

# In the mirror of my heart

by Ji Xianlin

*Translated by McComas Taylor and Ye Shaoyong*

*Translators' note: Professor Ji Xianlin, one of China's leading public intellectuals, died in July 2009 at the age of 98. Widely hailed as the grand old man of Indian studies in China, he was also a prolific essayist and public commentator. He received many honours and awards from the Chinese government, and in recognition of his services to Sino-Indian relations, he received India's highest honour, the Padma Bushan, in 2008. A fearless opponent and outspoken critic, Professor Ji remained a 'true-believer' and ardent patriot to the very last. This essay was originally published as 'Wo-de xin shi yi mian jing-zi', in Niu peng za yi. Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2005.*

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When it comes to the passage of time, each person's heart is like a mirror and, of course, I am no exception. I regard myself as a somewhat sensitive individual, having a mirror for a heart. Although I dare not claim that it shows every fine detail, it is certainly not too dull. I believe that the mirror of my heart accurately reflects the situation as it was during nearly ninety years of the twentieth century and it can certainly be relied upon.

I was born in 1911, the year of the Xinhai Revolution. Two months and four days after I was born, the last emperor was called on to abdicate from the Precious Throne. For this reason, I often jokingly refer to myself as a young loyalist of the Manchu Qing Dynasty. By the time I was old enough to remember, country people could still be heard speaking respectfully of the 'Court' (which meant the emperor in the speech of rural folk), as if he was still in power. I had no idea what this 'Court' was; it seemed to be a person, but also seemed to be some kind of spirit. In either case, it was a thing of great prestige and authority. Such are the lingering images of the Qing Dynasty in the mirror of my heart.

My old home town, Qingping County, Shandong, is part of the city of Linqing today. It was a famously poor part of the province. Ours was an impoverished farming family. Both my grandparents died young and I never knew them, so a grandfather's affection is something that I never experienced. They left behind three sons, of whom my father was the eldest, although he was the seventh among his generation of cousins. The younger of my two orphaned uncles was adopted out to another family and his surname was changed to Diao. The two who were left behind, having no parents to look after them, were alone in the world and were dependent on the good will of others. It is difficult to describe the misery of their circumstances. It is unlikely that they ever had enough to eat. When they were so hungry that they had no alternative, the two brothers would go to the little grove of Chinese date trees at the southern end of the village to collect the rotten fruit that had fallen on the ground. At least this would take the edge off their hunger. I am not at all clear about this period of history, because neither of the brothers ever spoke to me about it. Perhaps because it was too frightful or miserable, neither desired to open old wounds, nor did they want subsequent generations to retain such horrible memories.

In any case, the brothers could no longer remain in the countryside; if they had, they would only have starved to death. By some means or other the two agreed to venture out to the big city to look for work and to make a living. The only large city within reach was Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, so off they went; a pair of inexperienced country lads arriving entirely without support in the hustle and bustle of the big city. They encountered untold hardships and experienced numerous setbacks. I know very little about this time as, probably for the same reason, neither of them ever spoke to me about it.

My uncle later managed to gain a toe-hold in Jinan. At best he was like a tuft of grass growing in a crack between the rocks, grimly clinging to life. The brothers then decided that my uncle would remain in Jinan to earn some money while my father would go home to look for farm work in the hope that one day my uncle would enjoy some form of success. Even if he did not 'return to his hometown wearing silken robes', at least people would look at him with different eyes, and he would win some respect for his parents and for himself.

One needs land to farm— this is a most obvious truism. But land is exactly what my family lacked. My grandfather had probably left behind a few *mu* of land from which my father, I imagine, managed to scrape together a living. The story of what he did with the land and how he managed to start a family remain a mystery to me, but it was at about this time that I came into the world.

Fate always leaves people a way out. Just at this time, or a little earlier, my uncle lost his job in Jinan, and was wandering through Guandong. With the last *yuan* in his possession, he bought a ticket in the Hubei flood-relief lottery. It turned out that he won first prize, which was said to be worth several thousand *liang* of silver. Our family became rich overnight. My father purchased sixty *mu* of land along with a well, and resolved to build a

large house in order to display his newly acquired wealth. At one point, however, there was a shortage of bricks. He announced to the entire village that if anyone was prepared to demolish his own house and sell the bricks to my father, he would pay more than ten times the normal price. 'If the reward is sufficiently high, someone will always step forward', as the saying goes. As other people's houses were torn down, ours went up. The east, west and north wings each had five large rooms, and the main entrance faced south, all of which lent the house a most imposing appearance. The two brothers had finally won that measure of respect.

This pleasant prospect was, however, short-lived, as my father was undone by his own generosity and forgot his own limits. Sometimes, when visiting the markets in other villages, he would spontaneously invite all the customers in the inn to be his guests. People say that, before long, those sixty *mu* of prime farmland had been sold off, the east and north wings of the newly built house had been demolished, and the bricks and tiles disposed of. These had been purchased as dearly as if they were pure gold and sold as cheaply as dung. The splendid illusion had ended in nothing: our family was poor once again.

