# Taken from ‘On Camera’ by Ye Guangqin.

The cadre system is the Chinese government’s system of government personnel.

Tussles = small fights.

Adeptly = with skill

“On Camera” is a piece of jargon used in the media circle. It actually means to make an appearance on the film screen. If you mention this word to ordinary people most of them will not understand it. If you mention it to a peasant he will be more perplexed still.

At the moment, I am talking to a peasant about the problem of being on camera.

The peasant I am speaking to is the Village Head, Old Man Defu. He is sixty-three this year. As per the cadre system he should have retired long ago. Defu still remains in post, mainly because they cannot find a suitable successor. The village is too poor and lacks rain and running water, so nobody is willing to take on the role. Upper Mirth Village used to be the encampment of Li Zicheng (1606-45), the peasant rebel who became emperor. It was from here that Li Zicheng quit the mountains and rode directly to the imperial palace. Ninety per cent of the villagers have inherited the spirit of Li Zicheng. To quote the words of the Curator of the County Cultural Centre, they have “a strong rebellious streak” and “a vigorous battling spirit.” Those who have had contact with people of Upper Mirth Village know that the villagers are easily incited to take up anything that can serve as a weapon. When some matter crops up, they will come to bloody blows first and then discuss it later. What is more, their tussles follow a unique patter, which includes scratching, biting, jabbing, grabbing, kicking, shaking, beating, and wrestling. They employ all these skills very adeptly and to perfection. If one were to deploy a national-level martial arts squad to fight with them not even they would be able to win. No matter how capable you are, should one of the locals refuse to fight with you there is no alternative way of dealing with him. On this point, they have inherited the spirit of Li the Insurgent King. Maybe Li Zicheng fought with the Ming Imperial Court in this way and thereby proved victorious. In Upper Mirth Village whoever wishes to be the Village Head must be fully-prepared to be beaten by other people. It has been said that since Defu became the Village Head his scalp has been sliced open four times. There are forty or fifty stitches from the top to the bottom where it has been sewn back together. Someone claimed, “If the Village Head shaved off his hair, his head would look like a basketball. It has segments clearly picked out on the surface.”

Our camera team came here from Beijing. We have been shooting footage for several days. We chose this place as our location simply because our Director Upright Li was rusticated here for three months during the Cultural Revolution. By the fourth month, he was violently driven away. According to my estimation, Upright Li was himself a troublemaker. When he was young, activities like stealing chickens and dogs and plucking off the shoots from the farmers’ garlic proved too tempting for him to avoid. His forcible ejection from Upper Mirth Village must have been a case of “it takes more than one palm to make a clap.” Li Zicheng was not entirely to blame. When Upright Li recalls what happened at that time his heart still flutters with fear. He says, “Barren mountains and untamed rivers produce wild people. The villagers there are really wild.” “Wild and unruly folks are surely no match for you, Upright Li,” I remark. “In recent years, you’ve been running rings around everyone in the media circle, and to great success! You’ve given us full proof that you did in fact stay in this village for a while. You are a trickster too.”

We selected this spot as the location for the TV serial *The Sun is Still Red* because we were satisfied with the scenery here. The more barren and unruly the mountains and rivers are, the more splendid the scenery will be. The more inaccessible and un-trodden by traffic the less interference from modern civilization there will be. Today, such locations are becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Ye Guangqin, *Mountain Stories,* trans. Professor Hu Zongfeng, Scarborough: Valley Press, 2017, pp. 50-52.

The Cultural Revolution was a movement in China in the 60s and 70s which aimed to get rid of traditional values. Educated middle-class teenagers in the cities went to the countryside to do manual labour (rusticated).

‘forcible ejection’ = he was made to leave.

Upright Li must coordinate the crowd scenes in Upper Mirth Village.

The hitch is that Upright Li dare not meet the Village Head Defu face-to-face. Perhaps the old man has some hold over him. He has asked me, the scriptwriter, to go and negotiate these matters. He said that the peasants have an instinctive closeness and trust where women are concerned, while his reputation in the village is in the pits. Were he to approach Defu maybe there would be no way of pulling things off.

I said, “As far as shooting a TV series goes, if something is a goer, it’s a goer, if it’s not it’s not. The two parties should engage in discussion. Neither the village nor the team should make the situation hard for one another.”

Upright Li replied, “If it goes like that it will be great.”

## Comprehension Questions:

1. What does ‘on camera’ mean?
2. Who is the narrator speaking to?
3. What job does this person have?
4. What historical person/event is Upper Mirth Village famous for?
5. How do the people of Upper Mirth Village deal with their problems?
6. Why are the film crew filming near Upper Mirth Village?
7. What job does Upright Li have?
8. Based on what you have read, which word best describes Upright Li? Explain your answer.
   * Friendly
   * Argumentative
   * Clever
   * Lonely
9. In your own words, what is preventing Upright Li from coordinating the village scenes?
10. Do you think Upright Li thinks everything will go well?

## Development Questions:

1. What do we find out about the narrator?
2. What sort of story do you think this will be?
3. Analyse how the following sentence effectively shows that the villagers fight a lot?
   * ‘What is more, their tussles follow a unique patter, which includes scratching, biting, jabbing, grabbing, kicking, shaking, beating, and wrestling.’
4. How does this extract leave the reader wanting more?

## Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think that people can inherit personality traits from their ancestors?
2. What do you think is the best way to solve disagreements?

## Answers:

## Comprehension Questions:

1. What does ‘on camera’ mean? ‘to make an appearance on the film screen’
2. Who is the narrator speaking to? Old Man Defu (the village head)
3. What job does this person have? Village Head
4. What historical person/event is Upper Mirth Village famous for? Li Zicheng/the peasant King who rode from the area the story is set in to the capital, where he led a revolution and became emperor.
5. How do the people of Upper Mirth Village deal with their problems? They fight.
6. Why are the film crew filming near Upper Mirth Village? Their director, Upright Li, spent time in the village when he was younger (he was rusticated there). The scenery is appropriate for the show they are making. They want unruly and barren mountains and rivers.
7. What job does Upright Li have? He is the director.
8. Based on what you have read, which word best describes Upright Li? Explain your answer.
   1. Friendly
   2. Argumentative Yes. He argued so much with the villagers that he was thrown out when he was young.
   3. Clever
   4. Lonely
9. In your own words, what is preventing Upright Li from coordinating the village scenes? He is too scared to speak to Old Man Defu.
10. Do you think Upright Li thinks everything will go well? No, when the narrator says that it is best if everyone works together, his response, ‘If it goes like that it will be great’ suggests that he thinks it is unlikely that that would happen.

## Development Questions:

1. What do we find out about the narrator?

We know two things for sure – she is a scriptwriter and a woman. Pupils might also say that she seems diplomatic and optimistic.

1. What sort of story do you think this will be?

Accept any answer that the pupil can justify. However, the most likely options are that it will be funny and/or dramatic. The fact that it will be funny is established by the language (e.g. the contrast between the peasant being perplexed by the concept of being on camera followed immediately by the statement that the narrator is talking to a peasant about being on camera) and the plot (the set up between the film crew and the argumentative villagers, and between Defu and Li).

1. Analyse how the following sentence effectively shows that the villagers fight a lot?
   1. ‘What is more, their tussles follow a unique patter, which includes scratching, biting, jabbing, grabbing, kicking, shaking, beating, and wrestling.’

The long list of gerunds/-ing verbs suggests action, making it seem that the fighting is continual.

1. How does this extract leave the reader wanting more?

Accept any answer that the pupil can justify. However, Li’s statement at the end suggests that it will not go well. This implies that there will be comedy/drama in the future.