to add, "Don't get too excited now. If you want to obtain that remaining quota, there's a price⁵ to pay! We can increase your family's quota to

two. But from then on your income tax would be five percent higher than others', and..."

"If I can get that extra quota, can I choose to have a boy?"

"Of course. You and your wife can first have a boy, and then have a girl, or the other way around. The order doesn't matter, but you can't have two boys or two girls..."

"This is perfect! Just perfect!" Li Zhishun was beside himself with excitement. "No matter how high the price, I'm willing to pay it!"

Mr. Fang seized the opportunity to extricate his hand from Li Zhishun's grasp and then flourish a document, saying, "In that case, if you would please sign your name and affix your seal here? Congratulations, Mr. Li, congratulations on landing a boy on your first shot!"

III.

Xiangwen grumbled and grouched about how the price they paid for having a boy was just exorbitant, but Li Zhishun was extremely pleased. His long-cherished hope was finally coming to pass, and he'd feel no more regrets. One boy and one girl—there wasn't a more perfect family arrangement than this. Of course, he had decided that they would first have the boy. As for the girl, she'd come the next time around.

After receiving a birth permit from the Population Planning Bureau, Li Zhishun immediately brought Xiangwen to the most reputable hospital in the vicinity

of their residence to take care of formalities. Everything went smoothly, so they were able right away to obtain the birth certificate. They then paid a visit to the Obstetrics-Gynecology Department to meet Dr. Wu. The doctor was a tall, middle-aged man, sturdily built and dependable-looking. He puffed on a pipe as he explained, in a slow and unhurried cadence, the details of the birth process to the couple.

"You will both come here tomorrow to take a full-body exam. If the exam results are satisfactory, indicating that you have no hereditary diseases, then we may proceed to the next step. Mr. Li, we will first obtain a sufficient sampling of your semen. Mrs. Li, we will then use a vacuum pipe to suction half a dozen or so of your eggs. Finally, we will select the most robust sperm and egg to undergo in-vitro fertilization, and then implant the fertilized egg into the womb of the 'birth nurse', or the attendant who will be carrying your child. At the time of conception, we will notify you. All you have to do then is bring yourselves and whatever necessities to the hospital to welcome him. That's it. The birth process is this simple!"

Li Zhishun hung on Dr. Wu's every word like one utterly entranced, and he didn't cease nodding. But Xiangwen furrowed her eyebrows and asked, "Dr. Wu, can't I give birth to the child myself?"

"By yourself?" Dr. Wu recoiled as if he had suddenly been bitten by a poisonous snake⁶. "By yourself?" he repeated. "Mrs. Li, in modern times, women don't 'self-birth'⁷ anymore! Instead, 'birth nurses' are entrusted with the duty of childbirth."

"But I wanted to give birth to the baby myself. I think that it would feel...feel more intimate this way, as if this were indeed my very own flesh and blood⁸."

"Even if a birth nurse carries for you, the child in her womb is still belongs to you and Mr. Li. After all, this is the product of the union of your flesh and blood. How can it not be considered yours? The birth nurses are all young girls who have undergone a strict selection and training process, and they are the most qualified to assist you and Mr. Li in the 'creation'⁹ of your offspring. Mrs. Li, even if you wanted to give birth to the baby by yourself, your egg would still have to undergo the process of in-vitro fertilization. And what if you got sick or caught a cold? Or if you have taken some inappropriate medicine in the past? Or when pregnant? And what if back in the day, when you weren't yet married, you or your husband unfortunately got infected with some venereal disease? The child you give birth to could have some problems. However, if a birth nurse carried for you, there is absolutely no way these problems would appear. What's more, you would be able to avoid all the different inconveniences of pregnancy and the pain of delivery. Let's say you chose to give birth to the baby yourself. You would have to take at least two or three months off! But if you entrusted everything to a birth nurse, you wouldn't miss a single day of work. These days, that system called 'maternity leave' no longer exists, because no woman has to 'self-birth' anymore. Considering the miscellaneous costs of having your own child, compounded by the salary you would lose on leave, you would end up having to fork over a lot more than if you had simply just let a birth nurse take care of business."

Xiangwen remained unconvinced. "Dr. Wu, it isn't money I'm concerned about," she explained. "We've waited for ten years and gone through all this trouble to finally get our boy, so of course we want him to be healthy, smart, and..."

"It's okay, Mrs. Li, it's okay." Dr. Wu reassured. "It is exactly because your boy was so hard to come by that I think you ought to proceed with the utmost care. Think of employing a 'birth nurse' as akin to hiring the best nanny to look after your children. She will shower your fetus with the finest care, and the hospital will look after her room and board and every need. So of course this option is preferable to having the child on your own."

Li Zhishun was swept off his feet, deeply moved by the doctor's cascade of words, and he urged his still-doubtful wife, "Xiangwen, Dr. Wu is right. Since we've finally gotten our boy, we've got to be cautious no matter what! I'm willing to pay whatever it takes¹⁰. Besides, I'm not willing to see you suffer the pain of childbirth. And I'm not about to let you lose your slender figure because you carried child!

"Fine, okay then," Xiangwen finally acquiesced¹¹. "Dr. Wu, can we first meet the birth nurse? I've got to know what kind of person is going to carry my child."

"Not a problem." Dr. Wu pulled open a drawer and took out a dossier. "Our hospital has eight hundred birth nurses who take turns serving our clients. Which one you are assigned all depends on when you and Mr. Li decide to commence the birth process. Once you are certain, I will find out which nurse is to be on duty during that time."