From the time of my earliest memories, our family was severely impoverished. We would probably only have been able to eat 'the white stuff' (meaning wheaten flour) once or twice a year. We normally ate flat cakes made from red sorghum meal; even cornmeal cakes were something of a luxury. In spring and summer I would cut fresh grass or break off sorghum leaves and carry them on my back to my great-uncle's house where they were fed to his old yellow cow. Idling about there, I waited until I had eaten a cornmeal cake, which was like a little feast to me. In summer and autumn, two of my aunts from the Ning family who lived opposite us would always take me into the fields of neighbouring villages to glean ears of wheat and beans. I would hand over the miserable little handfuls of what I had found to my mother. I do not know how many of these handfuls she had to save up before she could manage to thresh out some grains and grind some flour so we could get a meal of 'the white stuff'. Naturally, I felt as if I were consuming some fabulous luxury, like 'dragon liver or phoenix marrow'. However, I never remember my mother eating a single mouthful: she just sat there watching with misty eyes while I ate. At that stage, how could I possibly have understood my mother's emotions? I vaguely formed a resolution that one day, when I was a grown-up, I would make sure that mother also got some of the 'white stuff' to eat, but as the saying goes, 'the tree wants peace, but the wind does not stop; the son wants to nurture, but the parent has passed on'. Before I was able to ensure my mother ate 'the white stuff', she had finally departed from us. This left me with a life-long psychological scar that I have been unable to treat; this has been a lasting regret.

There were fourteen cousins in my father's generation. Driven by poverty, six left for Guandong and were never heard of again. Of the five who remained, one was adopted out, as I mentioned before. Of these remaining five, only my eldest uncle had a son, who

tragically died young and I never knew him. After I was born, I was the sole male child: anyone in a feudal society naturally knows how much this implies. My uncle in Jinan had an only daughter. Once again the brothers came to some arrangement and I was sent to the city. Too young to understand the emotions that my mother must have experienced at that time, it was only many years later that someone told me what she had said: 'If I had known then that he would never return, I would have died, rather than let that boy go'. I never heard these words myself, but for the rest of my life they have been ringing in my ears. How can anyone every repay the kindness of their parents? The year that I finally left home I was only six.

No human life is immune from the twists and turns of fate. The path taken by an individual is sometimes not of that person's own choosing. Had I stayed at home in those days, my road would have been that of the impoverished farmer. Life may have been bitterly hard, but the risks would have been far fewer. What of the path that I follow today? I have broadened my horizons, come to know something of the world and of life, and enjoyed an underserved reputation. I have travelled the broad sunny highways, but I have also walked the narrow dangerous paths—sometimes rough underfoot, at others much easier to pass—right into my nineties. If I had been permitted to choose my own path all those years ago, which would I have chosen? It is impossible to say.

In the mirror of my heart is a lingering image of the time I left the village: a destitute rural family which, despite momentary prosperity, was immediately plunged back into poverty.

A whole new world appeared before my eyes when I arrived in Jinan. I need only give one example: when I saw the mountains of Jinan, I was both surprised and delighted. Until then I thought that mountains were simply very large pillars of stone!

My uncle naturally paid great attention to my education as I was the sole heir of the Ji clan. I attended a traditional nursery school for about a year, then enrolled in a modern school, Jinan Normal College Primary. Everything seemed to happen smoothly. The May Fourth Movement had just swept over Shandong, and the principal of the primary school was a modernist, who immediately adopted textbooks in the vernacular language. In one of these texts was a fable, 'The Arab's Camel', which has spread through many cultures, and which treats the topic of insatiable greed. By chance, my uncle caught sight of this, and suddenly flying into a rage, cried, 'How can a camel speak? This is pure nonsense! You need to change schools.' Accordingly I was sent off to the Modern Educational Primary School. It seems that changing schools was much easier in those days, almost as if there was no need to take the 'back door', or anything of that kind. I merely had to sit a simple oral test: the teacher wrote down the character *luo*, meaning 'mule'. I recognised it, unlike my relative who was one year older than me. I was immediately placed in upper first class, but he was

sent to the lower third. That one word gave me a one-year head start—such is life! At first, the texts were in classical Chinese, but later, following the trends of the time, they were replaced with Modern Chinese texts. Not only were there talking camels, but even the tortoises and toads were able to speak, so my uncle just gave up.

My uncle was a very talented man, but he had received little formal education. Living the life of a wandering vagabond, studying entirely on his own, he acquired both learning and ability. He could compose poetry in both *shi* and *ci* styles, he could write, he could carve seals, and he had read many of the Chinese classics. In view of his origins, it seems most improbable that he should have developed an interest in the rationalist schools of the Song and Ming dynasties—not only was he interested, he was uncommonly passionate about them, a fact which perplexes me even today. Whenever I saw him seated bolt upright, solemn and dignified, reading thoroughly dry books such as *Qing Dynasty Commentaries on the Classics*, I always felt that it was rather ridiculous.

Naturally, all this had a great influence on my education. Doubtless he wanted me, the Ji family's sole surviving sprout, to continue the line by means of a classical education. He regarded *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Annals of the Three Kingdoms*, *Tales of the Marshes* and all the rest as 'light reading', and strictly forbade them. Probably on account of some kind of reverse psychology, these were the very books I loved the most. I secretly read dozens of old Chinese novels, including *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, *Record of the Western Chamber*, and many others. Instead of going straight home after school, I would hide among the piles of brick and tiles to read. I even read by torchlight under the bedclothes. Several years seemed to pass in this fashion.

The formal education that my uncle arranged for me was another matter. When I was at Zhengyi School, he paid a teacher of Chinese to instruct me in the classical language after school, so I also read *Zuozhuan* and other classics. After I got home and ate dinner, I immediately set off for the Shangshi English Language Society, where I studied English far into the night. Several more years passed by as I pursued this daily routine.

It is quite clear that my uncle believed that 'Chinese learning should be the base', but did he also believe that 'Western learning is for practical application'?<sup>1</sup> On this point, I cannot speak so definitely. In any case, in those days everyone thought that learning something Western would help one climb the ladder and make money. This was a sort of pragmatic approach to 'admiring the foreign', but not to the extent of 'coveting the foreign'. The debate over things foreign and Chinese was obviously foremost in my uncle's mind.

