

Fiction

Group 2



The Disappearance of the Emperor's Vase

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Cheung, See Yan Deborah – 11

Judge Pao stretched lazily.

“Finally, a relaxing vacation. Away from the corruption of the emperor’s palace. Three whole days to just sit back and relax.”

Judge Pao sank back into his wooden chair and gazed thoughtfully out the window at the stunning view of the hotel he was staying in. Peacefully he closed his eyes, listening to the songbirds chirrup cheerfully, listening to the oak tree sway and its leaves rustle soothingly, listening to the muffled murmur of traffic and hawkers pushing their carts and hollering “fresh bread” and “cup–noodles”, listening...

“MASTER! There is a visitor wanting to see you!” A servant ran up the stairs, her shrill voice cutting through the harmonious atmosphere in an instant, like a sword slicing butter.

“Can it not wait?” Judge Pao asked sharply, he had been about to doze off when the servant girl burst in and he was deeply annoyed.

The girl shook her head frantically. Groaning inwardly, Judge Pao waved her away wearily. As he strode down the stairs purposefully, Judge Pao wondered who could be this important person, who had a case so urgent that not a moment could be wasted on anything else? Especially on my holiday, he thought bitterly. Then Judge Pao turned round the corner and stepped through the doorway.

What met his eye was a middle–aged man pacing nervously on the carpet, evidently distraught. Judge Pao immediately recognised him to be one of the Emperor's most trusted advisors, Da–fu. His face was lined with worry. When he saw Judge Pao his face seemed to brighten with relief as if a heavy load had been lifted from his shoulders. He motioned for everyone else to leave the room and closed the door.

“You must help me! Without it I will be ruined! I will lose everything!” Da–fu cried in despair, his hands were wringing the end of his cloak and the smooth silk fabric was becoming more and more crumpled.

Judge Pao placed a reassuring hand on Da–fu s’arm. “Tell me everything,” he said, firmly.

Da–fu drew a long shuddering breath, tried to compose himself and began:

“A month ago, the Imperial Emperor gave me a china vase as a reward for my accomplishments in spurring economic growth. When the vase arrived, I was dazzled by its beauty. In the sunlight that flooded in from the window, the vase looked so delicate and thin and it glowed in the light. However, the good luck did not last long. Yesterday, I found that my precious vase was missing!” Da–fu flung his hands in the air and flapped them helplessly like a bird in a tiny cage. “My army of servants searched everywhere, even the stables.” He paused for breath and continued, “And it gets worse! Tomorrow the Emperor will visit, he will think I do not value his gifts, and,” his voice lowered into a hoarse whisper. “I might be executed.”

Judge Pao realised the seriousness of the situation and nodded gravely. “We will set off right away.”

After a bumpy carriage ride to the lavish home of Da–fu. Da–fu brought Judge Pao to a room crammed with priceless artefacts and art. In the middle of the room on the carpet stood a lonely–looking pedestal. Judge Pao immediately started peering at the pedestal and carpet with a magnifying glass. Then, he asked, “May I have a look around?” Da–fu agreed. While Judge Pao wandered around the corridors, his eyes as sharp as a hawk’s, and in deep thought, muttering inaudible words to himself, Da–fu followed him anxiously behind him like a puppy, trying to gauge what was on his mind. Suddenly, he felt someone crash into himself and Da–fu landed with a bump on the floor. The person who had been knocked down—a small spry boy, scrambled to his feet. His vigilant beady eyes locked on Judge Pao, then Da–fu and a look of alarm came over his face and immediately he darted off into the maze of rooms without a word.

Da–fu shrugged Judge Pao’s curious look off dismissively. “That’s just my youngest son. He is six years old and too energetic, and he is always breaking things. He once disturbed me when I was at a meeting with the Finance

Minister! Nowadays he is very moody though and is always disappearing off, I really can't imagine why." Judge Pao pursed his lips together and furrowed his brow but said no more.

Judge Pao interviewed Da-fu's guards and servants, questioning them if they had seen anyone suspicious around. Finally, he announced, "The thief, and the vase are still in this house." A collective gasp went around the room. And murmurs of "Who is it?" could be heard. Avoiding the question, Judge Pao pulled an errand-boy aside and discreetly whispered in his ear. Then the errand boy ran out of the room. Moments later, he returned with...

"Son?!" demanded Da-Fu. The boy stared sullenly at the ground. Then seeing that every single pair of eyes were fixed on him in a steely glare, he explained, "Father was always too wrapped up in his work to spend time with me. That's why I started to break things to get his attention but that just made him annoyed with me. So I thought if I stole something then he would really start paying attention to me. Now I know I was wrong. Stealing is never the right answer. The vase is in my closet. Can you forgive me?" Da-fu nodded mutely and gave his son a hug.

After the commotion had died down, Da-fu asked Judge Pao how he had found out who stole the vase.

"Firstly, the pedestal was chipped slightly, a vase like yours would be too heavy for a small boy, so it was chipped when he lifted the vase. Also, there were scratch marks on the marble floor so I was even more sure that it was a small person who stole it—the scratch marks were made when he pushed it along the hallway."

"But how did you know it was my son?" persisted Da-fu.

"There were biscuit crumbs on the carpet beside the pedestal, and there were still crumbs on your son's face and shirt!" Judge Pao finished, his eyes twinkling.

And Da-fu marvelled at the perceptiveness of Judge Pao.

The Mysteries of Judge Pao's Afterlife

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Lo, Eilis – 11

White. That was all I saw. *Where am I?* As different shapes and colours started materialising in my vision and my thoughts flew back into order, recent memories came flooding back into my mind: A few other archaeologists and I went to Xiongzhou in hopes of unearthing some old relics. I had discovered a secret side door hidden in the ground, having opened it, I hopped into the empty voids of darkness without thinking and I'm now here.

Regaining my ability to see, I slowly sat up and looked around. Sitting on a dirt ground, there were trees surrounding me with crimson leaves that grew into the night sky, caressing the blood moon. Getting up to my feet, I was about to slip around the trees to explore when a low voice suddenly cut through my train of thought. "Who art thou, and how *in the name of heavenly gods* did thou appear?"

Spinning around, I found myself face-to-face with an old man. He wore a long blood-red robe that glowed against his ghost-white skin, and he had a dust grey hat plopped onto his head, akin to the ones people with high positions wore in Chinese folklore. With bushy eyebrows pinched together as he frowned at me, and a long but neatly trimmed beard dangling from his chin, he resembled a wise Chinese wizard. "Who...Art...Thou...?" he repeated as if I was hard of hearing.

I struggled to find my voice and replied in a sound equivalent to a mouse's squeak. "Anne." Returning the old man's stare, I asked. "Who are you? And why am I here?"

The man stroked his beard and nodded. He claimed to be the famous Judge Pao and this stunning place is The Department of Hell, where deceased people are judged based on their actions when they were alive. According to Bao Zheng legends, he bestowed justice as a human during the day, but at night, he became the immortal Yama of the Department of Hell and worked as a judge adjudicating the deceased. After death, he continued to advocate for justice. The secret door is the one the Song installed in the border prefecture of XiongZhou in the past and is now one of the doors of Hell.

Judge Pao offered to take me on a tour. Firstly, he led me to the place where they sentenced the deceased. He allowed me to stand near him while he judged one of the new arrivals. "Welcome to the Department of Hell. Tell me what happened to thou when thou were alive." He said warmly to the newcomer. The newcomer introduced himself and his background, which was quite intriguing. He insisted on being a rich silk merchant and was one of the wealthiest people in his day. As he spoke, Judge Pao's face changed from a welcoming expression into a pitiful face and held out a black basin. "The soul of thy victim called out to me. The riches thou carry is his, why is thou greedy and a liar? I detest injustice, so thou shall not enjoy heaven." Judge Pao drew out a sword with a dog head and sliced at the newcomer. I watched in horror as the spirit of the deceased person flew out from the neck and got thrown into a low pit, his screams echoing through the place and my mind. Judge Pao sighed, "Though it saddens me to see these folk wend into hell, injustice hast no place in heaven."

After I recovered from my shock, Judge Pao led me to another section with beautiful artwork aligned neatly against the wall. Even though the details of the art were elegant, the meaning behind all the layers of paint was not appealing. For example, one of the pictures showed a man being tossed into the burning flames of Hell, flames that looked like they would catch fire and burn the picture. But one of the pictures drew my attention. It was a picture of a girl's hand entering a scroll and travelling into the story. Then an idea struck me like lightning, "Judge Pao. If you have a library here, we can find this scroll and I can go home!" I gushed, feeling excitement for the first time since landing here.

"We do, it is located in the middle of this whole structure. Alas, it hath disappeared due to a... mistake." he said. Judge Pao seemed to be disappointed in my motivations for leaving, but eventually he said "We shall look for it." and thus started the mission of finding the library.

After a long walk, we halted in front of a pile of rubble. "The library should be under here." I said. "The scroll in the picture had swirly wooden patterns and a red seal." Without any further delay, we started digging, during the long process, we came across hundreds of different scrolls, none of them matching our description. Seemingly a decade later, Judge Pao called me over and showed me a scroll that was identical to the one in the picture.

'Art thou ready?' he asked and I nodded. Unfurling the scroll, I bent down and planted my palms on the wood. "Good luck, thou shall need it," whispered Judge Pao. Taking a deep breath, I pushed into the scroll with all my might and soon, my whole arm disappeared like the mist in the morning. Soon, Hell vanished from my sight and I was back where I found the secret door. With a crazy grin etched across my lips, I ran out to find my friends and tell them about my adventure.

My eyes landed on a small group of people and I bounded towards them, yelling. Weirdly, none of them responded or looked at me. Getting closer, and hearing what they were saying: “Where’s Anne?” “I don’t know, I looked everywhere!”

Frowning, I spoke again—no response. Looking down at my hands, I found myself staring at wisps of tenderly white smoke—I have transformed into a ghost.

The Curious Case of the Time–Traveller

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Pang, Yuet Wing – 11

I was strolling through the streets of Duanzhou when I noticed a crowd huddled around something, making a commotion.

I approached the horde and the crowd parted for me, and I peered down at...an unconscious man.

The man was wearing a strange costume. His torso was dressed in a plain, red coat that looked drab and dull compared to our patterned coats. There was an opening in the middle of the coat which revealed a pale blue garment that resembled a tunic except without the part that concealed the legs. The man's legs were covered with green trousers that looked like our pants, except that they were much baggier. Although the man was just dressed in odd-looking clothes, I got the feeling that this man did not belong here.

I ordered the people to move the strange man to the nearest house and waited for him to awaken. After a few hours, the man's eyes fluttered open. He instantly shot up and started speaking in a language I had never heard before. Based on his body language and facial expressions, I could tell that he was trying to ask me questions, but I couldn't understand a single word of what he was saying.

The man looked around frantically, wringing his hands, and his eyes lit up when he spotted some writing utensils lying on a desk. He dashed over to the desk and began to draw. First, he drew a simple man and pointed to himself. I understood what he meant. The strange man was the little man in the picture. He wrote some symbols underneath himself in the picture and said something that sounded like 'Harf'. I assumed that was his name. Using this kind of communication, he told me his tale. Harf had been living his normal life dozens, perhaps even hundreds of years after I did, and had teleported to the distant past, with no idea how to return home. It sounded like a made-up story, but all the pieces fit together: Harf's bizarre-looking clothes, the strange language. The future would mean advanced technology, which would surely enable people to travel through time. It was certainly possible.

Although I had no idea how to get Harf back to his time, I accepted the challenge, as I couldn't bear to abandon Harf in an unfamiliar world.

I began my investigation with a detailed interview. The language barrier was still a major issue, and a few hours and a lot of illustrations later, I gathered a sizeable amount of information.

Harf had been born a mind-blowing one-and-a-half thousand years after I died and was raised in Hong Kong. Recently, he had single-handedly invented the machine that enabled the user to travel through time. Unfortunately, he had been so eager to test out the revolutionary invention that he hadn't thought about how he would get back to his time, and ended up stuck in the past with no way to go home.

Just as I was wrapping up the interview, someone knocked urgently on the door. I opened the door. One of my friends burst in and shouted my name.

"Bao Zheng! Bao Zheng!"

He then informed me that a body had just been found at the bottom of a pond, and it was estimated that it had been there for about a week before it was discovered. The victim's throat had been slit before she was dumped into the pond to hide the evidence.

Behind me, Harf made a strangled noise and I whirled around to face him, asking if he knew anything about the murder, since he was from the future. He hastily shook his head, muttering something like 'can't interfere with history.' It was only after I threatened to use torture that he reluctantly revealed what he knew. (Apparently, he wasn't aware that I never resorted to torture.)

A week before, a man (Harf was unable to say his name, due to our language barrier) was forced to marry a woman he hated. He hated his wife so much that he plotted to kill her and disposed of her body in the pond after the deed was done.

It was at that time that I began to get suspicious. Why turn to murder instead of divorce? After all, divorcing was a lot less messy, and killing would very likely lead to execution, whereas divorce wouldn't. There was something else that was off about Harf. If he really was ingenious enough to create the time-travel machine all by himself, surely he would consider all the possibilities before he tested his invention? The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. What if Harf wasn't from the future at all? What if he had just made up the entire story to cover something up? Something like...an assassination?

I remembered 'Harf's' reaction to the news about the murder. If my suspicions were true, he could not be trusted. I looked up from my deep thoughts to study 'Harf' and advanced towards him.

Following an interrogation and some threats, he, at long last, cracked under the pressure and told me everything. He had, indeed, committed the murder, and I soon found out why. A year ago, he had lost his job and had to resort to stealing to make ends meet. Recently, his wife (whom he had recently married) had discovered his secret and 'Harf' had been forced to dispatch her in order to keep her mouth shut. He had concocted this elaborate plot in order to direct suspicion away from him, and it had worked, at least until I had discovered flaws in his story.

Then, things got even more shocking. After an investigation to find out 'Harf's' identity, I discovered that he was my daughter-in-law's brother! At that point, I was hesitant to apprehend him for a second. However, bearing justice in mind, I had no choice but to convict him of murder and sentence him to death.

Case closed.

New Tales of Judge Pao

ESF Kennedy School, Wu, Liam Emery – 10

One day I was sitting comfortably in my courtyard garden, immersed in the sounds of the pristine fountain gurgling nearby. The sun rested on my face as I enjoyed the pleasant surroundings. Suddenly, a chill burst of wind slammed the cosy garden gates against the courtyard wall, and I started with an irritable grunt.

“Who so rudely interrupted my relaxation?” I grumbled.

“I deeply apologise for the terrible inconvenience, ... Y–your Honour, J–judge Pao!” stuttered the obsequious bailiff, bowing deeply.

How typical! Bailiff Jao was always pretending to be an ideal servant with his excessively polite and unnecessary chatter. It was a complete waste of time.

“Yes, yes, yes. Please hurry and tell me WHY you disturbed me in the first place?” I demanded.

“Apologies, Your Honour! An attorney informed me there is a complaint by a petitioner who is desperate to meet you,” he whimpered sheepishly.

I leisurely proceeded to my chambers to put on the traditional silk robes necessary to hear this unfortunate petitioner’s case. Although I had not yet met him, he was beginning to arouse my sympathy. Why would he be in a rush to meet me?

As I returned to the courtyard through the front entryway, I noticed that Bailiff Jao was fidgeting and peering at the sundial next to the fountain. Realising the petitioner must be suffering greatly, I quickened my pace.

Upon entering the court building, I adjusted to its bustling activities. At the end of a long hall, I found several attorneys and scribes already waiting, numerous scrolls laid out meticulously on the tables in front of them. The petitioner was there as well, exhibiting a grim but determined expression.

“My wife was almost killed on the road by a vicious murderer. He is currently being detained. I beseech you to put him on trial to preserve the honour of my family,” he uttered gravely.

“Hmm,” murmured the attorneys, carefully stroking their lengthy beards.

“We will see what we can do,” I declared simply.

After gathering the basic facts of the case, I excused myself from the meeting and, accompanied by several personal guards, made my way to the petitioner’s home. A terrible stench of manure pervaded the atmosphere around the cottage, and I wrinkled my nose reflexively, repulsed and nauseated. Upon entering the house, I almost began to regret making this visit. Before me, lying in a small, soiled bed within a dark, damp room, was the young female. Although only in her early twenties, she had aged rapidly, and her once dark–brown hair was now streaked with grey. She filled the entire cramped house with horrendous groans.