Before Xiangwen could reply, Li Zhishun scrambled to say, "The sooner the better! The sooner the better!"

"The sooner the better? That would be the day after tomorrow, then. On that day... on that day, five nurses will be available. Let me think about it for a moment... Ah, yes, it would have to be Ms. Jin, after all. Ms. Jin is a student at an arts school, a piano major and an absolutely charming girl. She is also on duty today. Would you like to meet her?"

Li Zhishun and Xiangwen talked things over for a bit, and then agreed to go ahead with Dr. Wu's plan. In no time, Ms. Jin arrived. True to Dr. Wu's word, she appeared to be a very sweet girl indeed, with a ponytail and looking about twenty years old or so. Xiangwen and Ms. Jin hit it off immediately, and like old friends they got along swimmingly and chatted away. Li Zhishun knew that Xiangwen had always been enamored with music, and from the looks of things he gathered that his wife had more or less given Ms. Jin the stamp of approval. With this quality assurance test passed, Li Zhishun felt as though a great boulder were suddenly lifted off his chest.

After Ms. Jin left, Dr. Wu took out¹² a notebook and opened it, saying, "Very good. Then we shall have Ms. Jin serve you, agreed? There are still a few details that I would like to discuss with you. Firstly, regarding the period of pregnancy, would you prefer a first-class, second-class, or third-class room¹³?"

Flabbergasted, Li Zhishun was taken aback for a moment before he came to understand what Dr. Wu was in fact talking about. But of course, Ms. Jin would have

to stay at the hospital when she was pregnant. He hurriedly asked, "What are the costs like?"

"The first-class room is five hundred *yuan* a day, the second-class three hundred, and the third-class two hundred¹⁴."

"*What*, the costs are *that* different? If that's the case, then the cheaper the better," concluded Li Zhishun. "Let's go with the third-class."

Xiangwen glared at him. "I would be sort of embarrassed to let Ms. Jin live third-class."

"Baby, if this were you we were talking about, well then of course we'd go with the first-class room. But since it's not you, I'm afraid we're just going to have to inconvenience Ms. Jin a little bit."

A faint smile flickered upon Dr. Wu's face as he listened to the couple's exchange.

"Mr. Li, Mrs. Li, you've both got it wrong. I am not speaking of a ward for Ms. Jin. She may reside at hospital's birth nurse dormitory, where the birth nurses are all given the same treatment. No, the question is where your child will stay at—will it be a first-class, second-class, or third-class room?"

"Our child?" Baffled, Li Zhishun could barely speak straight. "He... he wouldn't have even been born yet, so of course he would be living in... living in Ms. Jin's belly. Why would he need to live in a ward?"

"It is not a ward that your child will be staying in," Dr. Wu patiently explained. "It seems I did not make myself clear. Mr. Li, in the past, when there was

no such thing as in-vitro fertilization, some women¹⁵ would become pregnant with one child, while others would have twins. Still others would even have triplets, or quadruplets... this was not something that humans could control. Right now, however, we may control how many fertilized eggs are implanted into the woman's womb. If more eggs are implanted, then a single birth nurse may give birth to more children in one cycle. It naturally follows that the cost for the birth of each individual child will be less. The 'first-class room' I was speaking of refers to a womb for your child's¹⁶ exclusive use. A 'second-class room' would mean that your child must share the place with a roommate, so to speak. Now if this were a 'third-class room'..."

"Then three different fetuses from three different families would all be squished together, good heavens..." finished Li Zhishun for the doctor. He then asked, "Do you also have fourth-class and fifth-class rooms?"

"At present, no." Dr. Wu answered matter-of-factly. "The Health Bureau has not yet granted us permission. But if they do, then in the future we may very well open up fourth and fifth-class rooms. The key concern, of course, is that all the cohabiting fetuses must be born healthy, but according to our research, even opening sixth-class and higher rooms should not pose a problem."

"Sixth-class rooms!" Li Zhishun exclaimed, and gave a shudder. He looked into Xiangwen's eyes, and then declared with resolution, "My boy must receive the very best treatment. I will take the first-class room."

"Very good." Dr. Wu jotted something down in his notebook. "Another question— How many months will the stay be?"

"What do you mean how many months?" Li Zhishun retorted angrily. "From Creation, a ten months gestation.¹⁷ Obviously it'll be ten months, unless there's something screwy going on here, too?"

"Mr. Li, medical technology has been advancing in leaps and bounds. To give birth to the child in advance—to have an 'advance birth' is no problem, and cannot be considered a 'premature birth'. You must understand—the concept of a 'premature birth' has already become antiquated! In an 'advance birth', by contrast, the child merely relocates, moves house from the natural environment of the birth nurse's womb into the artificial environment of the hospital incubator. Of course, a stay of fewer months means that the birth nurse may service others somewhat sooner, so the birth fees will also be cheaper..."

"Stop with the advertising," Li Zhishun exclaimed, cutting off the doctor. "Please just tell me how many kinds of options there are. You don't need to prattle on about anything else!"

Rather than getting angry, Dr. Wu laughed mildly, saying:

"There are in total nine kinds: first-class six months, first-class seven months, first-class eight months, first class nine months; second-class seven months, second-class eight months, second-class nine months; third class eight months, and third-class nine months. Mr. Li, it is quite alright to cut the stay shorter with with the first-class option. If it were second-class, the stay would have to be somewhat longer. The third-class room is the most packed, so the stay is also the longest to assure that the fetuses may grow large enough before they leave the womb. If you're

meticulous about the numbers, the third-class-eight month option is the most economical."