I graduated from Zhengyi Middle School in about 1926 and passed the entrance exam to study at the Liberal Arts Senior High, attached to Shandong University, which had been established at Baihezhuang in Beiyuan. The teaching staff in this school could be said to have been the best of their time. Among the teachers were Wang Kunyu (Chinese); You

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<sup>1</sup> Two popular slogans of the time.

Tong, Liu and Yang (English); Wang (Mathematics); Qi Yunpu (history and geography); Ju Simin (ethics, also the principal of Zhengyi Middle School); Wanyan Xiangqing (ethics, principal of No 1 Middle School). Teaching Chinese Classics was Mr 'Great Qing Empire' (his nickname had such a ring to it that I have forgotten his real name); another was a member of the imperial academy under the former Qing regime. Whenever these two gentlemen taught the *Book of History*, the *Book of Changes* or the *Book of Odes*, they never needed to bring the texts to class, as they knew by heart all the Five Classics and Four Books along with their commentaries. All these teachers were outstanding. Taking into account the school's paradisiacal environment—lotus pools all about, weeping willows spreading under the sky—it was an ideal place for learning.

It was here that I began to consciously apply myself to my studies. I am a person who is highly susceptible to the influence of the environment. When I was in primary and junior high school, my level of achievement could not be considered bad and my name was always among the best few in my cohort, but I never topped the class. I was not very concerned about this, and went fishing and prawning just as I had always done. By the time I reached middle school, however, one of my Chinese essays received unexpected praise from Mr Wang Kunyu, and I also came top of the English class. It was not particularly difficult to score well in exams in the other subjects: one could do this easily enough simply by learning a certain amount by heart. As a result, for the first time in my life I topped the exam list and was the only one in the school with a grade average in excess of 95 per cent. At that time, Professor Wang Shoupeng, who had been the top-ranking scholar under the Qing dynasty, was president of Shandong University and also Provincial Minister of Education. He composed a couplet for me and presented me with a decorative fan bearing his own calligraphy. Attracting the attention of others in this way excited my vanity. From that time I began to take serious notice of the order of names in the examination lists and ceased to be quite so lackadaisical. Accordingly, over the next two years, I won first place in each of the four sets of exams, and my reputation 'caused the earth to tremble'.

During this period, the outside world was certainly not so placid. Warlords were constantly at one another's throats, and the turmoil so endemic that 'even the chickens and dogs found no peace'. The Hubei-Liaoning War, the Hubei-Anhui War: the situation changed from one minute to the next. Successive regimes followed one another on and off the stage. One year there was a ceremony to honour Confucius at Shandong University and all students from our senior high school were ordered to take part. The first time that I saw Zhang Zongchang, commander of the local Liaoning and Shandong armies at that time, he was wearing a mandarin's robe and jacket, while kneeling on the ground and prostrating himself respectfully. Who knows how many soldiers, how much money or how many concubines he had? These images remain with me to this day.

By 1929 under the banner of 'revolution', Chiang Kaishek, taking on the mantle of Sun Yatsen, put together some kind of new army and marched north from Guangdong. With the support of the Communists, he swept aside all before him like a tempest. As the wind sweeps away scattered clouds, his large force swept into Jinan. At this time, the Japanese militarists seeking to gain advantage from adversity, or to 'to rob the house while it was on fire' as the saying goes, occupied Jinan, and fomented the 'Third of May Massacre'. Our senior high school was closed down.

The image in the mirror from this period is a montage of feudalism, modern education and the warlords' endless battles.

The invading Japanese army occupied Jinan again, and the Nationalists retreated. As none of the schools were open, I spent the year living the life of a temporary refugee.

At that time, the Japanese army was of course the unchallenged ruling authority in the whole of Jinan. Like all immoral regimes, they appeared strong, but were in fact highly vulnerable. They were so terrified of the Chinese people that 'the whistling of the wind and the cry of the crane, even the grass and trees, all seemed like enemies'. Every day they felt as if they were facing a substantial enemy, and regularly carried out on-the-spot inspections and searches of private houses. As soon as we heard that the Japanese army was searching somewhere in the neighbourhood, there would be a furious debate within the family. Some would say that we should leave the front door open, but others would stridently oppose it. The former said that if we left the door open, the Japanese soldiers would say, 'What insolence! How dare you leave your door open!' and then they would draw their swords. The latter would say that if we closed the door, the Japanese would say, 'You must have something to hide, otherwise you would have opened your door to welcome the glorious arrival of the Imperial Army!', and they would also draw their swords. In the end, the door was sometimes open and sometimes shut, and we were always in a state of high anxiety, 'like ants in a hot wok'. It is impossible to understand such a predicament unless one has experienced it oneself.

I also had one personal experience of this kind: I had no school to go to, and I was acutely aware of the depth of Japanese hatred for Chinese students, who were considered to be the 'ringleaders' of the movement to burn Japanese goods in Shandong. For this reason, I shaved my head and dressed in the style of a shop assistant. One day when I was walking along Dongmen Street, I came face to face with a group of Japanese soldiers who were searching pedestrians. I knew that I could not escape, so I had no choice but to stay calm or face their merciless weapons. I stepped forward as if nothing were the matter. One soldier gave me a body-search and noticed that I was wearing a leather belt. As if he had made some marvellous discovery, he said with a malicious grin, 'You very tricky. You not shop boy. You student. Shop boy not wear leather belt'. With this, he hit me over the head

with his baton. Luckily I did not pass out, and I tried to explain that shop assistants were making money these days and some could indeed afford leather belts. He did not believe me but as we were arguing, another soldier who was probably his superior walked over to us. Hearing what the first soldier had to say, he seemed to be a little impatient and with a wave of his hand said, 'Let him go!' I felt as if I had escaped with my life from the jaws of death, or that I had just turned back from the gates of Hell. Only I know how much I sweated that day.