Nearing the bedside, I saw her eyes were full of dread. “Hello, I am Judge Pao,” I informed her. “I have come to investigate this terrible incident on your husband’s behalf.” Strangely, her great pain seemed to subside while her face crumpled in despair. “May I please see your wound?” I inquired. Without uttering a word, she unfolded her collar, revealing the immense gash of a violent knife just below her shoulder. Maintaining a calm demeanour despite the shocking scene, I thanked her and quickly left to examine her alleged attacker.

After a short journey, my guards and I came upon the prison, a foreboding structure casting a dark shadow over the lush fields beside it. At the entrance, I asked the chief guard to see the prisoner; but for some inexplicable reason, he failed to recognize me – an unforgivable offence. Finally, having stared at my identification documents for a long time, he grudgingly let me in.

As I arrived at cell 5482, I glanced at the prisoner through the iron bars. He was unusually small, with a height that would barely reach my waist and very underdeveloped limbs. Obviously a poor peasant, he stood silently, staring

dismally at the floor. I glanced at the cell number again, wondering if I had come to the wrong location, but quickly verified that this was indeed the correct prisoner.

Concealing my thoughts, I gathered up my robes and headed to the nearest guard. "You must free the prisoner in cell 5482 and then follow me!" I demanded. The guard's eyes widened suspiciously; but then, unlike the unwise fellow I had met at the entrance, he quickly recognized who I was, and retrieved a massive set of keys. Fumbling with them a few long moments, he finally came upon the one for cell 5482. With atrocious screeching, the heavy, rusted door opened. Upon learning his fate, the inmate fell to his knees and bowed in gratitude.

I gestured to the guard and remarked, "Are you coming or not?"

"Of course!" he said quickly, gathering several other guards.

"I apologise for the intrusion, but you are under arrest for attempting to murder your wife!" I snarled. "The person you accused was not of sufficient height to stab your wife so violently. In fact, that poor man actually stopped you from killing your wife, and you called the authorities to have him arrested!"

Three months later:

I lethargically strolled around the neighbourhood's outer wall, surprised to find this ordinary pastime quite pleasurable. Having relaxed to my heart's content since closing the case of the murderous husband, I had become somewhat wearisome of the daily routine. As I turned a corner, Bailiff Jao unexpectedly rushed towards me in a cloud of dust, his face slick with sweat from the heavy sun.

"Excuse me, Y-your Honour!" he began rapidly. "I went to your house, but was told you had gone out. I want to inform you that a notorious criminal has been captured, and the police are demanding a trial!"

For once, I did not mind Bailiff Jao's foolish manner. A smile spread across my face. I was looking forward to serving justice.

A Theft in the Palace

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui-Schwille, Maia – 10

The day started just like any other mid-autumn day in Kaifeng, a gentle breeze swaying the leaves of the ginkgo trees. Princess Fukang had finished her breakfast and returned to her room to admire her coronation crown and necklace.

She approached the secret compartment hidden in her wall, then briefly looked behind her to check no one was in the vicinity. She unfastened the invisible clasp, and the compartment door sprung open. Within, she saw that her jewellery was all in place. She reached out to take the necklace, but it slipped out of her hands! She gasped as the jade, pearls and diamonds shattered on the floor. As she knelt to inspect the fragments, she thought to herself, diamonds don't break when dropped and neither do pearls or jade. But how could this happen? She picked up a few pieces as evidence, then sprinted to her parents' bedroom. She called tentatively, "Father? I—it's important. Really important." A few moments later, the door opened and he said, "Come in." Princess Fukang was always enthralled whenever she entered her parents' bedroom – it was larger than any normal person's living and dining room combined, and was decorated with tapestries of previous dynasties. "What is it that is so important that you need to interrupt my meditation?" he questioned, "Y—yes father, I have come to you because something truly terrible has happened," Fukang stuttered nervously and explained everything. He gasped in horror, "That can't be! Real gems don't just break on impact. Those were specially crafted by the land's finest jeweller!" She showed him the pieces she'd picked up from her room. Her father took them with shaking hands, meticulously examining them. A few moments later, he said quietly, "My dear, this is an ingeniously fabricated glass replica of your beautiful pendant and circlet. We must call upon Judge Bao Qing Tian."

Bao was having a peaceful day walking around the park, surrounded by, maple, birch and larch trees with leaves of cardinal red and ginkgo trees with fluttering golden leaves. It was definitely not a day he expected to be summoned to the emperor's palace to solve a theft. The emperor's messenger knelt at his feet, "Lord Bao, you have been summoned to the palace by the emperor himself," he stuttered for a moment, "H—he says that his daughter's coronation jewellery has been stolen and replaced by glass fakes." "Interesting... I shall investigate." Bao took his carriage to the emperor's palace, and arrived at the princess's room to inspect the damaged jewels. Fukang opened the concealed compartment for Bao to inspect, explaining how she'd been checking on them every morning. Bao felt at the back of the compartment and announced, "This can be opened from the other side. What room is next to yours?" "The maids' rooms." replied Fukang. "Then until I find another clue, our prime suspects are your maids. May I have the names of the maids? I wish to interrogate them one by one." As Bao left the room, he spotted a something glinting in the sunlight. He decided his eyes were playing tricks on him, so he moved on.

From the interviews, Bao gained nothing. The next day, Bao came up with a brilliant solution. He unhesitatingly rushed to the emperor's palace to propose this idea. The emperor agreed and sent for arrangements to be made. The plan was to make up a story that the jade jewel in the centre of the pendant was actually a key to opening a chest of treasures, and that the chest was hidden in the Emperor's Great Hall. This wasn't true of course, but the emperor sent members of the nobility to spread the rumour far and wide. The chest was an ornate mahogany trunk with intricate carvings of old Chinese heroes. It was to be left unguarded in the Great Hall.

On the first night, Bao and two assistants concealed themselves behind the pillars. They heard soft footsteps coming through the doorway in front of them. They all tensed. There were two voices; one man and one woman. They scoured every corner of the hall for the chest until, finally, its silver glint caught their eyes, "There!" And they hurried towards it. The woman took out the necklace and tried unlocking the chest, "Why isn't it working?" she hissed. "I don't know..." the man whispered back. On Bao's signal, his subordinates swiftly and soundlessly moved towards the criminals and in one fell swoop, bound their hands behind their backs. The prisoners screamed and fought but they were no match against their captors. Bao glared icily at them, "Who are you? And why did you take the princess's coronation jewels?" They cowered at his feet, "I—I am Liu Fei and this is Shen Lun," the woman

replied, trembling, “We thought they would sell for a good price on the black market... We knew that Princess Fukang had a secret compartment, also that it could be opened from behind, so we made a plan to go into the maids’ room and open the compartment from the back to replace the real ones with our glass fakes,” Fei whimpered, “So I sneaked in at midnight, following the plan exactly, but as I was leaving one of the maids stirred so I darted out as quickly as possible, but a small stone fell to the floor and I didn’t have time to retrieve it so I left in a hurry.” Now Bao knew that the stone he’d spotted earlier hadn’t been a fake. “I will now sentence you. Five years of imprisonment and a fine of three hundred taels would be adequate wouldn’t it?” he looked at them, as if daring them to contradict. Shen Lun opened his mouth to argue but closed it when Liu Fei shot him a glowering look. As their captors took them away, Bao sighed in relief. This had been a long few days and with the princess’s coronation the next day, the case had finally been solved.

Bowing to the Future

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Chow, Chi Wai Samantha – 9

1006 AD, Kaifeng, China.

Pao Hiren tiptoed through home, holding a hideous black cockroach. He slipped it into his dad's robe, at the nape of the neck, and giggled. Mr. Pao felt a tickle; he shook left and right; he jumped, he wiggled, until the bug flopped right into his cup of green tea.

“HIREN!” Mr. Pao roared, gripping his son's robe hard.

This was not the end of the story.

As Hiren was dragged through the village, townspeople giggled behind their sleeves. As fishermen sang coming into town, their catch glinted in the sunlight.

Finally, Mr. Pao dumped Hiren into a dry, dirty, square stone well. Hiren's head hit the bottom. His father turned away without a second look. Hiren slumped. His eyelids felt heavy. He let the light slip out from his eyelids...

Hiren sat up and rubbed his eyes. He squinted at the sky. It was light-blue, covered in sunlight, instead of the cloudless and grayness in the sky in his village. Is this paradise? He wondered, curiously.

He rose. Blue sky gave way to a row of pink buildings – the tallest and squarest he'd ever seen. Their sweet colours clashed surreally. Before him a Chinese crowd scurried about. But they kept babbling into little black boxes. And behind him were roaring metal chariots. The air was dusty, but it was an alien, metallic fug, not an earthy dust; he felt no red dust under his feet.

There was a sign in front of him, by a tunnel releasing a stream of faces – “Sung Wong Toi”. He peered closer. Chinese characters: “Fragrant Harbour.” Hong Kong. Hiren looked down. He was dressed in tattered robes, as if homeless. In a way, he now was. But he'd learn his heart was here.

A man dressed in shiny black came towards him, muttering. “Hey, kid! You look down on your luck. Wanna make some money?”

Hiren hid behind crates in a school's back alley, which smelled vaguely like old butter, and his eyes caught onto a girl older than him walking into it. She was chewing something, but didn't swallow it. Hiren quickly ran over to her and handed over his packet to her. “Hey, this is for you,” he said.

Here he was, a homeless person forced to sell stolen goods to survive. The girl shrugged, and suddenly grabbed it from him, even though Hiren was gripping it tightly. “Well, thanks anyway.” She grinned behind her mask, then pulled it down for just a moment, to take out a sticky, gluey thing and threw it. Hiren's jaw dropped. She looked like family. “Wait—”

But she then turned her back and put something in the box. “I've changed my mind; take the stash to him – Smith! Under the tree!” She pointed out of the alleyway, towards another truant in the schoolyard. Hiren blinked, startled.

He walked towards a boy under the tree, and said uneasily, “Hello, this is a package for you.” The boy took it and opened the lid. Then came a bloodcurdling scream. Inside laid a dead slug. Hiren's heart skipped a beat, and his face went white as a sheet.

“How dare you do this to me?” The boy screamed, terrified. His friendly smile now became a cold glare. “I paid for what I want, and you think you can—” Smith clenched his fists, and punched the boy in the stomach.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed Hiren. “What were you doing, Smith?” It was the girl. She took Hiren’s hand and they ran for their lives, passing street lamps and houses as tall as the sky. Hiren felt the breeze blow past his cheeks. A sea of faces swirled around them. They cut through them like a blade.

There was an aroma of jasmine, as the girl pulled him into a café and sat down. Newly invisible, they ordered a plate of what looked to Hiren like spongy flatbreads, topped with strange berries and cream. They proved perfect fortification for the coming chat.

“I’m sorry, but I didn’t mean to endanger you. Can you forgive me?”

“It is not good to play pranks on others. You should know that.” Hiren shuffled on the chair, and recalled what he did to his father.

“Let me introduce myself again. I’m Pao Hui Qing, the great–great–great–granddaughter of Pao Qing Tian?”

“R... really? What do you think about me...I mean him?” Hiren blinked, startled.

“The greatest judge of all time. A Song Dynasty Solomon. A detective too. He feared nothing and nobody. When justice demanded it, he sentenced the guilty... my parents said he was our role model, to learn from.” Her face fell a little.

“I see...” Hiren was speechless, he dared not tell the truth; I am Pao Qing Tian.

“But my dad told me: Pao Qing Tian was naughty too when he was small. So alright, I’m just like him. Look where our shenanigans took both of us.”

“That’s not an excuse for you to be like that!” But Hiren wondered how – or if – he should influence his own descendants.

Hiren decided to make a change if he could. He scrambled to his feet and asked Hui Qing the way to Sung Wong Toi station. “C’mon! I have a lot of explaining to do ...”

They stood by the square well. It was lined with centuries of dust, but its meaning shone brightly.

Hui Qing was still puzzled by how magic worked. But she promised to rethink her life. The well felt like the law, or a black hole of shame, threatening to swallow her up, like Hiren.

They hugged and crossed their fingers.

He took a very deep breath, and dived, head down, into the well. “Bye...” he thought he heard Hui Qing’s once–defiant contralto behind him. He sighed, relieved his descendant wouldn’t be bad anymore. Is being a judge really my destiny? But before Hiren could think, there was a “THUMP!”, and all was blackness...

Meeting Judge Pao

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Guo, Bing Xian Abraham – 11

When Henry woke up, he found himself lying in a dark, gloomy prison. The prison cell was full of gross hay. It was as silent as the grave. Feeling puzzled, Henry saw a man, whose face was as white as a sheet, sitting next to him, shaking mournfully. He murmured to the man, “Where are we? Where is this horrible and smelly place?” The man remained silent. Henry tried to break the silence. “What’s your name? Why are you here? What crime have you committed?” Henry asked him. Henry stared at the man, waiting for his reply, but the man didn’t give him any response.

Soon, some prison guards came and broke the silence. “Mr Wang, it’s your turn to see Judge Pao! Follow us!” one of the guards shouted at the man. Henry overheard them and remembered Judge Pao — the honest and upright judge with a black face and a crescent moon on his forehead! He learned about Judge Pao in his History class! Mr Chen, Henry’s History teacher, told them the stories about Judge Pao! Henry now realized that he was at the time of Song Dynasty. The guards were taking Wang to see Judge Pao.

After Wang left with the guards, Henry started considering himself, “Why am I in prison? What happened to me? Will I be the next one to see Judge Pao?” Although Henry jumped out of his skin and shook like a leaf, he kept telling himself, “Judge Pao is the most significant and legendary figure of justice and righteous. I am sure he can tell me what’s going on.”

Few hours later, the prison guards came again. “Mr Han, you are accused of a theft. Please follow us. You will be taken to Judge Pao for interrogation.” Henry was tied tightly that he could not move or run away but to follow the prison guards to walk slowly to the tribunal court where he met Mr Pao finally. He could not recognize Mr Pao at first as his face was not black at all! Mr Pao, who was about 50 years old then, had a crescent moon on his forehead! When Mr Pao saw Henry, he asked, “Why did you steal a kid’s coins?” Feeling puzzled, Henry questioned, “Your Honour, please may I know why am I the one who stole the coins?” Mr Pao replied, “Huh, that was because someone found you asleep on a rock next to the boy’s oil tank.” Henry remembered he heard this story before. He tried to recall his memory

When Henry tried to figure out what was happening, Mr Pao asked him, “You have to tell me why you slept on a rock next to the boy’s oil tank.” Fortunately, Henry came up with a brilliant idea. “Your Honour, I was exhausted when I was trying to help the boy find his coins, so I felt asleep next to his oil tank. Believe me please, Your Honour! I can help you search for the thief!

The next morning, Mr Pao told the villagers that he was going to interrogate the rock, which laid right next to the boy’s oil tank. The villagers were curious, so they gathered at the tribunal hall as they all wanted to know how Mr Pao interrogate the rock. Mr Pao asked the rock angrily, but the rock was still and made no responds. Mr Pao kept scolding the rock, “If you stay silent, I will beat you! Why don’t you just tell me the truth honestly?”

All the villagers were stunned and went gobsmacked. “Was Judge Pao mentally sick?” “Why was he talking to a rock?” “Did he expect the rock to speak to him?” “Oh my god! Poor Judge Pao!” Some villagers even burst into laughter which provoked Mr Pao, hence, he took a revenge and told the villagers, “How dare you laugh at me? You are not respecting me. I will punish you!” As a result, he ordered each villager to pay a fine of one dollar. The villagers were obedient and put a one-dollar coin into a water tank one by one. Suddenly, when a man put his one-dollar coin into the water, Mr Pao said, “You are the one we are looking for!” and asked his guards to arrest the man.

Mr Pao explained, “After you put in your coin, there was oil floating on top of the water surface. The little boy sells oil, so all his coins are always oily. That’s why I am waiting for an oily coin to find out who the thief is!” Mr Pao thanked Henry for giving him such a great idea to help him catch the thief easily. Henry was on cloud nine and felt Mr Pao’s taps on this shoulder...

Tap. Tap. Tap. Henry felt Mr Pao tapping on his shoulder happily. He woke up and said, “You are welcome, Your Honour...” and suddenly found his History teacher, Mr Chen, staring at him furiously. “I’m definitely NOT Your Honour, Mr Henry!” “I’m sorry, Mr Chen. I thought you were Mr Pao...” All his classmates cheered at this laugh-out-loud moment.

A New Tale of Judge Pao

Sacred Heart Canossian School, Cheng, Mandy – 12

I was dead. The emperor said so.

I sneaked into my funeral to see my son Shou for the last time. I felt guilty, as a kid at his age would need his father most. But I had no choice.