"I don't care about the costs!" Li Zhishun shouted. "My son is priceless, and you can't stick a discount tag on him! I'll have first-class-nine month option!"

Before leaving the hospital, Li Zhishun and Xiangwen paid a special visit to the delivery room area. It just so happened that the door to the third-class eight months room swung open, and out walked a nurse carrying a silver plate with three pink babies, diminutive like delicate and exquisite toys..

"They're so small!" gawked Li Zhishun, stupefied by the sight. "If this were a sixth-class eight months room, they'd look even more like a litter of little..."

"Please, that's enough." Xiangwen tugged at her husband's sleeve and muttered, "Hurry up, won't you. Thank God it's the first-class nine months room we've selected."

IV.

Over the ensuing days, salesperson after salesperson came knocking. First at the door was a salesperson from the Dragon Seed Company¹⁸. On that day, Li Zhishun came home to find sitting on the sofa a burly fellow with a boxy black case balanced on his knees, heralding his sales pitch to Xiangwen, who sat across from him. When Xiangwen saw that Li Zhishun had returned, she sprung up like one suddenly

disburdened and said, "Zhishun, what perfect timing. Why don't you chat here with Mr. Gao while I go prepare dinner?"

Mr. Gao then set his eyes upon Li Zhishun, and became immediately reanimated. With a *-click-* he popped open up his leather case.

"Mr. Li, I've been speaking with your¹⁹ wife for some time now, but she's not very willing to accept certain new ideas. However, you're a man of enterprise, and you've seen a great deal. You would definitely be one to understand how important it is to raise up children of excellent quality."

"What are you trying to sell?"

"I heard that you and Mrs. Li will soon be having a boy. What a cause for celebration, and how excited this must make the two of you! You must have initially thought, I assume, that your progeny would for sure be the flesh of your flesh, the bone of your bone. This is a most natural way of thinking. But have you ever considered whether or not by doing so you would be able to attain the most exceptional child possible?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"Forgive me for speaking bluntly, Mr. Li, but your college entrance exam grade was 460 out of 600²⁰, and Mrs. Li's 425, and..." Mr. Gao sort of grimaced and then continued, "These aren't the most ideal grades. So...my point is that....some day, your child is also going to have to take the entrance. If likewise he can only manage to pull a 400 or so, won't that influence his future prospects, hmm? Mr. Li, please don't get me wrong, I don't mean that your future isn't bright. However, don't you

want your boy to achieve more than you've achieved, to have a more glorious future than you do?"

"Cut the crap, what have you got in that medicine bag of yours²¹?"

"It's not medicine, Mr. Li, it's something even more effective. Look here!" Mr. Gao set the little leather case he had opened on the tea table. Inside the case were lined several rows of test tubes, divided into "male" and "female" sections and individually labeled.

"Mr. Li, rather than using your own sperm and Mrs. Li's own egg, why not opt for choicer selections? Do you harbor hopes that your child might become a national Go champion? Look, this is the sperm of a national champion. Or do you wish for your child to become a professional *manga* artist? Look, here is the sperm of a celebrated cartoonist. Oh, and there's even more, even more. Physicists, inventors, entrepreneurs, novelists, poets...whatever you fancy, we've got it all." Seeing that Li Zhishun's expression had undergone a drastic change, Mr. Gao hurriedly added, "Please don't get angry, Mr. Li, we're just discussing the issue at hand. There's no need to take anything personally. Actually, if you don't want to substitute your sperm that's fine. Why don't we switch your wife's egg instead, hmm? It's just as effective. Please take a look, we've got TV stars, famous singers, women poets, women authors..."

"You bastard! Beat it!"

Li Zhishun was so furious that his entire body quaked, and Mr. Gao scrambled to snap up his leather case as he waved his hand, saying, "Please don't get angry; you

mustn't get angry. I'll come back next time instead, hmm? Perhaps when the time comes for you and Mrs. Li to have your child, I can bring Bai Jiali, Cui Taijing, and Xia Taifeng²²..."

"Beat it!"

The next day, Li Zhishun came home to find sitting on the couch a slender young lady with a boxy black case balanced on her knees. Without skipping a beat, he hardened his voice and said, "Miss, I beg of you. What's the point of wasting your breath? Even if your box contained Einstein, Li Bai, and Du Fu, I could care less."

But then Xiangwen, who had been standing off to the side, countermanded him, saying, "Zhishun, Ms. Song hasn't come to sell sperm or eggs; why don't you listen to what she has to say?"

"Mr. Li." Ms. Song handed Li Zhishun a plastic business card. "I am a business representative from the Genesis²³ Company. Our company is different from other companies; we don't market remade genes of the ancients. I'm sure you're aware, but those kinds of companies are actually all commissioned by foreign corporations. Those kinds of products simply don't mesh with Chinese society. After all, we Chinese have never liked to play the role of the go-between. Our national character is much more conservative, and we're quite particular about keeping it "within the family". If that weren't so," Ms. Song chuckled, "you wouldn't waste all that effort in trying to get your very own

boy. Having a child of your own flesh and blood, however, doesn't mean that you can't upgrade him!²⁴ There are so many ways to do so!"

Ms. Song removed a thick catalog from the case and handed it over to Li Zhishun.

"These are the services our company provides. We're mainly in the business of upgrading hereditary genes to make your children more capable and beautiful. This is all just a really simple operation; a slight tweaking of the of the structure of the DNA double helix and we're in business..."