The image in the mirror of my heart for this year is of a temporary refugee who had been forced to bide his time.

In 1929 the Japanese army had retreated and the Nationalists advanced again. I was on the road in search of knowledge and a whole new world was opening up before me. Beiyuan Senior High School had reopened by now, and Jinan Senior High School had recently been established under the auspices of the province, and was the only advanced senior high in Shandong. I was admitted without having to take the entrance exam.

The school was run by a group of officials from the Nationalist Party and the air was so thick with the 'Party' as to be tedious. The general intellectual atmosphere, however, was bright and fresh. This was most apparent in the Chinese classes. Gone was 'Mr Great Qing Empire', the old books were read no more, and works in classical Chinese had been replaced with ones in the vernacular. Most members of the Chinese teaching staff were better-known modernist writers of the day. My first Chinese teacher was the martyr Hu Yeping. He very rarely stuck to the syllabus, but would spend every class promoting 'contemporary art and literature' and 'popular literature', which were in fact 'proletarian literature'. Many young people, myself included, found this very exciting. We set up a table in the public space in front of our dormitory door and invited everyone to attend a 'Contemporary Art and Literature Workshop'. We also planned to publish a magazine, for which I wrote an article entitled 'The Mission of Contemporary Art and Literature'. My essay contained a few passages on the so-called Marxist theory of art and literature liberally plagiarised from Chinese translations of Japanese works. These translations were like sacred texts to us, and although I do not suppose that I really understood them, the articles were filled with revolutionary indignation and catchcries, and were written in a most lofty style. But before my article could be published, the Nationalists issued a warrant for Mr Hu. He made a hasty get-away to Shanghai, but they caught and killed him two or three years later. My revolutionary fantasy burst like a bubble, and there was no more 'revolution' for me until 1949.

Mr Hu was followed by Dong Qiufang (also known as Dong Fen) who was regarded as a junior associate of Lu Xun. A graduate of Peking University, he had translated a book called *The Wave of the Freedom Struggle* for which Lu Xun had provided a foreword. He had somehow seen my article and believed that I had some 'gift' for writing, which in his opinion

was unexcelled in the class, or indeed in the school. It is only natural that I was somewhat carried away with my own importance.

Until this very day, in the entire long, slow passage of sixty years, irrespective of the research work I have been engaging in, I have never ceased writing essays. Leaving aside the question of their quality, I find that I am able to express my emotions in essays, to voice my joys, vent my spleen, and lift my aspirations. These benefits alone are not insignificant. I will never forget this revered pedagogue. This year, the image in my heart reveals something like a personal renaissance.

We graduated from the highest class of senior high in the summer of 1930. Several dozen matriculants travelled as a group to the capital to try for the examinations. In those days there were all kinds of universities in Beijing or Beiping as it was known: national, private, religious—the variety seemed endless. The quality was also very uneven and their ability to attract students varied greatly. The two ‘national’ institutions, Peking University and Qinghua University, were the most prestigious, as is still the case today. For this reason, no aspiring matriculant from anywhere in the country failed to register for the entrance examinations for these two great institutions. It was as if they had become a gate to heaven, but one whose threshold was frighteningly high. Out of dozens who applied, only one might be accepted. If the chosen one passed the examination, he would be like ‘the humble carp who became a dragon’. The year I applied for the entrance exam, there was another student from Shandong who had already sat it five times, but had failed on each attempt. That year he signed up again with us, but even on his sixth attempt he was unsuccessful. He experienced some kind of mental breakdown, and for the next week wandered around the Western Hills of Beijing in a daze before he finally came to. That was the end of this university dream, he returned to his old home town in Shandong and was never heard of again.

Naturally, I also applied for Peking University (Beida) and Qinghua, but the difference between me and the other senior high graduates was that I applied for these two schools only, as if I had great faith in myself. In fact, at that time I had simply not considered the options very carefully and acted more or less on impulse. Other students registered for multiple universities, including schools of the second rank, the third rank and even those with no rank. Some registered for as many as seven or eight. I have sat hundreds if not thousands of examinations in my life, from primary school right up to the highest levels of academia, but I have always been lucky with exams, and have never failed one yet. This time, the God of Good Fortune smiled on me again and I was accepted by both Beida and Qinghua. I became for a time the object of admiration in the eyes of some.

As far as I was concerned, however, Beida and Qinghua were like two delectable dishes—‘fish or bear’s paws’: which tantalising option should I choose? It was a most perplexing dilemma for a time. First I considered it from this angle, then from that, but I

could never reach a decision as to what my next move should be. In those days, the craze for studying abroad was no less than it is today, nor was I immune to it. From the perspective of foreign study, Qinghua was one step ahead, or at least that was the popular perception of the time. Following the crowd, I finally settled on Qinghua, enrolling in the Western Literature Department, which later became the Department of Foreign Languages.

In old China, the Western Literature Department of Qinghua University enjoyed a stellar reputation, mostly because the majority of the professors were foreigners. The lectures were naturally in foreign languages; even the Chinese professors mostly taught in a foreign language (in fact, in English). This was a very attractive feature. Most of the foreign professors lacked any profound learning and particular ability; I am afraid they would not have been capable of teaching middle school in their own countries. For this reason I did not feel particularly satisfied with any of the required courses in this department. On the other hand, the two courses which I either audited or took as electives I have not forgotten to this day, and I have derived life-long benefit from them. The one I audited was Chen Yinke's 'Buddhists Classics in Translation'. The elective was Zhu Guangqian's 'The Psychology of Art and Literature', which was effectively on aesthetics. Among the Chinese professors in this department, Ye Gongchao taught me English. His English was probably not bad, but he was conspicuously careless about his appearance, as if modelling himself on the semi-wild forest-dwelling sages of old. As a result he did not create a particularly favourable impression. On the other hand, Wu Mi's two courses, 'Comparative Poetry, East and West' and 'The English Romantic Poets' had a lasting influence on me.