In Song, you could have as many wives as you wanted to, and having an affair with a maid or having an illegitimate child was not uncommon or unacceptable, particularly for the rich and people holding a high position in the Empire like me.

But I am Pao. Pao was an exception. People in Kaifeng and perhaps the whole Song regarded Pao as a saint. A saint should never do anything wrong. It was not allowed, and such an act, if known to the public, would bring the Empire's reputation into disrepute.

The emperor told me not to worry about this; he would take care of my family, including Shou when I was not around.

I was chosen for this secret mission for a reason. But it appeared to me more like a joke. I had spent my whole life fighting corruption, but the emperor asked me to bribe!

Back to the reason. The Northern side of Song had all along been a headache since the Shang Dynasty. It remained so even after Ying Zheng of Qin Dynasty built the Great Wall. Most of the troops were deployed to the North and more would be needed. It was quite a burden to the Empire.

But now the emperor was troubled by another reason, namely, the expansion of the Da Qin Kingdom and the Persian World from the West, which posed a new and imminent threat to Song. In recent years, the conflict had intensified, from fistfights between civilians to direct confrontation between the militaries, and Song was losing.

The emperor wanted to put a halt to it. He vowed to reassert control and reclaim the land lost in the Tang Dynasty, and more by his predecessors. He also wished to rejuvenate the Silk Road and the trade between the East and the West. But clearly the Da Qin Kingdom and the Persian World were a hurdle that he needed to jump over.

The emperor had an idea, which was easy to understand but difficult to implement. He wanted the Da Qin Kingdom to fight with the Persian World. But the question was – HOW? The emperor came up with an idea.

Zhan Zhao, my bodyguard, who was tall and muscular in built, had an important role to play. He would lead an army to the West without anyone noticing. The army would attack small villages of the Persian World and kill a few villagers if required. They would put the blame on Da Qin Kingdom. They would also smear Arabia, the God of Persian World, in order to provoke the Persians.

I also had a role to play, which was more important. I had a crescent scar on the forehead. It closely resembled the symbol that every Persian worshipped. With tanned skin, the emperor believed that I would blend into the Persians and gain their trust easily. I could also try to convince or bribe the Persians to invade Da Qin Kingdom. It would be ideal if they could wipe each other out from the Earth. If not, the Song could also take advantage if any of them lost an eye or a limb in the war. The plan sounded perfect and workable.

After a few months of preparation, we left Kaifeng for the West. We crossed the Hexi Corridor, Dunhuang and Tibetans and finally reached the land of the Persians. We bid each other farewell and joked to see each other in the battlefield. But we knew it was not necessarily a joke. If we were successful, he would fight for Da Qin Kingdom and I for the Persians.

But we never saw each other again. Many years later, I learnt from sources that Zhan Zhao did a great job in accomplishing the mission assigned to him by the emperor. With the benefit of my teaching back in Song, he became a renowned philosopher who taught people the principle of equality, the rule of law, presumption of innocence, etc. Most important of all, he successfully convinced the King of Da Qin Kingdom to invade the Persian World and liberate the Holy Land.

Believe it or not, I blended into the Persians without difficulty. People accepted me at once and worshiped me as a prophet when they saw me for the first time. I gained the trust of all tribal leaders and was well received by their members. I soon became the spiritual leader of the Persian World.

Like Zhan Zhao, I gave lectures to the Persians, not only on legal principles but also issues happening on the other side of the Earth. They found it very enlightening. When time passed by, some of them called me “the Messiah” or “the Messenger” from the above.

One day, I told my assistant that I might need “a small piece of land” for Arabia in my own dialect which was pronounced “xiao-di”. The tribal leaders overheard our conversation and assigned a piece of land, which was later known as “Saudi-Arabia”, to me without any hesitation. I did not know at that time that it was so big and there was oil underneath. But that is another story.

Was my mission accomplished? Of course! I was a man of honour and thus kept my own promise. As the spiritual leader for the Persians, I sent my troops to fight the invaders and they protected the Holy Land fearlessly. The holy war lasted for more than two centuries and people in Song were free from any trouble during that period.

I also told the Persians that people from the East were friends, and we should respect and be nice to them forever. That was how the Sino-Persian relationship was established.

A True Portrayal of Justice Bao

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Cheah, Zu Zheng Christopher – 11

“And...cut!”

Displayed on the clapperboard: ‘Scene 1. Take 6.’

“Let’s try again tomorrow!” French director Patrick Marty shouts to the production crew of ‘Crime, Corruption, and Justice’.

Based on Marty’s comic novels about Judge Bao, Season 1 was a Netflix sensation. Season 2, produced in Hong Kong, will cover Bao Zheng’s earlier days.

“Listen, Chen! Can you give me a *true* portrayal of Justice Bao?” Marty demands.

Chen Zheng, a thirteen-year old actor, with dark makeup and a crescent on his head, feels the pressure. “Yes,” he lies with a fake smile. *But I can’t*, he thinks. *I can never be true.*

Walking through a sea of skyscrapers, Chen sees it again below his housing complex. An unilluminated windowless office with four crimson Chinese characters and the letters ‘ICAC’.

His heart beats faster, reminded of a traumatic past. His last memory of his mother was at her funeral. Shortly after, he was watching his father dragged by the ICAC to prison on TV. That dreadful night, he cried at a foster home until the next morning, comforted only by the sun’s motherly, nurturing light.

Taking out a crumpled photograph from his wallet, Chen grits his teeth. He throws it, hard. But he picks it up from the ground, and *screams*. He wants to get rid of it forever. But it is his father. Chen cannot throw him away.

Reaching the fourth floor, he opens the apartment door. His father, out of prison a year ago, embraces him. “I’ve cooked dinner.”

They eat dumplings together.

“I know that look,” Chen’s father says. “What’s troubling you?”

“Acting...a true portrayal of Justice Bao, whatever that means.”

“You can do it. After all, we named you Zheng, *justice*.”

Chen scoffs, looking at a wall photo picturing rows of seated men, his grandfather and father front row centre. Above them is a triangle logo: the Chen clan. A triad criminal organization, originally from the Henan province.

“We’re the opposite of justice,” Chen laments, seeing himself as one of them.

Chen’s father does not respond.

“The ICAC, Justice Bao, I hate them all!”

Silence.

"I hate my name, Zheng!" Chen shouts. "I hate myself."

His father hesitates. "It's time I tell you more about our family. Follow me."

Standing on a desk, Chen's father reaches up above the ceiling, bringing down boxes layered with dust.

He opens one box to reveal an old portrait.

"This is Chen Shimei, fictional in Chinese operas. But he was a real person, our ancestor, 1000 years ago. Records of him were erased because he was a convicted senior official. Although favoured and pardoned by Emperor Renzong, he was executed by Bao Zheng."

"What's this got to do with us?"

"Shimei left two young children behind, whom Bao secretly supported. However, our ancestors continued to rely on Bao's money. Requests for money turned into demands and threats on Bao's descendants and businesses, for 29 generations. That's how our Chen clan became the largest triad network, from Kaifeng to Hong Kong, which your late grandfather headed."

Opening a second box, Chen's father pulls out a photograph of two smiling men, seated next to each other inside a Hong Kong ferry.

"This is your grandfather and Y.K. Pao, 29th grandchild of Bao Zheng. They became true friends, eventually."

"How could that be?"

"Your grandfather changed. He and I wanted a new start for our clan. No more crime and corruption. But it was difficult. Other triad clans wanted to take over. I refused. They threatened us. And..."

Chen's father pauses, faltering. "And they got your mother. It wasn't a car accident."

Tears start to well up in Chen's eyes. Then he feels a burst of anger, imagining revenge, *one day*.

"I wanted to fight back, which would have started a triad clan war. But your mother would have disapproved. Instead, I planned something else, the right way. A plan to dismantle the triads from the inside, to keep their suspicions off me, to keep you safe."

"What did you do?" Chen asks.

"I approached the ICAC, and worked undercover for them. Going to prison was staged."

Chen is stunned.

"You were in a guarded foster home, until it was safe. And now, it's safe."

Chen is speechless.

"We're going to be fine now," assures Chen's father, his protective arms wrapping tightly around him.

Chen hugs his father, something he has not done for a long time. He finally cries, all his emotions flooding the room, realising he was never abandoned but protected, and his father was not a criminal but fought for justice.

"Your mother's proud of you," says Chen's father, looking at her portrait.

Both imagine her smiling with them, crying with them.

"She's proud of you too, dad."

Chen feels his built-up bitterness recede, like a wave returning to the sea, and what remains in him is hope.

As Chen's father gazes outside, illuminated by the crescent moon, he recalls a story from his late father. "I still have one more secret for you. A story of Bao's childhood, told by Bao himself to our ancestors..."

A pale-faced young Bao is held down inside a cave in Hefei, by men in white robes of the Song dynasty. "Declare your allegiance to our clan! Or we'll scar you for life."

Bao refuses.

They push him towards a burning furnace. His face turns dark, his head scorched with a crescent moon. Bao screams as blood flows down, and shouts, "Justice will find you, one day! *One day!*"

"And...cut!"

Displayed on the clapperboard: 'Scene 1 *revised version*. Take 7.'

"Bravo! A true portrayal of Justice Bao!" director Marty salutes Chen. "Whatever your *inspiration* is, keep it with you."

Chen takes out that crumpled photo again, this time gently, this time with a different thought.

My father's life is a portrayal of a hero, a Bao Zheng.

And my life can now be true. I am Zheng, and I stand for Justice.

The Nail in the Coffin

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Kam, Hei Yin Cadence – 11

1016 A.D.

The wind blew through the branches of the nearby trees, rustling leaves concealed in shadow. The village down to the right was hidden in darkness, overcast by a cloud. High above it all, an erubescence pearl drifted in the dark waters of the night, casting a reddish glow on the earth.

All was silent and calm. Even the birds were asleep. But a flicker of movement could be seen down below.

A small crooked shadow, illuminated by the moonlight, crept across the ground and through the window, nimbly unlocking it and locking it behind her. A half-muffled scream erupted, but all was still moments after.

There were no neighbours. There was no one awake. Nobody to witness the deed but the moon, which shone just as it had, as if nothing had happened at all.

★★★

1018 A.D.

“Husband? Your breakfast is ready!” a woman moved through the house with a tray, pausing at the door of a room. She called, “I’m coming in now!” When no response was given, she entered, seeing a young man lying on his bed. She touched him softly to wake him up—and jerked back, shuddering.

He was stone dead.

★★★

The coroner moved carefully around the body, poking and prodding. Finally, he looked up. “No signs of injury. He died a natural death.”

“That cannot be right. He’s so young. No illnesses, too. It seems suspicious to me. You’re very sure?” Judge Pao asked.

“I’ve now conducted an autopsy. There’s no injury to the entire body at all.”

“Well, it still seems strange to me. If reports come that he died an unnatural death, you’ll be fired.” Judge Pao strode out of the room. The coroner stared after him, but after a few seconds, turned around and began to pack up his tools, all the while muttering under his breath.

★★★

“And he said that I would be fired if it was discovered that he died an unnatural death,” the coroner finished. He was sitting in his living room with his wife next to him, recounting the day’s events.

The only sound that could be heard for a long while was the birds chirping outside.

“I hate to say this, but... couldn’t someone force long metal nails into the brain without injuring the body? Maybe through the nose?” the wife whispered.

★★★

“Do you know why you have been arrested?” Judge Pao’s harsh voice echoed through the courtroom.

The widow gulped before speaking, “Yes. I know you have the evidence”—her eyes shot to the long nail still rusty with blood, sitting on a cushion in front of Judge Pao—“but hear my reasons. They may not help, but I want them to be known.

“My husband and I were never happy from the very start. My parents wanted me to marry into a rich household, even if it meant my being unhappy. He would go out drinking, taking drugs and gambling. At those times, he beat me with whatever was lying around the house and I was helpless.

“That night, we argued. I told him to stop drinking and he wouldn’t. I went to bed covered in bruises. It was the final nail in the coffin. The abuse, the beatings, and finally that argument...” she broke down into tears. “I couldn’t bear it any longer. Before I knew it, that very night, I had snuck into the bedroom with a long nail and he was dead.”

The harsh voice sounded again, “That cannot excuse you.”

The guillotine came down. Blood splattered everywhere.

★★★

After the trial, Judge Pao took the coroner’s wife aside. “What’s your name?”

“Chen Ding Dai Ti,” she replied.

“You must be a highly intelligent and creative woman. I would like to know whether this man—” he gestured to the coroner “—has hurt you in any way.”

“No, never. He always treats me well and never belittles me,” the words poured out of her easily and naturally, but Judge Pao noticed that there was a tiny hint of wariness about her.

“Have you ever had another name other than the one you have given me?”

“Yes, Li Ding Dai Ti. Li was the surname of my first husband,” she paused for a while, then continued. “Li Bi Lei died a natural death two years ago.”

“How old was he when he died?”

“He was eighty.”

Judge Pao frowned, but let her go.

After the coroner’s wife had left, Judge Pao turned to his servant, “Did the widow have any siblings?”

“She did. The coroner’s wife, Ding Dai Ti.”

“Well, then that’s the root of this mystery. Perhaps her first husband didn’t die naturally. I just need one more piece of evidence...” He called over two men and whispered to them. They nodded, then disappeared into the night.

★★★

The wind blew through the branches of the nearby trees, rustling leaves concealed in shadow. The village down to the right was hidden in darkness, overcast by a cloud not unlike the one two years before. But this time, there was no blood moon. Just plain moonlight.

And there was a grave in front of the little house atop a hill, now long abandoned.

They reached the top of the hill and looked down at the grave in front of them. The moonlight illuminated the characters written on the gravestone: “LI BI LEI”.

They dug. Down and down and down, until they struck it.

A coffin.

They opened the lid and the body of a young man lay resting inside. His features were cruel and twisted—during his life, he had enjoyed causing harm to everyone around him, and it showed in his face. But the two men had only one goal tonight. One reached into the coffin, delving into this man’s brain, until he found it.

The hand retracted, holding... a nail.

The nail in the coffin that was never expected.

The Case of the Widow's Ill Will

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Lin, Amanda – 11

“*I am so sorry,*” the teenager cried in tears. “I didn’t mean to!”

“My stepson is still in shock. He is not thinking clearly,” the woman defended as the boy continued to weep.

Judge Pao gave the boy a sympathetic look. “Present your testimony, Lady Li.”

“It was midnight. I was woken by sounds from the Grand Hall. I got up immediately to see what was going on. I then heard Li Junior screaming for help. By the time I arrived at the Grand Hall’s entrance, I saw my husband laying there in Li Junior’s arms,” she said, sniffing.

“Did you hear their conversation, Lady Li? Do you know why they were fighting?” asked Judge Pao.

“No, Your Honor, I didn’t,” said Lady Li. “Sir Li is a patient and loving father to Li Junior. Li Junior always respected Sir Li. I just don’t understand what happened.”

“Were there any other witnesses at the scene?” Judge Pao followed up with a question, narrowing his eyes.

“Yes, Butler Chen was also there,” said Lady Li.

Judge Pao gazed sternly at Butler Chen then asked, “Did you hear the conversation of Sir Li and Li Junior?”

Butler Chen timidly said, “No, your honor. I was in the kitchen next to the Grand Hall. When I heard the scream, I ran to the Grand Hall and saw Sir Li and Li Junior on the floor. Lady Li was on the side crying.”

Judge Pao seemed unsatisfied but declared, “I have heard all the witnesses today. I will give my final judgement three days from now.”

“*I am so sorry. I deserve to be in jail!*” Li Junior howled. Lady Li stared at Judge Pao pleadingly.

That night, Judge Pao visited Li Junior’s jail cell.

“Young man, now that you are calm, tell me what happened.” Judge Pao said quietly.

Li Junior let out a shaky breath. “I was so angry at my father. He only loved *her*.”

“What do you mean by that, Li Junior?”

“*His* will. My stepmother told me that my father was going to leave his estates and fortune to her. She was so kind and willing to support me until I take my scholar exam. I was angry and confronted my father. He lectured me about my wasteful ways. Angrily, I stormed toward the door. Father tried to stop me so I shoved him, hard. He fell and hit his head on the pavement,” Li Junior sobbed.

“So Lady Li told you that your father was to leave all his fortune to her and not you?”

Stricken and pained by his guilt, Li Junior could only nod weakly.

Next, Judge Pao walked into a small, dark room, ready to view Li's body. The only objects in the room was an opened coffin and bouquets of flowers given by the mourning villagers to honor him. Judge Pao bent down and picked up a flower.

