

# Mao Zedong

## Trimetrical Classic

The tiger averts its head,  
 The tattered lion grieves,  
 The bear flaunts its claws,  
 Riding the back of the cow.  
 The moon torments the sun.  
 The pagoda gives forth light.  
 Disaster comes to birth;  
 The olive is seen waving.

An Annotation by the Teaching and Research  
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### I. "The tiger averts its head"

The tiger refers to American imperialism, a paper tiger which possesses a ferocious side but also has a weak and impotent side. Over the past thirty years, U.S. imperialism has stationed more than a million troops all over the world, established over two hundred bases, initiated a war of aggression in Korea, nurtured Israel, and manufactured crises in the Middle East. Now, this tiger has discovered that if it continues to make mischief, it will face both internal and external opposition, and if its tricks misfire, it will fall into the abyss of defeat. Therefore, on the one hand, it is reducing [the number of its] troops stationed overseas and has withdrawn its troops from Vietnam; on the other hand, it is again mediating a Middle East peace [settle-

ment] in order to give the appearance of being peace-loving and to cloak its aggressive nature. Internally it has made appropriate concessions to the people and has made a public appeal to fight the economic recession. These things all demonstrate that the tiger has turned its head. But the "tiger averts its head" certainly does not mean that once it departs it will never return. It is possible that it has averted its head as well as its tail and has retreated to the mountains never to return. But it is also possible that after averting its head and catching its breath, it will draw back three steps, bare its fangs, and attack ferociously. It could attack small animals, or it could attack the great bear and engage it in a duel. Therefore, we ought to regard [the line] "the tiger averts its head" from two sides; it would be a good thing if the tiger were to return to its lair in the mountains, but if it is retreating only three steps to return to the attack, then rigorous preparations





**Chairman Mao at the historic Tenth Party Congress in August 1973.**

for defense are necessary. Thus, Chairman Mao hopes that we will all watch the development [of the situation] with regard to the Americans and increase our vigilance.

## **2. "The tattered lion grieves"**

The lion refers to Britain. In the past, this lion rushed about wildly. It was supreme on all the seas and called itself the king of all the animals. Even the tiger was three parts afraid of it. China was also wounded by it. When did it happen that this lion had already grown tattered beyond cure? It cannot even save its own

precious life—there is nothing it can do. It is extremely sad. Chairman Mao's passage refers not only to Britain but more broadly to Britain and the Common Market countries. He simply uses Britain, which likes to use the lion as its symbol, as their representative, because [the countries of] Western Europe all relied on colonies for survival, and now all their colonies have become independent. When the Middle Eastern petroleum countries made a loud roar, it almost shook down all these countries. Therefore, apart from sighing mournfully, what future does this tattered lion have now?



### 3. "The bear flaunts its claws"

The bear, of course, refers to the great Siberian black bear. This bear occupied Siberia and still wants to penetrate China's interior from along the Ch'ang-pai Mountains [so it can] occupy mountains and control forests as the king. The bear's claws are sharp, and its strength is very great, but it is extremely stupid and clumsy. [From] this passage of Chairman Mao's we can very clearly see that we certainly must not be negligent regarding an invasion by the bear and must put up a defense against its attack. In wrestling against it, we must also guard against its sharp claws. We must take into consideration its territory, large population, advanced science, and excellent equipment. We must respect it tactically but also see through [to] its weaknesses. [It is] stupid, but big. We must win with strategy. We should despise it strategically and in the end defeat it.

### 4. "Riding the back of the cow"

This passage refers to India. The Indians worship the cow as a deity. Chairman Mao's use of the cow as a metaphor for India could not be more appropriate. It is no better than a cow or a horse, for it is only [good] for people to ride and for pulling carts; it has no particular talents. The cow would starve to death if its master did not give it grass to eat. Now India is in the midst of famine. There is no grass on the ground, and it relies solely on its masters giving it dry grass to sustain itself. Even though this cow may have great ambitions, they are futile. At a deeper level, [this passage] says that to lead a cow, one grabs its nose, and having grabbed its nose, one can control the cow from running wild. This metaphorical image demonstrates Chairman Mao's penetrating insight that we should not be overly concerned with this cow which is being led by the new czars.

### 5. "The moon torments the sun"

The moon refers to the Middle Eastern countries. Arabs believe in the moon. Many Arab countries use the moon in the design of their national flags. The moon can symbolize the Arab world. These countries believe in Islam, which also uses the moon as a symbol. Thus, the moon refers to these countries. Torment can be explained as torment in reverse. In the past, the Arab countries were colonies and were tormented by others. Now the Arab countries use the same methods of those people to turn the tables and torment their past masters—the imperialists and colonialists. The scope of the "sun" is very broad. Chairman Mao uses this word to represent those countries which suffered from the oil crisis. Since Britain used to call herself the empire over which the sun never set, the sun could represent it. Japan uses the sun as the symbol on its flag, so the sun could also represent it. The United States is in North America,

[respectively]. When the moon rises in the Eastern hemisphere, the sun comes out in the Western hemisphere. Since the Arab moon has already risen, it is natural that the sun refers to the Western hemisphere. The sun thus represents the developed countries of the West, with the addition of Japan in Asia which uses the sun as a symbol on its flag. This is what is meant by the moon torments the sun.

### 6. "The pagoda gives forth light"

The pagoda refers to the Buddhist pagoda. All the countries on the Indo-Chinese peninsula are primarily Buddhist in their beliefs. According to superstition, it is a good omen if there is light emanating from the pagoda. Chairman Mao uses the pagoda as a metaphor for the struggles of the people in the various countries of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, and we can see from this passage that the prospects for the Indo-China peninsula are very optimistic. The fact that the pagoda is already giving forth light indicates that victory is already in sight and is just ahead. This is also a congratulation to the Cambodian people, because Cambodia has many pagodas, and the pagodas of Phnom Penh are well known.

### 7. "Disaster comes to birth"

The disaster is the suffering of calamity and war. This represents the continuing existence of the crisis of world war. Imperialism and revisionism and counter-revolutionaries bare their fangs and brandish their claws, and war may break out at any time. The saying "Ten [lunar] months of pregnancy [must lead to] birth one day" means that we must be fully prepared ideologically. Even in the best circumstances, there is still the possibility that war will break out. Given a sudden attack, war will break out like a child being born. Once its arrival is mentioned, it comes. The eruption of this kind of crisis is not accidental, it has been conceived for a long time and cannot be avoided.

### 8. "The olive is seen waving"

The olive refers to the olive tree, which represents peace. Chairman Mao uses these three characters to show that there are people who desire war and that there are also people who desire peace. There are people who hold knives, and there are people who wave olive branches. No matter how it is said, peace has already been seen as a hope. It does not matter if it is war that leads to revolution or revolution that puts an end to war. Peace can be hoped for but not begged for. It requires that the people of all the countries of the world struggle earnestly and strive for world peace. □