In addition to these, I audited (officially or otherwise) classes from many other departments. For example, I used to listen to the courses of, among others, Zhu Ziqing, Yu Pingbo, Xie Wanying (Bing Xin) and Zheng Zhenduo, for varying periods of time. Some of my auditing activities were successful, others were not. The biggest failure was when I and a group of other male students were tactfully ejected from the lecture theatre by Bing Xin. The biggest success in auditing were Zheng Zhenduo's courses. He was generous, sincere, and devoid of professorial airs and cliquish tendencies. Through attending his classes, several young students, Wu Zuxiang, Lin Geng, Li Changzhi and myself included, developed a personal friendship with him. Along with Ba Jin and Jin Yi, he edited the large-format *Literary Quarterly*, which was a highly influential position in literary circles at that time. He even put us—even though we were non-entities—on the *Quarterly's* editorial board and made us special contributors. Our names appeared most impressively on the cover of the magazine, which was for me the highest honour. As a result, we became close friends with Zheng Zhenduo, in spite of the difference in our ages. Our friendship continued right up until his death in a plane crash in 1958. Even today, whenever I recall Mr Zheng, I cannot help but feel a little sad.

By this time the political situation was extremely tense. Chiang Kaishek was hell-bent on 'pacifying the interior'. The Japanese army had already taken Gubeikou, and was causing a great deal of trouble in the Northeast, of which no more need be said here. After the September 18 Incident, I joined the Qinghua students in blockading the railway lines and in a hunger-strike. We even travelled to Nanjing to present a petition calling on Chiang Kaishek to dispatch troops to oppose the Japanese. We were filled with fervour, but having been deceived by the dissembling Chiang, we returned crestfallen.

The attractive and placid Qinghua campus was in fact far from peaceful, as the struggle between the Nationalist and Communist students had flared up. At that time, Hu Qiaomu (whose original name was Hu Dingxin) was studying in the History Department in the same year as me. He was carrying out 'revolutionary activities', but they were in fact not particularly covert. The pamphlets lying in our wash-basins every morning were his doing. This was an open secret that he was behind it. On one occasion he came and sat on my bed in the middle of the night and tried to persuade me to join his organisation, but being of a very timid disposition, I did not dare to promise anything. I did however agree to teach in the night school that he had organised for the children of workers. This could only be regarded as a token effort, but I felt somewhat able to repay his favour of his attention.

The struggle between the Nationalist and Communist students was intense, but I am not familiar with the precise details. I was regarded as a neutral fence-sitter who leaned slightly to the left. I did not get involved, nor was I interested in getting involved, in this kind of tussle. In spite of their mutual animosity, I witnessed some collaboration between the two student factions. For example, both sides visited the villages in the districts of Shahe and Qinghe to propagate opposition to the Japanese. I took part in these visits on several occasions, and in my recollection, it seems that students who were inclined towards the Nationalists were also there. This was probably because young students tend to be very patriotic, and Chiang Kaishek was doing nothing to oppose Japan. The tradition of patriotism among Chinese intellectuals has a long and broad history, with 'deep roots and strong branches'.

In those years, my family's financial situation was far from secure. Whenever I returned to college after the annual winter and summer holidays, finding enough money for tuition fees and living expenses was always a terrible headache. As Qinghua was a national university, the tuition fee of forty *yuan* per semester was not high. These fees were more of a formality, because the university returned all the accumulated fees to the student on graduation to underwrite post-graduation travel. There was no charge for the dormitory, and living expenses were about six dollars a month, which was enough to ensure some meat at every meal. Even in these circumstances, I found it hard to make ends meet. I was the only student from my old home of Qingping County who was enrolled in a national university, and was therefore regarded as something of a 'county treasure'. Accordingly the

county gave me an annual bursary of fifty *yuan*. In addition, I used to write a few articles for money, and could thereby substantially reduce the financial burden on my family. This is how I spent four years in these rather straitened circumstances. At my graduation, I had my photograph taken wearing a hired mortarboard, thus bringing to a close my days as an undergraduate.

At that time there was a piece of doggerel called 'The rice-bowl question' doing the rounds. There was also a common expression to the effect that 'graduation equals starvation'. Except for a tiny minority who were the sons and daughters of important officials or wealthy merchants, everyone came up against the question of survival. This problem had occupied my mind ever since I had been in the third grade, and I was now facing the prospect of supporting my entire family financially. However, I had little aptitude for currying favour, and in any case I had no one to turn to. Late at night when everyone else was asleep, my mind seemed to boil over with worry, and I could see no way forward.

Soon it was the summer of 1934 and I had to leave the university. Like timely rain in a year of drought, the principal of my alma mater, Jinan Provincial Senior High, Mr Song Huanwu, sent someone to invite me to take up the post of Chinese teacher there. The monthly salary was \$160, which was more than double that of an assistant professor in a university. Most likely because I had published several articles, I was regarded as something of a writer, and of course any writer could certainly teach Chinese literature—such was the logic of the day. I was completely overwhelmed by this unexpected favour and my heart pounded like a drum. But I was from the Western Literature Department—could I teach Chinese literature in senior high school? Moreover, the previous incumbent had been 'racked' (student slang in those days for drummed out), indicating that the students might not be easy to handle. If I were to accept the position, I would doubtless be giving myself much trouble. I mulled over it, but being unable to decide, I dared not make any reply. Time, however, was pressing. The summer holidays were about to begin and I had to leave the university. In the end, I clenched my teeth and made a decision: 'If you have the courage to offer, I have the courage to accept'.