A scroll next to the flowers read: Lord Li, thank you for your generosity and inspiration. You have led us out of poverty and we are eternally grateful. May you rest in peace in heaven.

"An honorable man," Judge Pao whispered, and set the flower down carefully.

Even in the dim lit room, Judge Pao could see a purple bump on top of Lord Li's forehead. Judge Pao gently prodded open Lord Li's mouth, and grimly confirmed his hypothesis. A black tongue. "Gotcha," he smiled.

Three days passed. The villagers crowded the court room hours before the final hearings began. They waited anxiously to hear Judge Pao's final ruling that would bring justice to their beloved Sir Li.

"Before I announce the verdict, I'd like to hear the autopsy report from Doctor Su."

A scrawny man, dressed most primly, stepped out of the shadows. "Your Honor. After inspecting the body, the victim did suffer a severe head injury and was knocked unconscious. But the blow should not be fatal. Your Honor, you were right, the victim was poisoned!" he exclaimed.

Surprised, everyone in the court room gasped in unison.

"*You!*" Lady Li said shakily, pointing a finger at Butler Chen. "You poisoned Sir Li!"

"I did not!" Butler Chen retorted. "I am wronged, Your Honor."

"*You* poisoned your own husband, Lady Li!" yelled Judge Pao as he slammed the gavel on the head table.

"*Me?* Oh! I am a wronged woman, Your Honor—

"I had my suspicion given the discrepancies between yours and Butler Chen's testimonies. First, Lady Li, the distance of your bedroom chamber and the Grand Hall did not allow a person to be awoken from deep sleep just by hearing some sounds. You arrived at the scene before Butler Chen, who was only one room away. This meant that you were already near the Grand Hall and not in your bedroom chamber when the incident happened.

He continued, "Finally, Sir Li was a generous man and beloved by all the villagers. I heard that he was going to donate most of his wealth to further build and benefit this village. Your disappointment in your husband's will was the true motive for such a heinous crime. Was it not? Your greed motivated you to poison your husband and frame your stepson. Are you guilty, Lady Li?" Judge Pao rose to his full height, pointing an accusatory finger at Lady Li.

Lady Li wailed, "I deserve his entire wealth! I helped him to build his entire fortune and treated his son as if he was my own. I sacrificed my entire life for him! He was just going to give it away. I couldn't accept that!"

Judge Pao shook his head. "Indeed, you shouldn't, Lady Li. But your actions have consequences. I now sentence you to a lifetime in prison!"

Judge Pao turned from his chair, shaking his head as he prepared to exit the court room.

"Judge Pao, wait!" Li Junior grabbed Judge Pao's arm. "I'd just like to say ... thank you."

"It's what I do, Li Junior. I'm Judge Pao. Remember my name."

Convictions of Barrister Chan

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Lye, Yuxin – 11

1964, Hong Kong.

Barrister Chan was facing the toughest case of his career. The press had given it much coverage as it involved the Kong family, the richest in the city. Lau Ping-Wai, Kongs' right-hand man, had been murdered. Tabloids speculated that Lau knew too much about the dealings of the Kongs, who were extremely influential and connected, such that Lau must be silenced. Mere speculation, of course, until proven. For now, Barrister Chan must defend his client – a fishmonger at the wet market, someone with absolutely no interaction with the Kongs, and as Chan believed, just happened to be at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

Chan always aspired to be a champion for the weak. He grew up in the Kowloon Walled City and was no stranger to the rampant vices and local triads. It was the novel, "Three Heroes and Five Gallants" – stories about the legendary Judge Pao and martial arts heroes who helped Judge Pao fight crimes and oppression – that inspired Chan to become who he was.

To Chan, Judge Pao was the embodiment of justice – unwavering and incorruptible. Regardless of the stature or connections of the culprit, crime must be punished, and innocents protected.

The courtroom was filled to the brim. The accused glanced at an old lady at the public gallery and lowered his head.

"Li Shang, you are on trial for the murder of Mr. Lau Ping-Wai," the judge announced, "Do you plead guilty or not?"

The room froze. The answer came forcefully but helplessly, "No, I am not guilty!"

April 1056, Kaifeng Prefecture.

"Kaifeng has no authority over this," the arrogant Chancellor Pang exclaimed, staying seated, without even facing Judge Pao.

Chancellor Pang was the tutor of the Song Emperor and held immense power.

"As you wish, Chancellor, you are welcomed to sit in, but I do have a case to preside over."

The guards shouted "Wai-Wu!", knocking their wooden sticks on the ground.

Qin Lan, a commoner, had sounded the court drums of Kaifeng. It was the last resort, but the only way to bypass the local magistrates who tended to side with the powerful.

"Announce your name and why you have come."

"Your honor, I am Qin Lan, from Taiyuan," Qin Lan sobbed, "Pang Long, son of the Imperial Tutor, killed my sister, Qin Shuang. The local magistrate refused to handle my case."

Monday 8th June, 1964.

The prosecution called upon their witness.

"Sergeant Shek, how did you find the body of the deceased?"

“I was patrolling the Wanchai wet market at night and saw a body, and dagger on the ground. There was someone beside the victim whom I gave chase.”

Shek pointed to Li Shang, who was seated by a court guard.

“Were there fingerprints on the dagger?”

“No, probably wiped clean.”

“Do you mean the accused tried to remove his fingerprints?”

“Objection, your honour! The prosecution is leading the witness.”

“Objection sustained.”

“Sergeant, would you say the murder of the deceased was pre-planned?”

“It seemed meticulously planned and definitely the most brutal murder I’ve ever come across!”

“Objection!” Barrister Chan stood up.

“I have no further questions.”

The Prosecutor returned to his seat triumphantly.

The old lady at the corner remained still throughout, yet her eyes never left Li.

Chan was deep in thoughts – he had received an anonymous letter the day before, threatening to kill his family if he did not “do the right thing”.

Chancellor Pang had grown nervous and quickly sent a note to Concubine Pang for help. The guards dragged out a well-dressed man in his twenties and forced him to kneel before Judge Pao.

“How dare you!” Chancellor Pang was about to step forward.

“I suggest you stay put,” Judge Pao knocked on the table loudly with the Shangfang Sword bestowed by the late Emperor. The Chancellor was taken aback.

“Pang Long, do you know this lady, Qin Lan, or her sister Qin Shuang?”

“I do not recall.”

“Very poor memory indeed, though you frequent their family teahouse and are widely known to have a liking for Qin Shuang, as Constable Zhan found out.”

“Your honour, Long tried to kidnap my sister and when she refused, pushed her down the stairs and killed her. Many witnessed that but he paid them all to keep quiet!” Lady Qin kneeled, anguished.

“Show me the proof, Pao, I didn’t know you trial cases without evidence,” Pang Long laughed sadistically.

“Will the defense please present the case?”

Sergeant Shek strutted to the stand.

“Sergeant, how did the accused behave when you first arrived at the scene?”

“I would say he was rather calm.”

“You reported that he had his back towards you and started running right away, Sergeant, you must have sixth sense to feel his calmness.”

The courtroom burst out in laughter. “Silence!” the judge called out.

“Maybe he was facing me, I don’t quite remember.”

“What is the truth then?”

Shek did not respond and glanced around with unease.

“So there was no concrete evidence that Li committed the crime.”

“He stood by the body, that is proof!”

“Pack of lies. Your honour, I have a new piece of evidence to present.

“Objection!”

“The evidence was just discovered but it is absolutely crucial!”

“What have you got to say, Pang Long? Your bribes, your family’s gold bestowed by the Emperor were found at Magistrate Zhao’s residence – he has confessed!” Judge Pao proclaimed.

Long screamed, “I am the Imperial Tutor’s son, I can do whatever I want! You have no right to sentence me.....”

“Bring the Dragon-Head Guillotine!”

Chancellor Pang leapt forward and fainted.

A suffocating silence filled the courtroom.

The judge would soon come to a verdict. Li stood trembling and the old lady finally broke down crying, unable to contain herself. Chan reached into his briefcase for the “Three Heroes and Five Gallants”. He held the book to his heart and closed his eyes, as he had always done before a verdict.

Oily Fingers

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Wu, Xin Ru Audrey – 11

I was strolling around the market to buy fresh radishes for some radish soup. So far, I hadn't had much luck. A group of youths were staring at me with their mouths agape, but I shrugged it off.

Suddenly, I heard a shout.

“Fresh radishes! Fresh radishes! Straight from the farm to the market!” bellowed the seller.

I ran towards him quicker than a cheetah. “Good morning, sir, could I have a fresh batch of those radishes?” I asked amiably.

His eyes widened. “Justice Pao! How lovely to see you! Yes, of course, a batch of radishes coming right up!”

“Thank you, sir!”

These days, I am used to being stared at in the streets. People are shocked to see me buying groceries in the market like a peasant, but I enjoy cooking, and it's good to live life as I always had from the start.

The seller carefully placed the radishes into my basket, and I walked off, ready to go home and prepare a delicious, delectable bowl of radish soup. Just then, I heard the sound of a young boy caterwauling.

“Oh no! Where did all my money go? I need that for my mother's medicine! I never should have fallen asleep on that rock! What will I do?” cried the boy as he collapsed into a heap in the midst of his wails.

I took a look at the large basket he had set on the floor in front of him. It contained a few ceramic containers filled to the brim with oil noodles. From strolling around in the market, I knew that everyone was selling fruits and vegetables except for the young boy.

I rolled up my sleeves and sat down next to him. “Dear boy, please stop crying. I will help you find out who stole your coins, so don't you worry!”

The boy stifled his tears and looked up at me with his solemn, red eyes. “But how? Just because you are Judge Pao doesn't mean you can solve every single case.”

“Listen. If we can't find the culprit, I'll give you enough money to help your mom. I understand how it feels, and I respect your initiative to fend for yourself and your mother. Now let's find that culprit!”

Just as I had hoped, the boy's solemn expression had turned determined.

“Judge Pao, tell me what I need to do!”

“Everyone, gather here in a circle!” I bellowed.

I could see everyone's head snapping around to look at me, but thankfully they turned around and formed a circle. Most of them looked confused and annoyed, which was expected, since I just interrupted their job. But I had to help this poor child.

“Could the man in the straw shirt please pass me a coin?” I asked, my voice clear as day.

“What for?” he asked.

“I would like to find the culprit who stole this young boy's coins which he has rightfully earned,” I explained.

“Well, alright then,” he begrudgingly agreed.

“Dear boy, could you fill a big bowl with water please?” I asked.

“Yes sir!” he exclaimed.

It was a slow, repeated cycle. Take the coins, drop them in the water and return them to the owner, who would be free to go. The young boy was beginning to lose hope. But I would not give up. Soon, we were down to a handful of people. A man standing behind everyone else was fidgeting and sweating. That’s suspicious, if you asked me.

“Could the man standing at the back pass me a coin?”, the boy timidly asked. It seemed we shared the same idea. That the man could be the culprit. Why else would he be so nervous?

The young boy took the coin and dropped it in the water. Everyone gathered around the bowl. As I had anticipated, an oil bloom appeared in the water.

“Sir, you have stolen from a young child! This is unacceptable!” I yelled.

His eyes darted around, looking for a way to escape, but the remaining few people had formed a circle around us. Seeing he couldn’t escape, he held out his supposed grocery basket and poured the coins into the bowl.

I sighed. Theft did not merit execution, but a few months in jail.

“Sir, you are very lucky not to be facing execution. Guards! Please escort this man to the town jail as he will serve one month in prison and also pay back what he stole,” I cried out.

The town guards nodded and immediately set to work.

I hadn’t expected going to the market to be a scenario to deliver justice, but here I was!

Case of the Missing Robe

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Yu, Yat Hong David – 10

The Emperor's birthday was due in three weeks and the entire kingdom was bustling with excitement. Everyone was running around busy preparing for the important celebration.

Suddenly, a group of serious-looking palace guards marched through the crowded streets and stopped abruptly in front of two tailor shops. "Attention! This is a message from the Emperor!" one of the palace guards shouted, holding up an enormous scroll. Wang Hao and Jiang Lin, owners of the two tailor shops came out and knelt with trembling knees whilst the guard continued the message. "You two are the finest tailors in town and have been selected to make a dragon robe for the Emperor's birthday. Whoever makes the most beautiful robe shall be rewarded with gold and gems and become one of the Emperor's personal tailors!"

Wang Hao was a chubby man who had inherited a fortune from his father. He often bought delicate, expensive silk and weaved them into beautiful clothes which he sold for a great deal of money. The other tailor, Jiang Lin, was a tall, skinny man who grew up poor, but made a name for himself as the clothes he designed were both affordable and stylish. Their shops were right next to each other and the rivalry between them had always been fierce.

Upon receiving the orders, Wang Hao and Jiang Lin both felt nervous yet excited as this would be the biggest opportunity in their lifetime. One of the guards stepped forward, opened a wooden chest, and took out two rolls of exquisite silk fabric. "Wang Hao, you will use the purple silk, and Jiang Lin, you will take the yellow silk." The two tailors touched the silk gingerly, and it was the smoothest material they had ever laid their hands on.

Once the guards had left, both the tailors sprinted back into their shops immediately with the beautiful silk in their arms, cradling it like a baby. They both closed their shops for business and worked tirelessly day and night, using a monumental amount of effort in the making of the robe.

Three days before the big celebration, at the crack of dawn, Judge Pao woke up to some shouting and screaming outside his house. "Judge Pao! Judge Pao! Open the door, open the door! Please help me!"

Judge Pao was well-admired throughout the kingdom as he was known for his utmost belief in honesty and uprightness. As he opened the antique wooden door of his house, he saw a devastated Wang Hao standing outside with tears flooding out of his eyes, "The robe is gone! Someone has stolen it while I was asleep!"

Judge Pao replied calmly, "Tell me what happened."

"I finished the robe last night and fell asleep whilst admiring my own work. This morning when I woke up it was gone! I searched everywhere and could not find it. It must be Jiang Lin who stole my robe. He did not want me to win!"

"Let's not waste time," replied Judge Pao. "Lead me to your shop!"

As they walked to the shop, the city began to wake up. Jiang Lin was just opening the doors looking happy and bright as they arrived.

"Jiang Lin!" Judge Pao bellowed. "Move aside! Let me search your workshop!"

"Wha-what did I do? Why?" stuttered Jiang Lin, his smile gone and now looking confused.

Judge Pao ignored him and stepped into his shop. Right near the doorstep, he spotted a few strands of delicate purple silk lying on the cold stone floor.

“Jiang Lin, how do you explain having such exquisite purple fabric at your shop? Only Wang Hao received purple silk from the Emperor!” questioned Judge Pao. “Where did you hide his robe?”

Jiang Lin cried out, “I did not steal his robe! I was busy working on mine and just completed it last night. My one was so beautiful I did not need to steal his robe to win!”

Wang Hao cried, pointing to his rival, “He has the motive, and we have the evidence! Judge Pao, please arrest him and bring justice to the case!”

Judge Pao comforted Wang Hao, “Don’t worry, there is an easy way to find out where the robe is hidden. The Emperor keeps the finest fabrics in a special warehouse with herbs imported from Persia. The silk would have absorbed the scent and unless it had been washed, the Emperor’s specially-trained dogs would be able to find it. We will have this arranged first thing tomorrow morning.”

“Oh, that’s great, that’s great!” exclaimed Wang Hao.

That midnight, Judge Pao and two guards hid near the well and waited. A shadowy figure emerged from the darkness, took a large bucket of water from the well and started washing something desperately. The guards snuck up to the person and pinned him down. As the figure slowly turned around, his identity was revealed to Judge Pao. It was Wang Hao, grinding his teeth, holding on to his purple robe that was dripping with water.

“So it really was you, Wang Hao!” said Judge Pao.

Wang Hao burst into tears and confessed, “I had no other choice! I saw Jiang Lin’s robe last night and it was so beautiful. I knew I would lose if I did not do something! But... but how did you know it was me?”

“The part about the silk carrying the special scent from the herbs was fake,” replied Judge Pao. “I’ve suspected you all along because the purple silk left at Jiang Lin’s doorstep was too obvious. I’ve also seen the robe he made, and it was magnificent. He did not need to steal your robe to win.”

Wang Hao was arrested, and Jiang Lin eventually won the competition. In fact, the Emperor was so happy with the dragon robe that he made Jiang Lin his head tailor.

And with that, Judge Pao solved yet another mystery, the new case of the missing robe.