Li Zhishun scanned Genesis Company's catalog, and the more he looked the more excited he became.

"Double eyelids, 500,000 *yuan*...Height, 10,000 *yuan* for every (additional) centimeter...College Entrance Exam Grades, 10,000 *yuan* for every (additional) point...Round Eyes, 100,000 *yuan*...are you people really capable of doing all of this?"

"Of course, and we're willing to provide you with a warranty, so that if things don't go as promised, you'll be immediately and fully reimbursed."

After an extensive round of deliberations, Li Zhishun and Xiangwen finally decided upon three upgrades: a height of 180 centimeters, an perfect score on the entrance exams, and flawless, white skin, which came to a grand total of 200,000 *yuan*. Ms. Song then explained to the couple that there was a down payment of 100,000 *yuan*, while the rest of the bill would be settled in five installments, and Li Zhishun affixed his seal on the contract right then and there.

"These days. It's no walk in the park to raise a boy." Laying in bed that night, Li Zhishun spoke to his wife beside him. "I did some calculating. Before our boy even comes into this world, we'll have already spent more than 300,000 *yuan*²⁵. That's more than half our savings gone right there. Who knows how much we'll have to spend after he's born?"

"This is all *your* fault, silly; you just *had* to have a son." Xiangwen chided him as she gently stroked his smooth, naked chest. "If it were a girl, would you be willing to splurge/spend just as much?"

"Either way, you've got to pay up. Boy or girl— for the child's happiness, it's but a pittance..." All of a sudden, Li Zhishun got up and climbed onto his wife, straddling her. Xiangwen put on the airs of a struggle for a brief second or two, but then gave in as he penetrated her deeply. "You've got to pay up, somehow or another. But how easy it was to have children back then, just like this, and... and everything just comes." He panted for breath. "But having a boy these days...so tiring..." Xiangwen did not speak up again after that, and succumbed only to the up and down motion of his thrusting.

V.

Ms. Jin soon became pregnant, and Li Zhishun often brought Xiangwen to go visit her. The girl was even more beautiful when she was pregnant, and Li Zhishun sometimes found himself imagining that Xiangwen might be just as pretty if she were

with child. But he would immediately clear his mind of such thoughts. He couldn't be so selfish; they had to think about the boy's future. Ms. Jin was a fourth-year in art school. She went to school in the morning to take piano classes, and returned to the hospital dormitories in the afternoon where she would sing, listen to music, and read. This repertoire of activities was, naturally, the best "education in the womb" a child could possibly receive. Ms. Jin was a very chatty girl. She would talk spiritedly and at length about her background when Li Zhishun and Xiangwen visited her, and they came to find out that, lo and behold, she was also a test-tube baby. Back then, the hospital system was still in considerable disarray, and on a certain day, a certain test tube was, somehow or another, misread. By the time the mistake was identified, it was too late, and the only recourse thereafter was to "make" another child for the client. Ms. Jin was this very child who was born of a mistake, an orphan of the truest kind. By the time she was seventeen, Ms. Jin had already become a birth nurse. Luckily for her, she was by nature a very resilient girl and able to make the best of her circumstances. In this manner, she made her own living and would be graduating in the coming year, after which she planned to teach music in middle school.

"This is my seventh time carrying for someone," Ms. Jin said, then gave a little laugh. "One more go, and then it's retirement for me."

"And you're only twenty two now. You've already been pregnant six times, so you must have carried more than a few children by now, no?" Xiangwen spilled compassion for Ms. Jin.

"Eighteen exactly. That's eighteen over four years."

"Eighteen?" Li Zhishun echoed incredulously. "How can you possibly have had eighteen... Oh, I see. Were they all third-class eight monthers?"

"Yes, I've only ever served in the third-class rooms. So this would be my first time working the first-class, you know."

The more deeply Li Zhishun and Xiangwen felt for Ms. Jin, the more frequently they visited her. The fetus was growing steadily bigger. Ms. Jin let them place their hands on her belly to feel their child, and Li Zhishun could discern his movements. At the hospital, Xiangwen was just as excited as he was, but once they returned home she became rather dispirited.

"That's my child, but he's in someone else's stomach. Oh, how I wish I could also experience the feeling of having my child give a little kick in my stomach! How delicious that feeling would be!"

"Don't be so sad." Li Zhishun always tried to comfort Xiangwen with these words. "Everything's for our boy's future, so everyone's got to sacrifice a little something."

The couple continued to purchase more and more clothing and appliances for their as of yet unborn child. They even went ahead and bought a little bed for him, which they placed in Li Zhishun's study. The room had become the child's, it seemed. Everything was prepared and in order, and on an October night, they finally received the phone call from Dr. Wu.

"Congratulations to the two of you." Dr. Wu's sonorous, measured voice flowed from the telephone. "It's a boy. Congratulations to the both of you for getting a boy in one go!"

Wild with joy, they smothered one another with kisses and exchanged congratulations on their newfound status as parents. They then grabbed the baby carriage and rushed out the door to the hospital. When they got there, Ms. Jin was lying on the bed, her face slightly pale. Upon seeing the couple, however, she eked out a weak smile.

"Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Li! It's a boy! The little guy's right over there."

Next to her bed was a smaller one where the child lay, wailing. Li Zhishun and Xiangwen made their way around to lay their eyes upon him, and as Li Zhishun got closer he could feel his heart bursting with love and affection— he had finally become a father! But then he took that long-awaited look. And looked again. And then all the color bled from his face.