I started teaching Chinese literature at senior high school in the autumn of 1934. The principal treated me very kindly, and my relationship with the students was quite cordial, but my fellow Chinese teachers put me under a great deal of pressure. The three year-levels in the school were divided into twelve classes, and we four Chinese teachers took three classes each. But there was a catch: the other three staff members were much older than me; one was even of the same vintage as my own teachers. All had started off in science but were also old hands when it came to teaching Chinese, and they certainly did not need to do much preparation. Each of them took three classes in one of the year levels, so they only had to do one lot of preparation. On the other hand, I taught the remaining classes, one in each of three year levels, so I had to prepare for three different classes. The difficulty and

mental challenge of this is easy to imagine. As a result I felt depressed, even though my income was very good that year (the purchasing power of 160 *yuan* then is equal to approximately 3200 *yuan* today). The prospect of studying abroad had evaporated; the rice bowl that I held in my hands seemed about to slip away. It is impossible to describe how I felt at this time.

But the God of Fortune (if he exists) smiled on me. Just when I seemed to have no way out, Qinghua University signed an agreement with Germany to establish a student exchange program. I was absolutely delighted, and immediately wrote an application, which was eventually accepted. My emotions at this point were far beyond any that I had experienced on being accepted into university. 'There was an unprecedented feeling in my heart.' Anxieties that had accumulated over the years were swept aside at a single stroke, and the promise of lifelong security rang out. I now felt as if I already held in my hands a golden rice bowl, my own body was covered with gold, and that I would be able to achieve success whatever I did. I was invincible, and the whole world looked rosy.

Human beings, however, can never escape reality. My reality at that time was this: aged parents, domestic poverty and young dependants.<sup>2</sup> I had also reached the most important crossroads of my life. Which way should I proceed? It was a most difficult decision. The significance of this junction was without parallel for me. If I did not go forward, I would be fated to spend the rest of my days teaching middle school, and even this did not guarantee secure employment. The way ahead offered a completely different prospect. 'Before my steed, the peaches were in blossom; behind us was the snow. How could any man dare to look back?'

After a painful process of trying to resolve these conflicting emotions, and after close consultation with my family, I decided to proceed. Fortunately the original arrangement with Germany was only for two years, so I simply had to grit my teeth and manage somehow.

I left home in the summer of 1935 headed for Beiping and Tianjin, where I attended to the formalities for leaving the country. I then boarded the Transiberian for Berlin via Moscow. I felt like a second Xuan Zang, the Buddhist monk who travelled to India in the seventh century: 'in a strange land ten thousand miles from home'.

The image in the mirror of my heart from my university days, my teaching and right up until I left the country is one of great confusion and conflict: Chiang Kaishek's attacks on the Communists, the Japanese invasion, the constant turmoil on the political scene, and the polarisation of the student body.

The peaches were indeed in blossom before my steed, and from a distance they looked singularly attractive, but on closer inspection the situation was not quite so

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<sup>2</sup> The author married Peng Dehua in 1935. The couple had only four days before Ji Xinlin left for Germany. During this time, a son was conceived.

promising. I stayed in Berlin, where there were many students from China, for some months. Some took their studies seriously, but there was no shortage of individuals who spent their days idly. Many senior Nationalist figures, from Chiang Kaishek down, had sons and daughters 'studying' in Germany. These high-class 'insiders' looked down on us, and I treated this clutch of worthless individuals with even greater contempt, feeling that it was beneath my dignity to associate with them. This was clearly not the place for me. I left Berlin in the middle of the autumn for the little town of Göttingen. I was to reside in this famous seat of learning for seven years without a break.

The Germans gave me 120 marks per month, of which the rent accounted for 40 per cent or more, and food was about the same, leaving me with next to no spending money. I was much worse off than the students on government scholarships of 800 marks per month. Even though I lived in Germany for such a long time, I never took time off during the summer or winter holidays, nor did I do any travelling. One reason was my financial embarrassment, another was that I wanted to make the most of the opportunity, and I preferred to keep studying.

I had travelled all this way because I wanted to learn, but to learn what? At first I had no clear plan. I took Greek in the first semester, and it seemed as if I might study classical European literature. But I could not possibly keep up with the German students who had already done eight years of Latin and six years of Greek in middle school, and my resolve began to waver.

In my first semester, which began in the spring of 1936, I saw in the handbook an introductory Sanskrit class convened especially by Professor Waldschmidt. I was wild with excitement, because having heard Chen Yinke's lectures at Qinghua, I had always wanted to study the language. In those days, no one was teaching Sanskrit in China, and now that I had the opportunity when I least expected it, how could I not be excited? Accordingly I enrolled in Sanskrit on the spot. For a doctoral degree in philosophy in Germany, one needed three streams: one major and two minors. My major was Sanskrit/Pali, and my minors were English linguistics and Slavonic linguistics. Thus I set out on my journey along the road of higher education.

My scholarship ran out in 1937, the precise moment at which the Japanese army provoked the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and was greedily eyeing China and the rest of Asia with the intention of swallowing them whole. I could only think of my country and sigh— I had a home to which I could not return. But Heaven always provides, and the director of the Chinese department, Gustav Haloun, offered me the position of lecturer in Chinese. This was indeed a welcome respite from prolonged distress. Of course I accepted immediately and took up the post at once. The lecturing was not very arduous and I continued my own research as before. My studies were still based in the Sanskrit Research Centre, and I would

only occasionally go down to the Chinese department. This arrangement continued right up until I left Germany in the autumn of 1945.