The General's Ink

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Zhu, Yutong Sophia – 11

I stared at him, at the unbelievably young general, unable to do anything, can't move, can't speak, can't think. When I turned my head to the Emperor, I realised his expression matched mine. It isn't, it couldn't be, could it?

It was so many years ago, when I was just a new and so-called "rookie" detective. I had been called to the capital Kaifeng to complete a time-consuming investigation. Coincidentally, it was during one of the most stressful times of the year for Chinese students – the final palatial exams, Dian Shi, hosted by the Emperor himself.

It was already dusk, the day before the exams. I was finishing off my investigation and calling it a day when suddenly I heard horses galloping and a loud knock at my door.

It was a message from the Emperor himself, calling me to the scene of the Imperial Study. I threw on some clothes that seemed formal enough and followed the messenger out of my house.

When we arrived at the scene, I immediately dropped to my knees as I recognized the Emperor. He didn't say a word, but he gestured to me to come closer.

"It seems we have a difficult situation here. I have been sent the exam papers for one final check today. And I had also scheduled a meeting with three of the contestants around the same time. The meeting should have been held in the room next to this one. Unfortunately, I was called to an urgent military meeting and therefore missed the meeting scheduled with the three students. By the time I got back it was quite obvious that the papers had been rummaged through. We must figure out whether the papers have been leaked and decide if tomorrow's exam can still be resumed," the Emperor said, with what seemed like a frown on his face. The exams must mean quite a lot to him.

I immediately started looking around the scene. The first of the important papers was on the floor, the second was turned to face the high window overlooking the front gate, and the third was left right where it was.

There was also a peculiar bottle of ink on the table, with a few drops spilled. But the smell of that was enough to tell that it was unique, and of supreme quality. The quill placed next to it was also one-of-a-kind, one I had never seen before.

Without me asking, the Emperor silently handed me a scroll containing information about the three students he was planning to meet. The first one was a quiet and short man from Guangdong, the second a sturdy, confident, and tall man from Sichuan, the third was of athletic build, a tall figure, and from An Hui.

An Hui.

The spilled ink.

The smell of it.

How familiar and uniquely fragrant it smells.

I tried to put the scene into my memory, picked up the quill and the bottle of ink, and turned to the Emperor, "Your majesty, I'm sorry that this might bother you, but I will go home and do my research. Hopefully my return is possible by the next morning."

"I have my utmost faith in you. Please return tomorrow, even if it is with the most unfortunate news," the Emperor said as he agreed to my request, and I left his palace knowing I did not have a lot of time to waste.

.....

The next morning when I arrived at the emperor's palace, I saw that he was a shambles. Although he agreed to my request, I could tell he had not slept that night.

Having done my research, I turned to the Emperor.

"Your majesty, the ink spilled was of incredible value and quality. There is no other city that has easy access to it other than An Hui. Can I request a meeting with the gentleman from there?"

"Yes, that will be possible," the Emperor replied, and a minute later, the man was brought over.

"Greetings, I am Judge Pao, and I have been asked to complete an investigation for the Emperor. I believe you are somewhat involved, would you like to explain the situation, or should I—" I started.

The man immediately fell to his knees and handed the Emperor a letter.

"Your Majesty, I'm convinced that you already know that I am the culprit. My carelessness of spilling the ink has certainly given me away. Even though I gained a huge advantage from copying the papers, I couldn't sleep last night knowing what I had done. So, I got up early to write this letter. In it, you will find that I'm willing to drop out from the exams and would like a chance as a soldier guarding the border. I'm terribly sorry for what I have done but would be immensely grateful if you could give me another chance." He was in tears as he begged the Emperor.

"Yes, I do believe you should be given a second chance for your courage in coming to admit your mistake," the Emperor generously agreed, "you will be sent to the border as a new soldier this afternoon. I hope that will help you realise your mistake and allow you to reach your full potential."

I, Judge Pao, was convinced this was the end to the case, yet a decade later, the Chinese border was attacked again, and a mysterious young general led an army of a few hundred cavalry into battle. They mounted nearly impossible charges, and finally drove the attacking force away.

The Emperor couldn't believe the courage of the young general. Just as I was about to tell him the results of one of my investigations for him, he called the young general into the palace. When the general's athletic build emerged from between the doors, the emperor's jaw fell to the floor. It was him.

Him.

The culprit.

The man from An Hui.

Where is Sherlock Holmes?

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lai, Yuet Hei Hailey – 10

Judge Pao stroked his dark-coloured beard and furrowed his eyebrows. He was reading the daily newspaper, and this story was the strangest yet most captivating case he had ever seen. The headline read: “*British Detective from the future, Sherlock Holmes, held as a hostage in Kaifeng, China*”.

Judge Pao’s assistant, Zhan Zhao, peered over his shoulder to take a look. Zhan Zhao was a bodyguard skilled in kung-fu, which would be useful if they decided to investigate the case.

Judge Pao was extremely doubtful. He was an intelligent, detailed and clear-minded man, so he thought a detective from the future could have never time-travelled. “That’s just illogical,” he thought. His assistants thought the same – but there was a possibility that time travel had been invented in the future. Nevertheless, everything just seemed confusing and complicated, even for Judge Pao.

Later, everyone settled on further analysis and research. The officials and Judge Pao’s assistants read newspapers and listened to radio broadcasts for weeks. It was the busiest and most time-consuming situation they had faced in a long time.

First step: General Information. The officials jotted down notes about this so-called “Sherlock Holmes”. He seemed very clever, but in the Song Dynasty, Pao was the smartest one known at that time. Sherlock Holmes was apparently famous for his excellent observation and amazing reasoning skills. Nothing could be perplexing to him.

Judge Pao raised an eyebrow about that.

Second step: Location. Of course, without investigating where Holmes was kidnapped, the whole thing wouldn’t even be possible, right?

The officials formed a search party around Kaifeng, Judge Pao’s hometown. The government put up posters around the town that invited citizens to join the search party. Lots of people were interested in finding out what had happened, so that made searching for evidence effortless and speedier.

One of the police officers found a trail of pairs of footsteps, a piece of cloth and a garbage bag. This could have belonged to anyone – but cloth and garbage bags were used frequently in abductions. Judge Pao found this evidence helpful, he assigned police officers to guard this area.

Another official found a crumpled piece of paper thrown in the depths of a forest. This could be anyone’s trash, but the government declared that the search party should search for *anything* suspicious. There was a code on the paper: *EVITCETED NI DENODNABA ESUOH HTIW EULB ERIFPMAC*. At first, Judge Pao was quite bewildered, but once he cracked the code, things made sense. Hence the officials kept the paper in case it got into the wrong hands.

Gongsun Ce, Judge Pao’s personal secretary, found out one more thing. There were wisps of smoke coming out of the dangerous part of the forest, where cobras, leopards and more lived. Most of the citizens of Kaifeng were too frightened and intimidated to search there, so there was only Judge Pao and the government.

Before the forest investigation, the search party went to get ready. Flashlights, ropes, and weapons were packed inside bags. First aid kits galore. Everything they needed was all ready and prepared.

This case was lengthy, but with Judge Pao there, it would be solved in no time.

Judge Pao and his crew were ready the next day. They gathered in the shallow part of the forest, where there were only fish and birds. There were fewer people to help, so most felt worried and nervous.

The birds tweeted a glorious melody, and the fish swam in crystal-clear ponds and creeks. It was a beautiful day, and the sun shone brightly, which did not match the mood, where there could be a chance that one or more of the search party could get attacked or ambushed, or worse – even killed.

They went from Stage 1 Forest into Stage 2. There were a few monkeys and foxes. Then Stage 3, where it started to get exciting. There was a pit of deadly piranhas, but luckily there was only one. And there were snapping turtles as well, which sank their sharp teeth into an official's hand.

Finally, the smoke was a few miles away. Shadows of leopards and cobras came and went, but most of the team was unscathed and managed to creep away silently. The smoke was coming from a campfire with blue fire. It was next to a shabby hut with wooden boards hammered against the windows. Judge Pao realised it was the note on the crumpled paper read backwards: *DETECTIVE IN ABANDONED HOUSE WITH BLUE CAMPFIRE*. Judge Pao told the officials to stay on guard while he and his assistants went inside.

The flimsy door creaked open when the judge opened it. Drops and puddles of blood were splattered around the planks, and it would definitely be scary if you had hemophobia. In the cellar, a silhouette was tied up with ropes and twine. Judge Pao tried to cut the rope with the knife he brought along in his satchel, but a mass of kidnappers kicked open the door and attacked them.

Instantly, Zhan Zhao whipped around and kicked and punched and beat up all the kidnappers. The four enforcers helped too. At last, ten people lay on the ground making weird gestures, with blood smeared in many corners. Once the bad guys were knocked out, Judge Pao cut all the rope and untied the figure.

“Sherlock Holmes!” everyone cried. It was him.

A week passed. The case was closed. Sherlock Holmes made friends with Judge Pao and agreed that he would visit him again, except if he got kidnapped again. But they were ready for it. He showed him how he time travelled. The machine had been invented. All you had to do was type in the year you wanted to go to and press a couple of buttons, and voilà!

Judge Pao was eager to try out time-travelling too. Another case closed. He was satisfied that the kidnappers were executed with his dog's head guillotine to serve justice.

Judge Pao smiled to himself. *Well done, Judge.*

Love and Loathing

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Tin Hang Ethan – 12

Prologue:

That day, snow blanketed the landscape, the land, once lush and green with plants, was now barren and lifeless, and the harsh winter cold gnawed into the roots of the great tree which stood mightily in the centre of the city square. A man sat in his melancholy shed, as he plotted vengeance for one who he loved so greatly, and to exterminate one who he had a cold and bitter hatred for, as cold and bitter as the winter day itself. Exactly one year later, his wish has been fulfilled

The Death:

A metal dagger whizzed through the air, pinning the man's hand to the wall behind him, then another dagger was briskly aimed at the man's other hand, fully pinning him to the ground. "Who are thou?" The man's words tumbled out unevenly, and his lips shivered as he spoke. "Why do thou need to know?" A figure emerged from the shadows, revealing a well-built, robust figure with a fair face. "My name is not to be given to dishonourable fiends and murderers like thee." He did a gleeful jig in the darkness as he launched a dagger at the man, sending him to his demise.

He stepped forward to taunt his victim and to hear his last words. "Death is only the beginning, I will haunt thou to the end of thy life." As the man died and was sent on his way from the comforts of the living realm into the underworld, the figure dipped his finger into the victim's blood and smeared the walls with the words "Li min" in his Kaifung dialect "no one could read it, and I would probably get an alibi" he thought, and briskly left the room.

The Arrival of the God of detection:

Waitress Ye was weary. She woke up at first light for attendance, and had to serve breakfast to their hotel guests "ere first hint of dawn" as her senior said, because their guests are all "light sleepers". She was assigned to the toughest pleaser: Zhao Yan, uncle of the king and magistrate of the Yinchuan, where the Miao tribe established a settlement.

Drowsy and longing for a tranquil corner to sleep and rejuvenate her eyes, she knocked on Zhao Yan's door to realise it was open. "Most peculiar thing, I thought Master Zhao always valued his privacy. "Huh, who knows, the people who come to the Hefei hotel are always peculiar." She pushed open the magistrate's door to reveal the body of the dead magistrate.

As they sent for a detective, a figure stepped from the crowd of audiences. "I will solve this case."

The hotel manager smirked and desperately attempted to hide his prejudice towards peasants in a lower social class than he is. "What is thy name?" He asked politely.

"It is I, Bao Qing Tian, High judge of the royal court of justice."

The manager's disdain turned into admiration, and he frantically sent him to a private room to talk.

The evidence:

"May I survey the crime scene, good sir, I have many worthy assistants to help me. You are of wonderful service, dear manager."

Bao turned to the manager, and unhesitatingly the manager left.

"What do thou think of him?" Bao turned to his advisor, Gong Sun Ce.

"Almost impossible to be the criminal." The advisor replied to his senior. "As you, good master, can see, there are characters smeared onto the walls of the room, most likely to be in blood, irreversible damage to the wall. How, would a hotel manager destroy the walls of a hotel he paid so dearly to build?"

“It shall be as thou say.” Judge Bao made a final search for anything suspicious in the room and noticed the knives that pinned Zhao Yan to the wall.

They were Butcher’s knives, something one only with a butcher’s license would possess. “Awaken every client, tell them to cut each a strand of pork for dinner, each three inches wide.”

Gong Sun Ce obeyed, but he turned to face his master before he went out. “Wouldn’t the murderer have already escaped?” Bao shook his head unhesitatingly, and the advisor left. Bao was about to leave when he caught the words smeared in blood in the corner of his eye. It was written not in traditional Chinese, but in his mother tongue. It wrote: *Li Min*.

Moments later, Bao arrived at the kitchen to inspect the investigation being conducted. Before anyone starts, he beckoned his armed and flawlessly trained bodyguard Zhan Chao to be stationed at the entrance. The investigation commenced, one by one, clients were called up to cut the pork three inches wide, and cooks examined them. The fourth client cut the meat into exactly 3 inch pieces, and Bao beckoned him to come with him. “How did thee

Bao felt a searing pain his leg as the client launched a knife at him, and sped to the entrance, only to be stopped by Zhan Chao. The client, seeing no hope, resigned, and followed Bao into his compartment.

The Confession:

“Tell me,” the client said, breaking the silence, “how did thee know it was me?”

“It’s simple.” Bao explained. “The knives thee used to kill Zhao Yan were Butcher’s knives. Only butchers would have them, because of the recent disarmament policy. Therefore, the one with the best knife-work is the killer.”

“How do thee know it’s not one of the chefs?”

“We have checked all the knives and none are missing.” Bao’s tone softened to a soothing, charming voice. “Now, why did you kill Zhao Yan?”

“I killed him to avenge.....” the client began.

“Yes, Li Min.”

“How did thee know?”

“I was from Kaifeng.”

“Okay, Now, here it goes. My name is Yan Ming Li Min was my Fiancé. She was loving and charismatic, and I was promised her hand after I saved her and her father’s lives by fending off bandits who were attacking them. It was all so blissful until Zhao Yan came and threatened death to her and her father if she wasn’t promised to him. Desperate to save her daughter, her father agreed. A few days before the wedding, they were both killed by Zhao Yan, who left in pursuit of another maiden.

Later, my village doctor diagnosed me with blood poisoning, and there were reports saying Zhao Yan snuck into my room the day he left. I had two years to live. I killed Zhao Yan to avenge Li Min, her father and myself. After all the sins he had committed, isn’t he the one who deserved being punished?”

Bao hesitated before replying. “God has his sympathies for thee. I shall present the case to the royal court, and secure a verdict for you, and I would have the honor to retire from the case.....”

In Good Hands

Ying Wa Primary School, Lee, Sing Yu – 11

Think of all the people in your life that love to have money and power, the people who want everything at their fingertips, the people who want to be gods.

Now go to them and tell them they are making a bad decision in wanting to be a god.

Sure, the whole everything-you-could-ever-want thing is nice, but it gets boring. The duties are pretty horrible and the higher-ups are really strict. People who try shirking their duties, which I don't blame them for, go into the higher-ups' office and never come out the same way. Rumors fly, but I keep my head down and do my job.

This time, I was sent to monitor Pao Zheng. Again. I swear the higher-ups have some kind of vendetta against him, but I wasn't there to ask questions. I sighed as I let my mind wander free, turning my mental slate blank. The surrounding hustle faded and the colors around me coagulated into a shimmering iridescent sphere, a warping marble before my sealed eyes. Then, I focused hard on the vivid ruby-red walls, on them a painting of the sea and words of justice; the majestic marble lions outside, so lifelike they seemed ready to pounce at a moment's notice; even the three sacred guillotines, each imposing in their own rights. With a blow of air, the colorful orb scattered, filling my once-blank vision with bright palettes, taking up the empty canvas, spiring me to somewhere new.

As the all-too-familiar scene popped up around me, I smiled.

I was getting better at this.

I quickly morphed into my guard attire before looking at my objectives. "Same old, same old..." I muttered to myself, smirking as I ran off to my business. However, not long after, I heard something that made me stop in my tracks. I quickly hid behind a wall to eavesdrop on a heated argument.

Guard 1 argued, "I think Pao Zheng will get him out of it. He's his elder sister-in-law's only son. You know what Pao Zheng's elder sister-in-law helped him through? She raised him like a son! There's no way he wouldn't repay the favor!"

Guard 2 scoffed, "There's no way Pao Zheng would let him go free that easily! He's known to be unrelenting in the pursuit of justice! He's a symbol of justice, how could he let family stand in the way of a case?"