The child looked nothing like him. He didn't resemble Xiangwen, either. He had rough, craggy eyes, a bulbous, tuber-like nose, and a large, flat face like an iron skillet. He was dark, porky, and unbearably ugly. Even though everyone says that newborns are all somewhat unattractive, there's no way they could possibly be this hideous!?

"What the *hell's* going on here? Did someone screw up or something?"²⁶ Li Zhishun exploded in Cantonese; his native dialect tended to slip from its cage when

he got agitated. Ms. Jin slowly shook her head, exhaustion etched into her features. With her eyes closed, she replied, "I don't know. I was responsible only for carrying the child; I don't know about anything else."

Li Zhishun became frantic. He bolted out the delivery room (ward), and then, as luck would have it, saw that Dr. Wu was on his way over. In one motion, he seized Dr. Wu by his white lab coat and demanded, "Dr. Wu, what the hell's going on here? How can my son be that repulsive looking? Did you people screw up or something?"

"It has nothing to do with us." His face full of disgust, Dr. Wu shoved Li Zhishun's hand aside. "You *did* employ Genesis Company to alter the genes in your sperm, correct? So go question them."

Full of fury and apathetic to the fact that it was already deep in the night, Li Zhishun immediately dashed to the public phone and called that Ms. Song from the Genesis Company. The phone rang for quite some time before her weary voice finally sounded through.

"What a fine thing you bastards have done!" Li Zhishun snarled into the receiver. "You bastards are just too ridiculously incompetent, fixing my son into this kind of shape! Oh, this is all entirely your fault!"

"We're not to blame."

"If it's not your fault, then whose fault is it? Don't forget that I have a warranty from your company— unless you would dare to go back on your word ! I'm going to drag you to court!"

"Mr. Li, please don't get so worked up. Are you aware of the fine print that's written after the very last section of the very last page in the warranty? Please first take a good look at that section. Then decide whether or not you really want to sue us."

Before Mr. Li could muster a reply, Ms. Song had already hung up. Utterly dejected, he was left with no choice but to return to the delivery room and join Xiangwen in casting a tearful gaze upon their homely little newborn.

Three hours later, they returned home. Li Zhishun retrieved the warranty from Genesis Company, flipped to the very last page, and struggled to read through all the microscopically small fine print. It was only then that he became woefully aware of what Ms. Song had intimated.

VI.

"Mr. Li, please take a seat. I just knew you would be paying us a visit."

The short, pudgy, and pleasant mannered Mr. Fang gave him a little smile, but Li Zhishun wasn't amused in the least.

"Hey you, FANG, you've really screwed us over! Why couldn't you have made things clear from the start?"

"Well, I had intended when I met with you that day to explain all the nitty-gritty details, but you were too impatient for me to be able to get a word in. So I

figured, why rain on your parade? It's all probability and statistics, after all. Unfortunately for you, my friend, your luck is just the absolute pits."

Staring at Mr. Fang's friendly, fleshy face, Li Zhishun would have given anything to strike it a ferocious blow right then and there.

"You're telling me that my luck is bad? Why didn't you tell me that the Population Planning Bureau has the authority to alter our hereditary genes? Your keeping mum resulted in my blowing a fat wad of cash for the Genesis Company to upgrade my son's genes. But all for what? In the end, things got worse instead! Why didn't you tell me that you were also altering my son's genes on the sly?"

"We don't 'alter genes on the sly', Mr. Li; please don't be so indiscriminate with your words." With an extremely stern expression, Mr. Fang continued, "The Population Planning Bureau has the authority to alter any newborn's genes; it's our industry's place and duty to do so. Our task, after all, is first to control the speed of population change, and second to refine the quality of the masses. In the past, we didn't take the initiative to push for the latter. But nowadays, enterprises like Genesis Company are flourishing more and more because all the parents out there hope to have more intelligent and beautiful children, so... Anyway, from a private and selfish point of view, wanting to have smarter and prettier kids makes perfect sense. But if you apply such a mentality to all of society, massive problems are in the making. Think about it: if everyone around you is smart, and there are no stupid folks; if everyone you see is attractive and no one is ugly, won't we have to compete even more ferociously? Won't our problems multiply manifold? Sociologists have

already studied this issue and found that society cannot be composed of only one type of person. There has to be an appropriate ratio of beauties to beasts, intellectuals to idiots." Mr. Fang paused for a second, measuring his words. "It was for the sake of preventing everybody from becoming too attractive and smart. After extensive and detailed calculations, we found that we had to make at least ten percent of our kids unintelligent and unattractive, so we decided to select half of the extra yearly quota to undergo slight genetic alterations so they might turn out this way... Who was selected was also decided by the drawing of lots. That very day I was thinking to myself, 'You know, maybe his luck isn't rotten to that degree.' It's very unfortunate that your son managed to hit the jackpot. Even if the Genesis Company strove all the more and went the extra mile, there's no way they could have worked against the alterations we made at the very end. You've got to know—we hold the right to make the final alterations."

Maddened speechless, Li Zhishun could only stare mutely. Mr. Fang went on, saying:

"You needn't be so sad. Your son will have a good life like the rest of us. I mean, look at me. The truth is, I'm also one of those "ugly-stupid" test tube babies. But am I not getting along fine, like anyone else? I'll tell you what. In the future, when your boy's all grown up, we here at the Population Planning Bureau will be happy to have him."

Mr. Fang then let loose a little sigh and said, "I did tell you that other day, didn't I? That if you wanted to obtain that extra quota, there would be a cost to pay?"

After Li Zhishun heard the squat little man's final words, he couldn't hold it back anymore, and finally erupted with a resounding wail.