The Second World War began in 1939. One would naturally expect that a conflict like this, murderous in its barbarity, with rampant slaughter and unprecedented cruelty to humankind, should by rights have reached to the very sky, shaken the entire earth, made every living thing tremble, and caused all humanity to blanch. Surprisingly, although I was by chance right at the edge of it, apart from hearing the rantings of Nazi leaders on several occasions—which was unavoidable in Germany at that time—it was as if Germany was half asleep and marched off to war without a murmur. The early victories filled the German people with wild enthusiasm, but each victory was also a blow to me. Every time they celebrated another win, I would have to take a sleeping pill in the night. With the passage of time, I developed insomnia, a life-long complaint that has weighed heavily on me for decades.

At first the war had little impact on my life, but gradually meat and butter were rationed, then bread, and finally all the other necessities of life. Without realising it, the screws were tightening on our daily existence. By the time people became clearly aware of it, the screws were very tight indeed. However, apart from the odd individuals who opposed the Nazis, I never heard a word of complaint from the townsfolk. The Nazi leadership in Germany ruled very cunningly, and the Germans are a rather unique people. They simply remained an enigma in my eyes.

Later, as the flames of war burned higher and Germany was blockades on all sides, supplies became scarcer by the day. I was hungry every day, and every night I would dream—I would dream of Chinese peanuts. Even as a child I was not very ambitious, and my taste in food was no exception. Those with heroic dispositions and stout hearts doubtless dream of swallows' nests and shark-fin soup. How could an unpromising fellow like me who dreams of peanuts compare with such individuals? When I was really famished, I truly felt as if I was in the realm of Hungry Ghosts and that I could swallow the whole world in a single gulp.

In spite of everything, I persisted with my studies and teaching. Apart from the hunger, there was very little aerial bombing to contend with at first, and I eventually completed my doctoral thesis. Prof. Waldschmidt had been drafted into the army by this time, and his predecessor, Emeritus Prof. E. Sieg, took over his teaching. He was an internationally renowned authority on Tocharian, having spent several decades mastering it. In terms of both his age and his feelings towards me, he was the grandfather I had never known. He was certainly determined to pass down to me all his expertise in classical Indian grammar and Vedic, and he most definitely wanted to teach me Tocharian, an offer I could hardly refuse. In Prof. Waldschmidt's absence, I passed the oral examination. Prof. Braun conducted the oral exam for Russian and Slavonic, and Prof. Lauder took the English exam.

After my successful completion, I continued to study under the supervision of Prof. Sieg. We would meet every day, and I would support this eighty-year-old German scholar as he made his way home through the snowy streets in the winter twilight. I forgot the war and forgot my hunger: the only thing in my mind was the old gentleman beside me.

Of course I also worried about my country and my family. The postal service had been cut off long beforehand. As Tu Fu observed in a poem, 'The flames of war have been burning for three months, and a letter from home is worth ten thousand pieces of gold'. But in my case, the flames had already been burning for three years, and a letter was worth one hundred times that amount. In fact it was impossible for any letters to get through. This greatly aggravated my insomnia, and gradually I increased the dose of sleeping medication that I took each night. Only my research work offered me any solace. By now the British and American bombers were daily visitors, but amid the hunger and the bombing, I still managed to complete several papers. The university had become a female domain as all the men had been rounded up for military service. Before long, however, the men started reappearing, but if they were not missing an arm, then they were missing a leg. The sound of crutches hitting on the floor echoed through the main lecture building, making an eerie symphony.

By now, every battle on the frontline ended in defeat. Although the Nazi leadership continued to boast shamelessly of its prowess as before, its words were hollow and were out of step with reality, 'like the mouth of a horse on the head of an ox'. To my foreign eyes, defeat was already inevitable, and no one had the power to avert fate.

What were the German people like? After ten years of observation and personal experience, I felt that the Germans are without doubt among the finest people on earth. They had a flourishing culture; their science and technology led the field internationally; and their great writers, philosophers, musicians and scientists had no comparison in any other contemporary society. Moreover, as individuals, they were upright and trustworthy, and everyone had an honest disposition. Politically, however, they were quite naïve and the majority sincerely supported Hitler. One point puzzled me greatly: Hitler was extremely vitriolic towards Chinese people and regarded them as the enemies of civilisation. Logically, I should have met with many difficulties in Germany, but in fact I never had the slightest problem. It is said the Chinese in America find it difficult to integrate into society there, but for the entire duration of my stay in Germany I felt that I was part of German society. I lived in a German home, and my German teachers, classmates, colleagues and friends always treated me as one of their own, without the slightest hint of prejudice. This is something that I will never forget.

How did such a people view the impending military defeat? They very rarely discussed the question of the war with me. They seemed indifferent to the extreme hardship of daily life and the acute terror of the bombing, and were somewhat lost and

apathetic. Right up until the spring of 1945 when the American forces took Göttingen and the Nazis were totally finished, the German people still seemed indifferent and had largely resigned themselves to adversity. In addition to loss and apathy, they seemed somewhat dazed and confused, as if they had suffered a blow to the head.