Guard 1 replied, "Come on, not even someone as strict as Judge Pao would execute their nephew, right?"

Well, this was certainly news.

Against my rational, rule-following mind screaming at me to report this, I decided to keep quiet and see where things went from here. I had a report to write on Pao Zheng after this and to say I was running out of material would be an understatement. So, I left the two of them to their bickering and waited for the summons to the courtroom. Sure enough, it came along before too much hassle, and before long I was standing in the imperial courtroom. As the incense wafted through the stuffy room, the criminal was dragged in by two beefy soldiers, a look of blank solemnity on their faces. "We have delivered the criminal to court," they uttered in a deep, booming voice that resonated in the room. They then turned around and marched out of the courtroom in synchronization, taking up their posts alongside the chiseled marble lions. Finally, Pao Zheng stepped into the courtroom, thickening the tension in the small lodgings. His already-white hair and goatee wafted lazily as a small breeze came rustling into the petite building. He was wearing his signature jet-black futou hat, as well as an impressive crimson robe, adorned with grandiose dragons flying, unaware they were frozen in time. His unwavering eyes paired with his stern,

wrinkled face gave away a menacing, intimidating aura as he stood behind his table, facing the man at fault — his nephew.

Then, all of a sudden, he spoke, and his voice was so loud it seemed a thousand more were echoing along with it. “Pao Mian, you have been accused of bribery and malfeasance. Do you have anything to say?” he thundered at the young man. Until now, I had never seen his face, but seeing as now was a good time, I stole a glance at him. He harbored some resemblance to his uncle, namely the hair, face and eyes, but his expression was of remorse and determination. Ultimately, determination won and he raised his head, saying to Pao Zheng, “I have nothing” — his voice broke — “Uncle.”

I quickly reverted my attention back to Pao Zheng. His eyes softened as he stepped forward, and his voice dropped to a whisper. “I am sorry that I cannot save you, Nephew, but I cannot fulfill both concepts of loyalty and filial piety. It is my duty to execute you. I am sorry.” Upon saying this, he took a shaky step back and took a deep breath. With a steady voice, he ordered, “Take the criminal to the dog-headed guillotine!”

As Pao Mian’s neck was pressed to the guillotine, I had my eyes on Pao Zheng. Now was his last chance to cancel the order, to lift the gleaming blade aloft, to save his nephew.

But the action never came.

As Pao Mian’s head was cut clean off, Pao Zheng only watched with tearful eyes. Through the blood, I stood in shock, reeling from the fact that this man killed his beloved nephew for the sake of justice. After that, everything was a blur up until the point where I scattered the ball of colors once more and returned to my regular duties. To this day, I have never decided if it was a good thing that Pao Zheng killed his nephew, but if a nation has a man so dedicated to justice he kills his family if they commit crimes...

I finished my report with a flourish:

“That nation is in good hands.”

New Tales of Judge Pao

YK Pao Primary School, Zhou, Jia Tong Emily – 10

Night settled on the city called Hefei as it fell asleep. Mr. Tao, the butcher was hurriedly running across the street with a huge burlap bag in his arm. The moon light shone on him as he ran into the woods.

A dozen soldiers are running behind him, each with a torch in their hand. They followed into the woods where Mr. Tao ran into. After the soldiers, a young boy called Hui snickered behind a tree. He slowly crept towards the house of the richest man in the village, Mr. Zhang. There had been a dozen soldiers at the door, but they had all gone after Mr. Tao, so the door was clear by now. Although there was a huge, golden lock at the door, it wasn't a big deal. Hui had always known how to pick lock in the rightest way. He had been stealing things and picking locks ever since his parents went to war and haven't come back and he had to take care of his young siblings. He had once stolen a flute, a ring, a chunk of cheese and an old man's golden tooth. Of course, all of these were sold out and turned into a cow that provides milk for the family.

Today, in Hefei, everyone had heard of the famous government official, Judge Pao. Everyone there was proud of him and admired him. They even set up some statues in memory of his influential goodness, wishing his spirit of wisdom and justice can spread and sustain for long. Everyone admired him a few hundred years ago, including Hui.....when he was even younger. At that time, he was a little boy who wasn't often noticed. That was why he wasn't caught when he crept into Judge Pao's room and peeked at him as he worked. At that time, he swore that when he grew up, he will become a man like Judge Pao, helping others around. However, his dream vanished since his parents left.

This time, he would rob an old treasure, from ten thousand years ago. If he sold that out in the black markets, then he and his siblings will never be poor again. He slowly pushed a piece of twig between the lock. Maybe the Empire would want him to work in the palace. The lock fell to the ground with a "Clang" and the door opened. He quickly checked that no one was heard the sound before he walked inside.

Suddenly, a few guarded men sprang out from inside, pointing at him with their spears. The Judge Pao walked out from the shadow and glared at him. Hui suddenly realized that it was all Judge Pao's trap. It was his idea to hide in Mr. Zhang's house and get him!

The next a day was Hui's trial. Judge Pao glared down at him and spoke. "Hui," he said, "I had heard that you are a poor young man. However, that is no reason you should go and steal other people's properties. You are a young man with a long future before you. But you just stole things and abandoned your future." As he spoke, Hui felt huge pressure hanging in his voice, but as he thought about it, it did make sense. A lot of sense. He was poor, but other people are poor too. The people he had robbed are once poor too, but they worked hard and became rich. He shouldn't take away other's hard work, but he should work hard himself. He has no reasons to wreck their life, even if his life was wrecked. If he worked hard, he could have a bright future. Now, he must die for his actions.

Judge Pao seemed to see his regret, for he said, "I wish there were other ways to take your crime but there weren't, eh?"

"No, sir." said Hui.

"Then I regret say that you must die."

"Wait! Mr. Tao is part of the plan as well! Why is he not dead?"

"There, young man, Mr. Tao is dead. The stones in his bag slowed him down as he ran. His head was taken down yesterday, as he was caught before you. I am sorry to say that although you are caught after him, you must die too."

He turned to executioner and signed before he said to them, "Kill him."

The sword was high in the sky before it fell, and the thin blade felt cold on his neck for a second. Hui saw his life flashed in front of him. And then, he remembered.....

That day ten years ago, when he crept into Judge Pao's room, when he saw Judge Pao work, and when he swore. He then saw that ten years later, he would steal and rob. At last, he saw a grave with the name "Hui" on the stone. It was different from any other stone. There were no flowers on the stones. Instead, people had thrown all sort of rotten food on it and there was a pungent odor coming from the cold stone. No one will respect him when he died. He was looking at his life when he heard Judge Pao shout, "Run!" He couldn't see anything as he did so.

When he finally opened his eyes, he was back on his bed. Is it just a dream? He looked down. The letter he was going to give to Mr. Tao to ask him to help attract the guards was in his hand. He stared at it for a moment, then he threw it into the fireplace. Fire danced around the letter, and he watched as Mr. Tao's name melted and the letter slowly turned into ash. He won't steal the treasure anymore, and he won't have Mr. Tao die for him.

From that day on, Hui became the most helpful young man in the village.



Creative Writing
Fiction

Group 2

New Tales of Judge Pao

CCC Wanchai Church Kei To Primary School, Wong, Ngai Chi – 10

Judge Pao was famous in Kaifeng as being a fair judge promoting legal justice. He was not afraid of power and would not allow unjustly imprisonment as well as bad guys getting away with punishments.

One day, a lady broke into the court while Judge Pao was dealing with a court case. Her act was considered committing a crime as in accordance with the law, nobody was allowed to enter the court without permission. The lady screamed and was caught up in hysteria. She yelled in the court, 'My husband Ah Fook was innocent! He should not be sentenced to death! He was framed by the son of a chief judge called Ah Keung!'

Judge Pao commanded the lady to leave the court as her act was disrupting the operation of the court violating the regulation of the court. She should be punished. Considering there might have some grievance behind, the lady was forgiven and was asked to wait outside. Judge Pao would privately talk to her.

Judge Pao met the lady in a meeting room and requested her to explain in details about the incident she raised. The lady said, "Ah Fook had been working for a chief judge for ten years. The chief judge was called Ah Kwok. Ah Fook never made a single mistake and was loyal during his ten-year service. One day, he heard a loud bang coming out from Ah Keung's room. When Ah Fook ran to his room, he saw a bloody man lying on the floor and while Ah Keung was sitting on a chair armed with a knife full of blood! Ah Fook was frightened and did not dare to make any noise, he ran back home and told me what he had seen. We discussed and decided to report the incident to the officials. Just as we left home, the officials came here and caught Ah Fook. Ah Fook was accused of murdering Ah Keung's friend --- Ah Leung. Judge Pao, Ah Fook is innocent! He could not be the murderer! He faints when he sees blood. Moreover, he is significantly weaker than Ah Leung who is a butcher." She cried throughout the conversation.

One annoying problem Judge Pao faced was that chief Judge Kwok was the senior of Judge Pao while the main suspect of the case seemed to be Ah Keung... Judge Pao went to see chief Judge Kwok and shared what the lady told him. Judge Pao wanted to see how chief Judge Kwok responded to the lady's statement.

To Judge Pao's surprise, senior Judge Kwok told Judge Pao to keep his hand off from the case and told him, "This case should have been concluded. No doubt Ah Fook is the murderer of the case. This case is NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS! There is no advantage for you to continue dealing with the case." He seemed to be threatening Judge Pao.

Judge Pao felt very uneasy about the conversation with senior Judge Kwok in his mind, the sole consideration is to ensure justice must be seen to be done. The threatening from chief Judge Kwok and his power is not at all any of his concern.

Judge Pao met up with the lady again to gather further details relating the case. He also interviewed all the servants and neighbors of Kwok's family. Furthermore, he called up few of Ah Leung's best friends for discussions. He also picked up the clothes and other objects attached to Ah Leung's body. Judge Pao tried to get a more comprehensive picture and background for the case.

With all the facts at hand, Judge Pao scrutinized every single detail and discovered the following:

Ah Leung never knew Ah Fook. There was no motivation for Ah Fook to kill Ah Leung.

A servant saw Ah Fook working in the garden when the loud bang was heard.

Ah Keung's hair and blood was found sticking on Ah Leung's body. However, none from Ah Fook could be found.

Judge Pao brought all the findings to the chief judge and requested for a retrial. Chief Judge Kwok was displeased and said, "I did ask you to stop dealing with this case, but you obviously disobey me. I warn you as the second time that you should give up processing this case, or else YOU WILL BE FIRED!" Chief Judge Kwok was apparently protecting his son --- Ah Keung.

It turned out to be a huge challenge to Judge Pao. If he continued to work on the case, he might get fired and never be able to fight for justice, for the people. However, if he gave up the case, compromising the interest of Ah Fook's fairness, how can he face his family and the masses? He was struggling...

In the end, Judge Pao decided to go to the emperor directly and presented to him the entire case, together with the threatening message from Chief Judge Kwok. Judge Pao politely asked the emperor, "How do you want to rule the country, justice or power? If you choose power, I would rather resign."

The emperor thought for a while and said, "Judge Pao, you can arrange for retrial for the case. You are now the sole judge of the case. Please ensure justice is properly done. Chief Judge Kwok will not be involved in this case by now."

After the retrial, Ah Keung was proved guilty and was sentenced to death. Chief Judge Kwok was demoted to a normal judge because he undermined the rule of law. Ah Fook was immediately released.

This was the other incident demonstrating how Judge Pao maintained justice, fairness for the society. These are no doubt the important values every citizen has been looking for. That was also the reason why Judge Pao was well respected and loved by all people.

New Tales of Judge Pao

Farm Road Government Primary School, Fong, Hei Man Lillian – 11

One thousand years ago, there were two women living in Kaifeng, the capital of ancient China's Song Dynasty. Mrs. Wong was the wife of a farmer, and Mrs. Chan was the wife of an owner of a restaurant. In the same year, both of them gave birth to their baby girls. They were very happy.

One day, Mrs. Wong finished her work with her husband on the farm. When they went back home, they could not find their baby girl. They were frightened. They went out of their home and ran to the main street of the city shouting. "Who has seen our one-year-old baby girl?" Mrs. Wong cried loudly, but no one on the street could answer her.

The next day, Mr. and Mrs. Wong went to the city center to find their baby. When they passed by the front door of Mr. Chan's restaurant, they heard the crying of a baby. Mrs. Wong shouted, "She's my baby!" They went into the restaurant immediately. They saw that Mrs. Chan was holding a baby.

"She's my baby!" cried Mrs. Wong angrily. "Give her back to me! Why did you kidnap her and bring her to your restaurant?" Then, she ran to Mrs. Chan to try to get back the baby.

Mrs. Chan said, "No! She is my baby! Don't try to hurt her!" Mr. Chan pushed Mrs. Wong hard and she fell down on the floor. Poor Mrs. Wong cried, "Give me back my baby, please!"

Frightened Mrs. Chan also cried loudly, "No! She is my baby, not yours!" Mr. Wong and Mr. Chan fought with each other.

An old lady was in the restaurant. She stopped eating and lifted up Mrs. Wong. She shouted, "Stop fighting, please! I have something to say."

Everyone looked at her, including Mr. Wong, Mr. Chan and Mrs. Chan, except for the baby girl who was crying very loudly now. The old lady turned to Mrs. Wong and asked, "What are the special characteristics of the appearance of the baby girl?"

"She has big eyes, a small nose and a small mouth," said Mrs. Wong.

The old lady looked at the baby and she saw exactly what Mrs. Wong had just mentioned. "Oh! She is actually Mrs. Wong's baby," said the old lady.

"No! Every single baby looks the same! This cannot prove that I am not her mother!" screamed Mrs. Chan.

The old lady was puzzled and could not say anything. The baby also screamed and cried more loudly.

At that moment, Zhan Zhao, the Imperial Guard of the Kaifeng Government, was leading a group of policemen past the front door of the restaurant and went in to see what was happening. Mrs. Wong and Mrs. Chan, who were both crying, told him the story.

Zhan Zhao said at once, "Both of you have to come to the police station with me. And you..." he said pointing at the old lady, "Please carry the baby girl for us."

They arrived at the police station and saw Judge Pao. Zhan Zhao briefly reported the case to Judge Pao who then asked the other people a few questions. Everyone reported to him one by one. Judge Pao asked a policeman to bring the baby to him. The baby was now sleeping quietly.

"Would this old lady please stay with us in the police station? We have a room for guests. Please help us to take care of the baby girl for a month. We will judge the case a month later," said Judge Pao. The old lady carried the baby and followed a policeman into the guest room and the other people returned home worriedly.

A month later, all the people went to the police station to see Judge Pao again. Judge Pao arrived and sat down. He looked at Mrs. Wong and Mrs. Chan and asked, "What is the baby's favourite food?"

At that time, most of the babies in China liked pumpkin congee, and it was one of the most popular dishes of Mr. Chan's restaurant. Mrs. Chan shouted immediately, "Pumpkin congee!"

But Mrs. Wong knew that her baby hated pumpkin congee very much and liked eating fish congee instead. She replied confidently without thinking, "Fish congee! She hates pumpkin congee."

Hence, Judge Pao asked a policeman to go to the market to buy pumpkin congee and fish congee. He noticed that Mrs. Chan looked worried.

About an hour later, the policeman returned to the police station with two bowls of congee. One was made with pumpkin, one with fish. Judge Pao came out from his office and ordered another policeman to ask the old lady to bring the baby out.

The old lady came out of the guest room with the baby girl. "Have you fed the baby this morning?" asked Judge Pao.

"No. Zhan Zhao told me not to feed her. He said that was your order," replied the old lady.

"Then please help me feed the baby with the congee on the table," said Judge Pao. "Feed her the pumpkin congee first."

The old lady fed the baby the pumpkin congee, but the baby wouldn't eat it even though she was quite hungry. Then, the old lady fed her the fish congee. This time, the baby ate all the fish congee!

"Now, you may know who the baby's mother is," said Judge Pao. "In the past month, the old lady told me that the baby had picky eating habits. Therefore, I thought of this idea to find her real mother."

"Forgive me, please!" cried Mrs. Chan. "I did this because my baby died a month before."

"But that's no excuse for you to do such a bad thing," said Judge Pao. "And you..." he continued, looking at Mrs. Wong, "You should teach your child not to be so picky with food anymore."

"Thank you, Judge Pao!" yelled Mrs. Wong and she hugged her baby with her husband and went home. Mrs. Chan was sent to jail by the policemen.

The Road Not Taken

Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten (Primary Section), Chan, Tsz Huen Evelyn – 12

Rumors of Judge Pao curl around the streets of China. Some say they are myths and madness, legends and lies. Ming was one of them.