¹ Protagonist Li Zhishun's name may be very telling of his character's nature. The *zhi* 志 in his name means "will", or "resolve", whereas *shun* 舜 may be reference to one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors in ancient Chinese history, the celebrated leader Shun. He was known as the Great Shun (*dashun* 大舜), and praised by Confucian philosophers for his filial piety. As a child, Shun suffered under the heavy hands of his step-mother and step-brother. His real mother had died when he was still young and his new family members resented him, while his father failed to defend him. Shun was made to do all sorts of hard work from a very young age, but he never complained. Even when his family members conspired to kill him, attempting to burn him or bury him alive, Shun never sought revenge, and remained a gracious and obedient son. Eventually, when his step-mother and step-brother realized the error of their ways, Shun was quick to forgive them. Shun became well known for his unflinching filial piety, and was therefore recommended to Emperor Yao as one worthy of the throne. He passed all of the emperor's questioning and tests, and became one of the great leaders of China, ruling for half a century. *Zhishun*, therefore, may be understood as "one who wills to be filial, like the great leader Shun". In addition, *shun* may be read as a homonym for *shun* 順, which means "to abide by", for *zhi* 志 and *shun* 順 together would imply that Li Zhishun is a terribly obstinate man, determined to see that not only he, but also others (i.e. Xiangwen) abide by his will. Finally, there is the obscure comment from Charles Gould in his Mythical Monsters that the Emperor Shun was said to have had dragon-like features.

² Li Zhishun's wife, Xiangwen, also has an interesting name. *Xiang* 湘 is used in modern days as an abbreviated reference to Hunan Province, much as *dian* 滇 refers to Yunnan and *wan* 皖 Anhui. Xiangwen may be a native of the Hunan Province, and thus named as such. The significance of such a name, however, is unclear.

³ A reference to Chinese sayings revolving around the concept of the "Five Zi" 五子 may be seen here. *Zi* 子 in Chinese has multiple meanings, among which are son, child, and a general reference to "things". *Zi* as a reference to "son" or "child" may be seen in the Chinese proverb *wuzi dengke* 五子登科. A century or so ago, in the Later Jin of the Five Dynasties period (936-947C.E.), there was a man named Dou Yujun who had five sons (*wuzi* 五子). Each of them successfully passed the imperial exams (*dengke* 登科), and went on to become outstanding men. As such, the saying *wuzi dengke* 五子登科, or "The Five Children Pass the Imperial Exams", came about as a sort of auspicious saying that was meant to bring about fortune or good luck. *Wuzi dengke* might be proclaimed in wedding ceremonies and the like, for example. In time, however, the *zi* took on new meaning as it came to refer not to sons or children, but to more general "things" that were altogether symbolic of "making it" in the modern world. These were a house, or *fangzi* 房子; wife, or *qizi* 妻子; car, or *chezi* 車子; silver, or *yinzi* 銀子; and a child, or *erzi* 兒子. In this story, we see that Li Zhishun has already obtained four of the five *zi*. All he lacks is the son, or *erzi* 兒子 which he so desperately desires.

⁴ The Chinese proverb *wangzi chenglong* 望子成龍, which is the title of the story, appears for the first time here. While the proverb literally means "To see the child become a dragon", it has the figurative meaning of harboring great hopes for one's child, and longing for him or her to become successful. It is used almost satirically by Mr. Fang in this context, for his brother and Li Zhishun both don't even yet have a child, so they ostensibly wouldn't yet be able to entertain such wishes. Nevertheless, Mr. Fang uses this proverb to point out the depth of each father's desire to have a boy.

⁵ The word Mr. Fang uses here is *daijia* 代價. There are many words that express the concept of costs or expenses in Chinese, including *feiyong* 費用, *jiashi* 價值, or *kaizhi* 開支. However, *daijia* 代價 most adequately carries that connotation of an almost sacrificial parting with something in exchange for a something else that is greatly desired. The *dai* 代 in *daijia* 代價, after all, may mean "to replace",

or “to substitute”. Thus, *daijia* 代價, used in this context, points towards a price to pay that is not solely *monetary*, and in a sense Mr. Fang is warning Li Zhishun that he will have to part with a precious something else if he really wants to procure that extra quota.

⁶ As all translators can testify, idioms are often difficult to translate because they may make perfect sense in one culture, while make little or no sense in another if they are directly translated. For example, in Japanese there is the idiom *magaraneba yo ga watararenu* 曲がらねば世が渡られぬ, which essentially means, “Unless you are crooked, you won’t be able to make it in this world”. This idiom, however, owes to the Japanese cultural view of group identity over individualism, as Kenji Kitamura has proven, and may therefore fail to come across in English, to an American with an individualistic worldview. In our situation, however, the difficulty of translating the idiom lies not in a cultural difference between SL and TL, per se, but rather in the degree of literalness to which this idiom ought to be translated. Dr. Wu is described as flinching as though he had suddenly *chudao yitiao dushe* 觸到一條毒蛇. The action in this clause is *chu* 觸, which means “to touch”, or “to come into contact with”. While the original SL is able to use this verb to convey a sense of fear, describing the simple touching of a snake would not have a similar desired effect in the TL, because the TL culture equates fear with snakes in regards to being bitten by a snake, rather than touching or being touched by a snake. Instead of translating the phrase as “as though he had touched a poisonous snake (*dushe* 毒蛇)”, I thus rendered *chu* 觸 as “to be bitten”, resulting in the phrase, “as though he had been bitten by a poisonous snake.”