A dim flicker of light meets Ming's eyes, arousing him from dreamless slumber. He wakes up in a daze, sullen eyes disoriented in a haze of color. Someone is calling, a curious sound that pulsates through his head...

Terror grips his chest, his head reeling for the thirst for sight. Finally, the mesh of images clear up miraculously. He breathes unsteadily before the shadows shroud his sight with impenetrable blackness, and the peculiar light burns out.

The distant voice rings again, louder. Ming's heart leaps with a yearning hope for a savior.

"Erase those dire hopes, child. Truthfully, I never thought I'd see one of my own here in the gateways to Hell."

Ming steps back, legs buckling from inescapable fear. Again, the fury of sudden flames ignites the barren floor in a circle, burning through the soles of his worn shoes. Pain sears through his bones and anguished cries strangle his throat. He looks up, the light of the fire ricocheting off the present surfaces. The stone walls are broken down, dusted with ash and soot, and traces of burnt-out fire are obvious to be acknowledged. Everywhere he looks is devoid of color, until he sets eyes on his true peril. A looming, tall figure sits on a throne of blood and bones.

It can't be, he thinks frantically, could the legends of his lineage be true?

"Are you...you...what they say?" he stammers, perspiration stringing beads on his forehead, tormented by the sweltering heat, "Judge Pao?"

"Indeed I am," the figure – Judge Pao, replies, breaking into peals of almost derisive laughter, "this is my duty after my long career of dueling crime."

He rises from his throne, and Ming gasps. The timely tales the elders spin, they were right. They always have been.

Time seems to slow, and a barrier of stillness sets between them.

"You're here, Ming," Judge Pao chuckles ruefully, piercing the silence, "because you didn't believe, didn't make the most out of your legacy. You could've done great things, yet you are cast aside. Now the roads lead you here."

The flames diminish, and Ming pants, eyes burning through the swathes of darkness.

"Wait...what?"

"I know it all, Ming, especially since you carry my blood," Judge Pao explains with a sigh. "I'm rather displeased with how you chose your path in life. Running away to create your own villainized identity, to steal and..."

He trails off, obviously not wanting to visualize that picture.

"You were young, innocent, and had no idea what you were stringing yourself along...but you chose to abandon your family's crime-corruption duties, which strove for the good of the world. Then, in the cruelest stroke of fate...your life ended in terms of the most twisted of ways. You sacrificed yourself to crimes."

Remnants of the past remain scattered in Ming's river of thought, and he desperately tries to remember. Until realization hits him like a tidal wave.

Ming died.

He remembers the scars from wicked swords that slashed his skin like paper until he took his last breath. They stung from the memory as he traced his fingers along those open, fresh wounds. His demise was at his own hands. He remembers his family's pain, and the look on his mother's face, forever embedded in his memory. He can only imagine how much she mourned him, despite it all. He lost her trust the night he left.

How the sky has cursed him to realize that only now, in the aftermath of everything he had ever set his mind on, just minutes before death lulls him to the other side.

And Ming remembers it all. He doesn't know what to say.

Judge Pao draws a breath, and it feels like the room is falling with an essence of somnolence as he stands warily from his throne. "Ming," Judge Pao says quietly, obsidian eyes gazing at him, "you ended up where fallen kingdoms now reside. Tyranny, bloodshed, and defeat. They all wanted glory, but glory is fleeting when the price of it all is hatred.

"Most people are like that, heedless to the power of their desires. So drunk on power and pain, they forget that no true hero can fabricate their legacy unless they truly earned it themselves."

Ming doesn't sneer at the remarks like he used to. He is not unfazed or unperturbed, like when he listens to endless warnings and cautions. Quite the opposite, he understands.

“It’s too late,” he whispers begrudgingly, “I was vindictive, angry, bitter. It seems my story has come to an end after all, and time has finally allowed the end to its shame. I won’t cause any more suffering, to anyone else.”

“Time, the most complex device in all of eternity. You can’t turn over its hourglass, yet it is always waiting for you, forevermore,” Judge Pao remarks, “your story isn’t over yet. You can go on the road not taken. The first step is to heal yourself.”

Ming turns away, tears glistening in his eyes. The expectations, the neglect, the claims of him knowing nothing in the cusp of his youth. He muses over the recollections, for a moment. *What could’ve been? What could he have done right?*

“Now, Ming,” Judge Pao says faintly, “I grant you something that the universe rarely allows me to do. The ability for you to cross back into reality, your one final chance.”

Somehow his voice is dissipating, no longer clear enough for Ming to fully comprehend. “Fight the good fight” is what Ming hears last. They reverberate incessantly, once again.

Judge Pao and the lessons he taught still ring true to many if not all. Many say they are tried and true, sound and sensible.

Ming will always believe in his wise words, no matter what.

New Tales of Judge Pao

HKCCCU Logos Academy, Sage, Elaine Lang-en – 10

As the pale light of a waxing moon sailing across the Hong Kong night sky shone down on her, the crescent moon-shaped birthmark on Judy Law's forehead suddenly began to tingle madly. Sometimes, she wished it wasn't there, and she wished that her classmates wouldn't make fun of her for it so much. Her vision blurred and she lost consciousness...

She awoke in a strange place, it was vast, white and endless. Before her, a translucent body appeared! It said, "Judy, blessings be upon you, dear child."

"Huh? Who are you?" she asked, confused. Then, she noticed a matching birthmark on the spirit's forehead! The spirit chuckled softly, "Why, I'm Judge Pao! You're my descendant. The first descendant to inherit my powers!"

"W-w-where am I? W-what powers? Why —" Judy stammered.

"Hush, I'm sure you have a lot of questions," he interrupted. "When I was your age, I discovered I could talk to the dead. This place between worlds is where the living and dead commune. I decided to help people solve murder mysteries with my powers. But I was poisoned by one of the murderers. At long last, I have a descendant with my powers! Although your surname isn't Pao, being descended from my granddaughter," he continued, smiling affectionately, "your birthmark proves your lineage."

He added, "You can call me Grandpa Pao."

Judy was dumbfounded. It was a lot to take in.

Smiling kindly, he went on. "There is a serial killer at large — and the murderer is none other than a descendant of the man who killed *me*. Your destiny is to use your powers to avenge me and all his victims. You'll become a magnificent crime-fighter and judge, renowned for your good deeds and sought out by everyone in need! I'll train you to master your powers, and you will be acknowledged as Judge Judy!" Judge Pao exclaimed, his translucent eyes shining with pride.

"Well... that does seem pretty exciting, and it *would* feel wonderful to have people *like* me, and it would also feel *great* to help people, but... I'm not sure about saving all of China from an evil murderer and bringing him to justice! I'm only thirteen!" Judy cried, a little flustered.

"Don't worry, sweetheart," Judge Pao soothed her. "I believe in you. Remember, I too was a mere child when I first began this journey." Judy sighed but nodded gratefully. She was overjoyed to have somebody who not only loved her and cared about her, but also had all the time in the world for her, unlike her loving but worn out single mother. She hugged him, although her arms went right through him. Just then, her birthmark tingled softly, the surrounding whiteness grew blindingly bright, and she found herself back in bed.

Every night after that, under Judge Pao's supportive guidance, Judy would hone her powers and talk to spirits in the white void. She became a master at investigating and solving mysteries, using her powers to question the serial killer's victims. One night, Judge Pao appeared before her. "You are ready," he declared solemnly. Breathing deeply, Judy smiled at her loving 'grandpa'. It was time to bring an evil man to justice.

Using her hard-saved pocket money, Judy bought a train ticket to Shenzhen, the scene of the last murder. Judge Pao had taught Judy to press hard on her birthmark with two fingers, thinking of him, and he would materialize as a hologram only Judy could see and hear. She was relieved to have him with her.

When in bustling Shenzhen, by pressing two fingers to her birthmark, Judy could hear spirits whispering to her and guiding her towards the murderer's location. She spotted a suspicious figure. His jacket hood fell back, revealing his head briefly before he put it up again. A wig and sunglasses disguised his brooding face, but Judy could never miss the monster she had seen through the victims' dead eyes. *You were born for this*. She reassured herself. Taking a deep breath, she stealthily pursued after him, Judge Pao following. He entered an old building, went to a flat and picked up the lock, pushing the door open. Watching intently, Judy called the police and reported where she had found the serial killer and that someone was in peril.

"Well, well, look who we have here," he rasped menacingly. A pretty young woman turned around to look at him. Recognizing her ex-boyfriend, she frowned, demanding, "What do *you* want?" With a grimacing smile, the

murderer drew a blade from his belt and advanced towards her. “To *kill* me?” the woman snorted, “Enjoy prison!” She spat at him. With a soft, harsh sneer, he lunged at her. Judy gasped, shouting “Stop!” just as he was about to plunge his knife into her chest.

The murderer whirled around, finding himself face to face with Judy’s smartphone. She had been recording and live streaming to a police website. He snarled through gritted teeth. Judy was scared. What if the police didn’t come in time? The murderer charged at Judy, knife in hand. Judge Pao instinctively stepped in front of her, protectively but in vain. Just then, several policemen rushed in, tackling the evil man to the ground. Judy and Judge Pao heaved sighs of relief. The police thanked Judy as they took the serial killer away in handcuffs.

Judy’s heart was still racing as she rode the train back home. Judge Pao floated alongside her, nodding his head with pride, confident that his legacy was secure in the hands of Judge Judy. It was long past midnight when she finally arrived home. Her mother was still up waiting frantically for her, having seen Judy on the news. Judy told her everything. “I’m so *proud* of you!” gushed Judy’s mother, embracing their newfound lineage. They hugged each other tightly, tears of love and joy welling from their eyes. For the first time in her life, Judge Judy felt like the luckiest girl in the world.

New Tales of the Judge Pao

Kowloon City Baptist Church Hay Nien Primary School, Wong, Yi Kwan – 12

One day, a woman who was in desperate need of help went to Kaifeng mansion to report a crime. The officials beat the floor with their rods while shouting ‘Wei...Wu...’. Then, a dignified man came out of the door gravely. His skin was as black as ink. On his forehead, there was a white crescent. His mustache reached all the way to his neck. He was Judge Pao.

Judge Pao sat down and asked the woman to narrate her case. ‘My name is He Nian’. In my village, there’s a rich man named Chen Fu who always pesters me by constantly telling me to be his wife. I courteously refused, however, he forcefully locked me in his house with chains. It was a miracle that I eventually escaped. The first thing I did was to run here for help.’ She said, while trying to hold back tears. ‘He Nian, relax! Go home first. I’ll help you fight for justice.’ Judge Pao replied. He then ordered Zhang Long, one of his guards, to take Chen Fu back for interrogation tomorrow.

The following day, Zhang Long arrived at Chen Fu’s house. When he entered the living room, he stood there stunned and speechless. Chen Fu was dead! His neck had obvious strangle marks and he’s still holding an antique vase. There was a crack on it. Weapons were nowhere to be found.

Zhang Long rushed outside to question the villagers there. An lady claimed that she heard He Nian and Chen Fu argued last night and He Nian indignantly shouted, ‘Back off, or I’ll kill you!’ Then, an obese man recalled, ‘Last night, I saw County Magistrate Wang and Chen Fu quarreling in a restaurant.’

Zhang Long brought both He Nian and County Magistrate Wang back to Kaifeng mansion. Judge Pao interrogated He Nian, ‘Last night, someone overheard you threatening to kill Chen Fu. Are you the murderer?’ ‘I admit I did say that but I swear I didn’t murder him. It was nothing but a threat!’ she cried agitatedly. At that moment, Judge Pao noticed the freshly scabbed wound on He Nian’s hand, and asked her, ‘When did you get that wound?’ ‘I got that when I was pulling Chen Fu.’ She replied.

Then, Judge Pao asked County Magistrate Wang, ‘Yesterday, somebody saw you and Chen Fu having a huge argument at a restaurant. Later on, he was murdered at home. Was this incident related to you?’ ‘No.’ County Magistrate Wang simply replied. Judge Pao found that County Magistrate Wang’s palm was bruised and there was also a wound on his forehead. ‘When did you get these wounds?’ Judge Pao asked. ‘The previous day, I got drunk with Chen Fu and accidentally fell to the floor and hurt myself.’ Wang replied.

Judge Pao thought for a while and said, ‘I have a method to find out who the real murderer is. In the murder scene, there were some blood stains on the antique beside Chen Fu. The blood was obviously from the murderer since no wounds were found at the dead body. I’ll drop each of your blood on this antique. If anyone’s blood can dissolve with the blood stains, then whoever that is, is the murderer. Now, you two can go home first. Tomorrow, I’ll send both of you to the scene of the crime for a blood test.’

Then, Judge Pao whispered something to his bodyguard’s ear.

At midnight, a person in black snuck into Chen Fu’s mansion. He was as sneaky as a black cat. As soon as that person found the vase, he instantaneously took out a wet towel from his pocket and started to wipe it. All of a sudden, the lights turned on. ‘County Magistrate Wang, you’re the murderer!’ said Zhan Zhao vociferously while pinning him down. Later, he was taken to the Kaifeng mansion.

Judge Pao asked County Magistrate Wang, ‘Why did you sneak into Chen Fu’s house at midnight?’ ‘Yesterday, you said that there was an antique vase at Chen Fu’s house. I am extremely fascinated with antique vases so I decided to go see for myself.’ Wang replied.

Judge Pao furiously said, ‘You wore black clothes and brought a wet cloth to break into a dead man’s house, just for taking a look at the antique vase? Actually, I didn’t mention what the antique is. How did you know it’s a vase? Your aim was to wipe the blood off the vase, wasn’t it? To be honest, the reason I deliberately told you there’s blood on

the antique is just to lure the culprit to show up. I bet the wound on your forehead was caused by Chen Fu hitting you with the vase during the fight while your palms were bruised when you strangled Chen Fu to death with a rope. I'm sure you're the murderer! Tell me, why did you kill him?

County Magistrate Wang lowered his head, 'You're right. Chen Fu was killed by me. I met him at the restaurant and requested him to sell his antique vase to me but he refused. I had no choice but to steal it from his house at midnight. However, I was found and a fight broke out. In a panic, I took a rope to strangle his neck but I really didn't want to kill him. He's dead because he's too weak...'

'Execute him immediately.' Judge Pao screamed.

County Magistrate Wang shouted loudly, 'My official position is much higher than yours. You don't have the right to exercise punishment at me!'

'No matter how high your position is. Whoever breaks the law, I will deal with in impartiality! Come on! Take out the Tiger-head guillotine!' Judge Pao bellowed. Finally, County Magistrate Wang was executed.

Due to Judge Pao's extreme honesty and uprightness, he gained the honorific title, Justice Pao. Up to now, he is still honored as the cultural symbol of justice in Chinese society.

Murder Mystery in the Mansion

Kowloon Rhenish School, To, Sum Yuet – 11

News had spread. The master of the Song Mansion was murdered last night, and the rumour was that one of his sons killed him.

It was the break of dawn, the sound of drums beating loudly at the front of the courthouse could already be heard. The person who beat the drums stepped inside and reported the case to Judge Pao.

‘I’ve been working as a maid in the Song Mansion for years... I just cannot believe that one of his sons could’ve murdered Master Song. But nobody else was in the mansion that time. It couldn’t be suicide either since he had planned to make his own will today, seeing that he’d die shortly from his sickness. He had discussed it with the family.’

Judge Pao had been listening carefully the last several minutes, then, rising from his seat, he said, ‘Very well, let’s head over to the mansion now.’

The maid led Judge Pao and Zhan Zhao to the mansion. They went to the primary bedroom – the crime scene – to investigate the death of Song.

In the middle of the bedroom was a wooden table. Song, the victim, was lying on the floor next to the table. On the table were a teapot, a goblet, and a pile of arsenic.

Judge Pao studied the pile of arsenic carefully. Then, looking into the goblet, he realised that there was some red powder – arsenic – left in the goblet and on its rim. Judge Pao showed this to the others.

‘Do you know anyone who buys arsenic in this mansion?’ he asked the maid. She nodded sadly and told Judge Pao that the youngest son, Jian had to take arsenic to cure this sickness he had from a young age.

‘The evidence here points to Jian. Do you think he might’ve done it?’ Zhan Zhao asked Judge Pao, who wasn’t sure himself.

Afterwards, Judge Pao invited the three suspects – Yi, Wen, and Jian – to have a chat in the dining room, to inspect their behaviour. Then, he told them about the arsenic he found in the bedroom.

‘I knew it! Jian was the one who killed Father!’ Wen shouted, pointing at Jian. Yi nodded in agreement. ‘Who else would be able to own arsenic themselves without suspicion?’

Jian looked aghast. ‘I only take arsenic as a medicine to cure my illness! Besides, there isn’t any remaining since last week and I’ve been meaning to buy it yesterday! And why would I even want to kill Father? How would that benefit me? Maybe you’re the murderer, blaming it on me before anyone uncovers the truth!’ he exclaimed. ‘Don’t forget, you were the one quarrelling with Father about borrowing money for gambling on the very same day!’

The two brothers continued arguing while Yi just stood there in the back watching them. His face was unreadable. It showed no anger or fear. Although he wasn’t smiling at all, Judge Pao swore, for one second, he could see a gleam of happiness on his face. But then, nobody else saw that.

‘– Look, if that’s it, why don’t you accuse Yi of murdering him to receive inheritance? We all know what Yi is. He might want to speed things up,’ Wen was saying. Yi widened his eyes in terror as he heard him. That didn’t go unnoticed. ‘Being the eldest son, of course, what else do you think I mean?’

Zhan Zhao leaned in closer and whispered to Judge Pao, ‘Who do you think is the murderer?’

‘Oh, I’m not sure about that. For what we know now, it can be anyone.’ Judge Pao looked at Zhan Zhao and asked, ‘Can you go to the local pharmacy and investigate? See who had bought arsenic to poison Song.’

He nodded and hurried off, leaving everyone else in the room.

Two hours later, Zhan Zhao returned to the dining room, and he had bought an old woman with him. ‘I’ve brought a guest.’ Judge Pao noticed Yi turned and dropped the goblet he was holding once he saw her. The woman saw him too and she looked scared. Even the maid looked appalled.

'She bought arsenic two days ago, and the only person besides her who bought it since last week was Jian,' Zhan Zhao informed Judge Pao.

Judge Pao asked Yi and the maid if they know the old woman. A went speechless and looked everywhere but into the eyes of Judge Pao. 'I met you twenty years ago. The night you gave your son to Master Song,' the maid addressed the woman, and turned to Yi.

'Why were you buying arsenic?' Judge Pao asked the woman. He could see Yi shaking his head frantically. He had already given himself away.

The old woman took a deep breath and said softly, 'Yi is my son, but I didn't have the ability to raise him. We were separated after sending him away. Anyways, we keep in contact, and Yi consistently seeks for my help. Last week, he told me to secretly buy arsenic for him, but I never thought he would do this.'

Yi stared at his mother in disbelief. However, he looked calm – even murderous – instead of fearful. 'Of course, I have underestimated your skills, Judge Pao. Very well, if you want the truth, here it is.' He looked angry for a second and continued, 'Song adopted me, which means I am not his blood-related son, that I couldn't receive his inheritance. I must kill him so that nobody will find out the truth, and as the eldest, I will get to inherit all his property. By using arsenic, I can blame it on Jian.'

Before anyone else could move, Zhan Zhao grabbed Yi to prevent him from escaping, and took him to the courthouse.

Judge Pao solved another case, and this, along with all the other ones he had solved before, will be heard by everyone through all generations.

Judge Pao Outsmarts the Murderer

Kowloon Rhenish School, Tse, Man Chun – 11

Two men were riding a carriage to Kaifeng City. Suddenly, their horse stopped. They felt strange so they went down to see. When they went down, there was a noise. It was footsteps. They can hear that the footsteps were getting closer and closer.

In Judge Pai's court, Judge Pao and his subordinates were all in their position to judge the next case. Instead of adults, a child came in. 'What seems to be the problem?' asked Judge Pao. The child answered, 'Lord Pao, today when I was walking back home from the market, I saw two dead bodies lied on the ground. I think they got killed by someone with a knife when they were going to Kaifeng City to find you.' Judge Pao's advisor Mr. Gongsun said, 'This isn't an easy case. We need to go to the crime scene to look for details and clues.'

When they arrived at the crime scene, there was a lot of people gathering around. Judge Pao went up to see if there are any clues. After he examined the two corpses, he gasped in terror. His bodyguard Zhan Zhao asked, 'Lord Pao, what seems to be the problem?' 'Over twenty cut wounds were found on the corpses and these two are the people who I invited to our court for a case of human trafficking. Despite they are not a good person, they have the right to life. The murderer needs to be punished by the justice of law!' cried Judge Pao. 'Well then, we need to start looking for more details and clues to find out who is behind all of this!' said Mr. Gongsun.

After a while, one of Judge Pao's bodyguard Ma Han found something. He shouted, 'Everybody come here, I found some footprints which might lead us to the murderer. We just needed to follow them. Judge Pao ordered everybody to follow the footprints.

The footprints lead to an old and abandoned warehouse. Everybody walked inside. There was spiderwebs everywhere. It was horrible inside. They all thought how could someone live or hide in such a place.

They started to search the place. The warehouse was huge. They need to spend a lot of time to search the whole place.

After a few hours, they still couldn't find a single person. When they all thought it was hopeless, Mr. Gongsun saw a deep line on the ground. They took all the things off it. It was a hidden door. They opened it and saw a ladder. They climbed down it slowly.

Inside was huge. There was a giant goat statue in the middle. Their eyes were all caught on the statue that they didn't notice two eyes were spotting them at the back in the darkness.

Then, the two eyes disappeared into the darkness. There were some words on the wall. It was written by ink – 'I have been baking bread for years and years. I am so angry..... I needed to.....They need to pay the penalty.....' Some words were blurred. 'I think the person who wrote this might be an old baker.' said Mr. Gongsun. 'We need to find him quickly.' said Judge Pao.

According to the track of carriage, Zhan Zhan led Judge Pao and the fellows to trace the murderer. Finally, they reached a cave. Judge Pao shouted, 'Anybody here?' An old man walked out slowly and said in a deep voice, 'What bread would you like, Judge Pao?' Judge Pao asked, 'No, I just want to know have you been to an old warehouse?' After Judge Pao asked, the man started to become nervous and his whole body was sweaty. 'Uh.....No.' the man said nervously.

Suddenly, he took one of his bread knife out and wanted to kill Judge Pao. Luckily, Zhan Zhao stopped him. They started to fight. Zhan Zhao defeated and seized him easily. The man was escorted to Judge Pao's court.

In the court, the man knelt on the ground and faced to Judge Pao. He disclosed his name was – Hao Shang. Judge Pao asked him, 'Any explanation at this moment?.' Then, Hao Shang began to tell his miserable story "Twenty years ago, I got married with a woman in Jing City. I worked as a baker and got rich. We had a child one day. My life was happy until the war started. That time, I was forty years old. One day, thousands soldiers charged into my

village. My wife and son died in the war. After the war, I didn't want to bake but two men said, 'Nobody can take your job, you must do it for us!' I asked, 'Well then, Can you give me an assistant?' The two men replied, 'Sorry, all bakers died in the war.' Afterward, the two men forced me to do with a sword. If I did not obeyed their order, they will kill me. Few months later, I found that the men sold my bread to the enemy for earning money, so I was extreme angry and got very mad. Then I started to train and built a hideout to get my revenge plan."

After, Judge Pao heard Hao Shang's story. He was very touched but also angry. He said, 'Even your story is touching, you can't just got revenge and kill anybody. They should be punished by law, not by you! Since you killed the gangsters, you must be sentenced to death. Wang Zhao and Ma Han, take out the Dog Guillotin!'

Wang Zhao and Ma Han took out the Dog Guillotine. Zhang Long and Zhao Hu put Hao Shang's head under the chopper. At this time, Hao Shang closed his eyes and found his wife and child waving hands to him. Judge Pao threw out the execution sign and the Dog Guillotine shut down with a loud bang. The guards shouted, 'Wei Wu.....'

Judge Pao Investigates

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee, Charlotte – 10

No one else in the crowd had scanned the area for possible threats and suspects like he did. No one else had taken note of an absence of clues like he had. No one else in the crowd knew how to find out the truth. He was Pao Qing Tia and there wasn't a mystery he couldn't solve. And the murder of Jin Lihua and the missing coronation seal was no different.

Judge Pao was lounging in his armchair in the sitting-room in his dressing gown, reading the DiBao and sipping his morning cup of tea, as per usual, when he came upon a rather curious article. It was a day after Emperor Zhenzong had passed and the whole Song Dynasty was still in shock. The article read, 'Trusted servant and guardian of the Royal Seal found dead in room'. The Royal Jade Seal, to be used at Renzhong's coronation, was missing. A reward of 1,000,000 pieces of gold Yuanbao if found. "Hmm." "A bit odd, that this was to happen exactly the day before the coronation." Pao sat up from the armchair, "Since I do have a bit of spare time, I suppose it can't hurt to help out." He sent a post message to his assistant. "Zhen Zhao, we've got a case on our hands."

"Judge Pao, thank you for coming with us to investigate this case. We'd be happy to answer any questions you have." The police led Pao to the crime scene. "Jin Lihua was killed in this room, with the door locked and windows closed from the inside." Pao stood on the threshold, examining the scene. "When exactly, did this happen?" "We don't know as the door was locked. However, we discovered this at around eleven o'clock in the morning." "If it was locked, how did you know?" "We received a report at the police station by one of the court officials. I assume you're familiar with him — Li Qiang? He told us someone died inside the treasury." Pao nodded without saying anything. Li Qiang was a "bent" court official known for supposedly planting fake evidence in crime scenes, but never getting punished during trials. Of course, there was no real evidence whatsoever to support this, but just multiple coincidences were enough for people to conspire about where his loyalty lay. "Clues show that Jin Lihua was bludgeoned to death, but there's no weapon." Zhen Zhao explained. Scattered on the floor was a comb engraved with jade, a blue rubber band and muddy footprints leading to a wall. "Who'd you think did it?" Zhen Zhao asked. "Don't you find it peculiar that Li Qiang somehow automatically knew the seal was missing and Jin Lihua was murdered even though the room was completely locked so well that the police had to break open the door just to get in? And what about the blue rubber band next to the body? I saw one on Li Qiang's wrist the other day. "It is suspicious, indeed. But he's innocent until proven guilty. There's no direct evidence that points to him. Besides, it is unjust to accuse someone of committing a crime because you don't like them."

Rustle. A paper flyer blew in front of him, advertising waterproof paper, except that apart from the title, the paper was blank. Must be a trick, Pao thought. He grabbed a candle and held the piece of a paper above it, letting the flickering flames reveal a possible secret message. Faint letters spelled out, 'Meet me in the library at 1am'.

Judge Pao could feel that whoever the people here were, they knew that he was there. The room was as silent as a grave and both Pao and Zhen Zhao were too afraid to make any kind of sound, in hopes of remaining undiscovered while trying to "spy" on the suspicious-looking note writer. "Do you have it?" A disembodied, gravelly voice asked. "Yes. I even have a few others." The voice reminded him of Li Qiang — honeyed yet nasal. "Good. We have a buyer." "Who, may I ask?" "None of your business," they snapped.

Zhen Zhao sneezed and both of them instinctively drew in their breath. It's over now. They had been discovered by the plotters. Thump. One step. Two steps. Three, four and five... Li Qiang's footsteps echoed around loudly in the library. Pao Qing Tian could feel someone's breath on his neck.

Li Qiang gritted his teeth. "You'll never find the seal."
"I don't think so," Judge Pao whispered, leaning forward.

They both raised their guards as Pao and Li Qiang executed an overhand cut. Pao Qing Tian parried with lightning speed. Pao once more parried Li Qiang's swing from the opposing side. They continued until Pao began to recall his training from when he was little and realised he wasn't already dead. He started thinking and acting, as opposed to just responding. Li Qiang carried on making overhand cuts. The next time this happened, Pao raised his hands up high and aimed for Li Qiang's head. Despite missing his target by a few centimetres, Pao succeeded in lightly poking Li Qiang's forehead with his sword.

"I yield." Li Qiang muttered. "Good. Now confess. Where did you put the seal?" Zhen Zhao asked. "We never stole it in the first place. It's still in the room. We just pretended we did to cause a distraction." Pao sheathed his sword. "Alright then."

It had been a few weeks since they had spied on Li Qiang and his fellow plotter and Judge Pao was still trying to unravel the mystery of the seal. Still in the room... blue rubber band and muddy wall footprints... that's it! They created a secret trapdoor, then hid the seal inside with footprints as clues to discover!

5 days later, in the high court.

Judge Pao banged his gavel. "Li Qiang, I hereby sentence you to punishment by beating and 11 years in prison for past cases of fraud, robbery, murder and high treason."

At last, justice was served.

New Tales of the Judge Pao

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Leung, Song – 10

In the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1122) there lived a government official who was honest and righteous to the utmost degree. His name was Bao Zheng and everyone called him Bao Gong (Lord Bao). He was the man with a long beard and a thick eye brown. He also has a mole that shape like the moon. When Bao Gong was in his late forties he was appointed Magistrate of Tian Chang country in An Hui province. During his term, he not only upheld the laws in a justice and strict way, he was also very good at solving many legal cases. Because of that, many evil people were punished and many innocent people in wrongfully mindset were changed from the justice. Unfortunately, Bao Zheng died inside his office at the age of sixty three. He was buried in Anhui Hefei province. His grave was 1200 meters square in area.

We had seen a lot of movies about Bao Zheng. They seemed farfetched and unreal. In real life, Bao Zheng trialed some case that is worth to reflect. Let me share some of them with you.

One time there was a woman who came into Bao Zheng's house and said, "Bao Zheng, Please help me! Last year, My husband and I went to Beijing to have an exam with our son in order to get a better job and have money to pay for the bills for our house. But my husband and son were killed by a man called uncle Guo after the exam. He is now trying to kill me. Please help me...please!" After hearing what the woman said, Bao Zheng was pitiful for that woman. So he let her stay in his house and told the guard keep everyone out. The next day, Bao Zheng went to uncle Guo's house and found that he has moved to another place. However, he found two dead bodies in the well and knew that the two bodies are the husband and son of that woman. Then Bao Zheng asked the people if they knew where Uncle Guo went. They said, "He went to a place called Guangzhou and he said he would never come back." Few days later, Bao Zheng packed his stuff and went on a trip to Guangzhou. He also brought his bodyguards and the woman. After few weeks of trip, they finally got to Uncle Guo's house. When they arrived, there was a man in a white shirt and he had a long beard. He looked very old. Then Bao Zheng asked the woman, "Is that Uncle Guo?" And the woman said, "Yes! That's him!" Then Bao Zheng asked his bodyguards to catch him. When they caught uncle Guo they asked him to go to Bao Zheng's court and arrested him as a murder case. When they arrived the court, Bao Zheng said, "You need to be honest about what you say next!" Then Bao asked, "Are you the killer?" Then uncle Guo said, "Of course not!" Then Bao said, "But we found two dead bodies in your old house." Then Guo said, "Really! But I didn't kill anyone! That means someone killed somebody there!" After that, Bao said, "But a woman said you killed her husband and her child. How can you prove that you didn't kill those people." Then Guo started to be scared and said, "No... I didn't, I don't know that woman." "But we found your fingerprints on the dead body. You can't say that you didn't kill them, right?" Guo said, "Sorry Bao Zheng, I know I was wrong. Please don't kill me!" Bao said "You are now a killer so we must use the death penalty. But because your terrible killing way, we will use the most painful death penalty. But we will send you to the jail first." Guo said, "no please no..."

The next day, Guo's brother came. He said, "Can I bail Guo please?" Then Bao said, "No, because it was a big case and we have already issued the death penalty. And he will die tomorrow. You may come tomorrow so that you can see him for the last time." Guo's brother cried, "No! No! I can't let my brother die. No!"

The next day the death penalty began. Before that, Uncle Guo's brother said, "Brother, I hope you can have a great life in the heaven and we will miss you forever. I came here because I want to see you for the last time. I love to be your brother and I hope that I can still be your brother or your family member in our next life. I love you brother." Uncle Guo was so touched and cried, "I love you too brother!" Then the executioner cut off uncle Guo's head. That next day, the town was very peaceful and there were no murder cases anymore. Everyone in that town was very grateful to Bao Zheng and he became a hero.

Bao Zheng was a sympathetic person. In the above case, you can see Bao Zheng was a brave person. He offended a lot of noble people. In the history, Bao Zheng was being poisoned by the king. Bao Zheng didn't have a noble life, but his honesty and integrity was respected by the posterity. Although he died so long ago, the kindness of his heart and spirit never wiped out. In the present, people visit his grave as a respect for Bao Zheng. Hope you guys learnt to be a justice person after reading this article.