⁷ I created this term “self-birth” to express what in Li Zhishun’s time had become an antiquated tradition of giving birth to one’s one child. In such a future, this type of special term would certainly be used by health professionals like Dr. Wu who work in the hospital and are involved in the industry of almost literally “creating” babies. Indeed, the whole process of childbirth had become so commercialized by that time that “self-birth” was regarded as a strange and dangerous practice.

⁸ Here, the word for child, *haizi* 孩子, appears time and time again. For the sake of avoiding monotony, I substituted different terms for the word “child”, such as baby, and also restructured some sentences to avoid mentioning the word altogether. It seems as though there is no problem in Chinese with repeating the same word over and over again. In English, however, such repetition might come across as very dry. In the end, I felt I might be “faithful” as a translator by not necessarily translating word for word, but by rather creating a text that would be read by an English audience much as the original story might have been read by a Chinese audience. In order to accomplish this goal of *Dynamic Equivalence*, I felt that it was necessary to adhere to English literary traditions, and I thus avoided the continuous use of any one word and used appropriate synonyms whenever necessary.

⁹ Dr. Wu uses the literal term for “to create” here, *chuangzao* 創造, which is usually not used to speak about the “creation” of children. *Shengchan* 生產 is most often used, as *sheng* 生 means “to give birth”, or “to be born”, while *chan* 產 has to do with “production”. *Chuangzao* 創造, on the other hand, has intimations of a formation that is completely new, a genesis of sorts. This term is particularly apt in the mouth of Dr. Wu, since he and the other scientists of this futuristic society are involved in a different kind of fetal creation from the “traditional”, maternal birthing process. They are almost literally creating children; they have the power to decide on a particular date for conception and to select for specific, desirable traits. I have thus chosen to translate *chuangzao* 創造 literally as “creation”, in order to capture the mechanical, almost assembly line-like nature of the new birthing process.

¹⁰ The author may have made a mistake regarding the internal integrity of plot details here. He wrote *duo hua dian qian mei guanxi* 多花點錢沒關係, which means, “who cares if you have to spend a little

more?” However, Dr. Wu had just stated before that it would be much more expensive to have a “self-birth”, as compared to a birth by way of a “birth nurse”. As such, I attempted to capture the spirit of the idea— that money isn’t the matter at hand— by having Li Zhun say instead, “I’m willing to pay whatever it takes”.

¹¹ “Finally acquiesced” was added in to reinforce Xiangwen’s act of giving in, which, if left only to the devices of the SL dialogue, would read rather weakly in TL form.

¹² With the simple addition of the Chinese *you* 又, which means “again”, the author was able to convey a sense of an almost predatory waiting on the part of the doctor, who has apparently prepared both dossier and notebook to take out one after the other. The *you* 又 is used here in reference to the subsequent extracting of the notebook; the dossier had just been taken out before, and a relationship is created between these two through the *you* 又. After all, the notebook and dossier are both tools of the trade for the doctor, who is looking to market the hospital’s 800 nurses, as well as the different living options the hospital has provided for the child. It would be very hard to convey the nuance contained in this single *you* 又 character, however, without adding another sentence of my own into the fray, so I went the explanation to this footnote.

¹³ Dr. Wu uses the single word *fang* 房 here. This is a character with a broad semantic scope that may refer to a house, as in *fangzi* 房子, or a room, as in *shufang* 書房 (book + room, or study). *Fang*’s many connotations contributes to Mr. and Mrs. Li’s confusion here; they misunderstand Dr. Wu and believe him to be referring to a *bingfang* 病房, or a ward, where naturally the birth nurse, who will be pregnant with Mrs. Li’s child, would have to stay. Dr. Wu later points out their mistake, and we see that he has referred to the word *fang* 房 metaphorically to speak of the “room” where the couple’s child will be “staying”, as though he were a traveler renting a hotel suite.

¹⁴ In 1978, when this short story was written, the exchange rate for NT to USD was 36:1. The cost for renting a first-class room would therefore be equivalent to about \$13.89 USD a day, a second-class room \$8.34 USD a day, etc. To put this price in perspective, the average Taiwanese made \$1,461/yr in 1978.

¹⁵ In this context, the author uses the Chinese for “some people” or “someone”, or *youren* 有人. Oftentimes, gender-neutral pronouns are used in the language to speak about general trends or commonly held practices, as in *youren da le dianhua gei ni* 有人打了電話給你, or “Someone gave you a call”, or *youren hen youqian, you ren meiyou qian* 有人很有錢, 有人沒有錢, or “Some people have a lot of money, some people don’t have any money”. The gender-neutral pronoun *youren* 有人 might work without problem in a Chinese text, as this is a language that does not assign too much importance to the gender of the subject. Indeed, in spoken Chinese there are no gendered differences between pronouns, with both references to males and females pronounced *ta*. What’s more, it was not until the May Fourth Movement, when Chinese authors came into contact with a great deal of Western literature, that written Chinese came to differentiate between the different “*ta*’s”. A whole host of new “*ta*’s” arose, with *ta* 她 for “she”, *ta* 他 for “he”, *ta* 牠 for animals, *ta* 祂 for God, and even a *ta* 它 for objects. However, these new pronouns all sound the same when spoken, and are not always employed without fail. What’s more, the original *ta* 他 often suffices for any general statement about “someone”. In light of the above reasons, I chose to not translate *youren* 有人 as “some people”, which might make sense in the often gender-less SL, but rather translate it as “women”, because in this context, where the birthing of children is the subject of discussion, it would certainly be odd in the TL to not specify the actors as “women” but rather simply as “people”.

¹⁶ The author in this case used the word *peitai* 胚胎, which is most commonly understood as “embryo”. However, *peitai* 胚胎 is sometimes used as a byword for “baby” or “child”. Since the *peitai* 胚胎 Dr. Wu is talking about in this context is treated as something that already has life and agency, spoken about as the resident of the womb, I chose to translate *peitai* 胚胎 as “child”, and not simply as “embryo”.

¹⁷ Four character phrases are used here in the statement *shiyue huaitai, zigu jieran* 十月懷胎, 自古皆然. The Chinese often use four character phrases as proverbs, or *chengyu* 成語, a term which literally means “set phrases”. These proverbs have been passed through time, often serve to teach or inform, and may impart some pithy ideal or clever observation. Chinese may also employ four character phrases to show off their knowledge; *chengyu* contests are a staple of school competitions. As such, when ideas are captured in four characters, they take on more aphoristic qualities, and the fact that Li Zhishun speaks in these two four character blocks reveals that he is attempting to put his ideas across as natural, true, and even obvious. I have therefore rendered his words into rhyme in an effort to convey the proverbial, almost common-sense nature of the idea that “gestation has always been ten months long”.

¹⁸ Dragon Seed Company was *longzhong gongsi* 龍種公司 in the Chinese text. This is a clear reference to the dragon of the title *wangzi chenglong* 望子成龍, with the dragon as the virile, fiesty boy that fathers like Li Zhishun so desire. It is interesting to note that in Ancient China, imperial children were known as the “Dragon’s Seed”. This of course is in accord with the idea of the Emperor as dragon; his clothing, banners, vessels, and many other imperial fixtures all featured the symbol of the dragon, which was his royal domain.

¹⁹ The businessman Mr. Gao addresses Mr. Li here with the honorific *nin* 您, as compared to the everyday *ni* 你, as a show of respect or even a form of flattering.

²⁰ A perfect score on the college entrance exams was 600, and 460 was not considered the best of grades.

²¹ The Chinese used here is *ni daodi hululi mai shenme yao* 你到底葫蘆里買什麼藥? The *hulu* 葫蘆 in question is a form of gourd, the calabash, which was used in ancient times by Chinese medicine practitioners as a mortar wherein they could grind their medicines. Chinese doctors also used the gourd as a container for their medicines. The *hulu* was believed to have magical properties, and it also figured into Chinese creation myths. As Lihui Yang narrates in the Handbook of Chinese Mythology, there is a tale where the creator gods, Nüwa and Fuxi, are said to have escaped the Great Flood by hiding in a giant gourd. They had grown the gourd from a seed that the Thunder God had given them, and in order to replenish the earth with humans after the flood, they married, after which Nüwa gave birth to a gourd. The couple chopped the gourd into pieces, which then turned into people. The relationship between the creator god siblings and gourds has also been researched by Wen Yiduo, a professor from Qinghua University. He claimed, based on his ethnography studies of creation myths, that Nüwa and Fuxi were actually gourds, and that the *hulu* was therefore viewed as the common ancestor of humankind in “primitive thought”. For the purposes of this story, it is also interesting to note that, given its associations with China’s “original ancestors” Nüwa and Fuxi, the *hulu* also represents a symbol of fertility and longevity. The businessman from the Genesis Company was certainly trying to sell these things in test tube form.

²² Bai Jiali, Cui Taijing, and Xia Taifeng were all famous female figures in Taiwan in the 60’s and 70’s. Bai Jiali, originally from Gansu, was known as the “Most Beautiful Hostess”. Cui Taijing was also a hostess, but she was more well-known as a singer, famous in the more conservative Taiwan of

the 60's for her sultry looks and ways of dance. Xia Taifeng, finally, was an actress who starred in films like "Million Dollar Bride" (1970) and "Funny Girl" (1972). She won Best Actress at Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival in 1972.

²³ The company went by the name *chuangji gongsi* 創基公司. I chose to translate *chuangji* 創基 as "genesis", in order to capture both the idea something completely new coming into existence, and the allegorical reference to the first creation of man in the Biblical Genesis account. Just like Adam desired to know as God knows, and thus fell, so does Li Zhishun ultimately "fall" after trying to "play God" by meddling with his son's genes.

²⁴ The Chinese *pinzhong* 品種 used in this context represents the sort of word that is connotatively complex and may be interpreted several ways depending on the context. *Pinzhong* 品種 may mean breed, or variety, but used in this context it refers much more to the quality of the offspring. The scientists are, after all, not changing the child's "breed of human", for even after the alterations he will still be a human. Rather, they are refining his genes to make him into a sort of Alpha-human. As such, I did not translate *pinzhong* 品種 as the child's "breed", but rather viewed the word together with the child himself, so that it was the child himself, and by extension, his "quality" rather than his "breed" or "variety", that was changed.

²⁵ In 1978, 300,000 NT = 8,333.33 USD. This was almost six times the average Taiwanese salary.

²⁶ Li Zhishun here lets loose the Cantonese *mao* 冇, in the statement *youmao nongcuo* 有冇弄錯. This character is unique to the Cantonese dialect, and means "there is not", or "to not have". It is significant that Li Zhishun is revealed here to be from Hong Kong, since in 1978, when this story was written, Hong Kong was economically very prosperous, and most immigrants from that island were quite well-to-do. It is therefore no surprise that Li Zhishun is able to afford the exorbitant costs of paying for a (genetically engineered) sons!