The great war which had shaken the world and had dragged on for six years was now finally over. As soon as I was able to steady my shaken nerves, I immediately thought of my homeland and my family. I had already been away for ten years, and deep in my heart I felt my country calling me home from abroad. After some negotiation, someone in authority in the American occupying forces agreed to send me to Switzerland by jeep. When the time came to part with my German teachers and friends, especially Prof. Sieg, I felt terribly sad. Seeing this elderly gentleman's forlorn expression and his shaking hands, we both knew that this would be our final farewell. I did not dare to look back as my eyes were brimming with burning tears. My landlady also wept copiously over me. Her son was away, her husband had died, and once I was gone, her house would be empty and she would be alone. She and I had truly depended on one another for the previous few years. How was she going to survive now? Nor did I look back when I bade farewell to her, but with tears in my eyes, I climbed into the American jeep. I composed a new poem, based on an old one:

I studied in Germany for ten winters.  
My heart returns day and night as I recall my old country.  
For no reason I cross the border into Switzerland.

Looking back, this foreign land has become my second home.

In the mirror of my heart, the image of these ten years includes the Nazi regime, the barbarism of the world war and a wanderer's yearning for home.

I reached Switzerland in October 1945. Having waited there for several months, I set off again in the spring of 1946. I sailed from Marseilles to Saigon with a British steamer that was transporting French troops. I spent the summer there before sailing back to Shanghai via Hong Kong. I had been away for nearly eleven years, and now I was finally coming home.

With an introduction from Chen Yinke, and with the support of Hu Shizhi, Fu Sinian and Tang Yongtong, I arrived at Peking University to begin work. I wrote to my old friend from Göttingen, Prof. Haloun, who was by then in charge of teaching at Cambridge University. I thanked him for his offer of a position there, but declined it, as I had decided not to return to Europe. I had already re-established contact with my family and had managed to send them some money. I felt deeply indebted to my uncle and aunt, and to my wife Peng Dehua. All had endured endless hardships while struggling through those eleven years. Soon our family would be complete again and we would happily press on together.

The Chinese civil war was raging furiously at that time. As communications were cut, I was unable to return to my old home in Jinan to see my family. Accordingly, I waited out

the summer in Shanghai and Nanjing. I paid a visit to Chen Yinke in Nanjing, and went to the Central Research Institute where I called on Fu Sinian. In the mid-autumn of 1946, I sailed from Shanghai to Qinhuangdao and then travelled by rail to Beijing, which I had first left eleven years earlier. Mid-autumn was crisp and clear, and fallen leaves filled the streets. My heart rose and fell inexplicably with the joys and sorrows of life. Yin Falu met me at the station, and temporarily lodged me in the Vermillion Hall at Beida. The following day I met with Tang Yongtong, dean of the College of Literature. Professor Tang informed me that according to the regulations of Beida and other universities, academics who had qualified abroad could not be appointed to positions higher than Associate Professor. Fu Sinian had said something similar in Nanjing, but I was overjoyed simply to be at Beida—how could I ask for anything more? Not long after, however, probably as little as a week or so, Professor Tang informed me that I had been made a full professor and director of the Department of Asian Languages. I was thirty-five at the time. I think I may have set a new record for the shortest-ever tenure as associate professor. This greatly exceeded all my expectations, and I made a resolution to work diligently and write actively, lest I squander all the effort that my teachers through the generations had expended in nurturing me.

The current political climate was particularly odious at that time. The Nationalists led by Chiang Kaishek had dropped all pretences and appeared to be corrupt and venal to the core. They openly gave and received bribes, ravished the landscape and generally took over where the Japanese army had left off. As the 'legal currency' lost value by the day, they adopted the ruse of printing up paper money in huge denominations, but soon this also proved to be completely worthless. People had to live in the most unenviable circumstances, and university professors were no exception. The salary that I had held in my hand lost value by the hour. Everyone furiously exchanged silver dollars for US dollars, and they would change these back into legal currency whenever they needed to make a purchase. A few silver dollars in the palm of one's hand always imparted a warm sensation, akin to a feeling of security.

Among the students, the battle between the forces of the new and the old raged on. The Nationalists were in their death throes and the progressive students attacked them fervently. At that time, there was a saying that 'Beiping had two liberated areas: one was the Democracy Square at Beida, the other was Qinghua campus.' On several occasions while living in the Vermillion Hall, I was threatened by thugs from Tianqiao who had been stirred up by the Beiping Municipal Branch of the Nationalist Party to break in and cause trouble. We used to barricade the entrance to our building with tables and chairs at night, and we were thoroughly on edge as we prepared to do battle. We felt that this was both despicable and ridiculous.

Everything that is corrupt always breaks down in the end: such is the law of evolution that applies to both human society and to the natural world. In the spring of 1949,

Beijing was finally liberated. My image of these three years is one of darkness before the dawn.

If I were to divide my life into two periods, I would usually describe them in this way: the former period was the old society, thirty-eight years in all. The latter period is the new society: how long this period will be, I cannot say. I am not yet contemplating the ascent of the Mountain of Eight Treasures<sup>3</sup>, but I cannot say how long I will live.

Why do I divide my life into two periods? The contrast between the two societies is so great that they are separated by a vast chasm. Along with the middle-aged or older intellectuals who stayed behind in Mainland China and neither went abroad nor fled to Taiwan, I did not really understand the Communist Party, nor was I particularly attracted to Communism, but we knew all about the Nationalists. Accordingly, when the liberating army marched into the city, we welcomed it with great excitement. We hoped and indeed felt that the world had changed. In the period immediately following 'liberation', politics seemed honest and wise. This was like a breath of fresh air, and many of the early measures won popular support. Much of the 'polluted water and contaminated soil' left over from the old regime was swept away. We all felt that better days lay ahead and that felicity had descended on the world.

We would, however, have to undergo a period of adjustment. I do not know how intellectuals older than myself really felt, but in my own case, at forty and just on the verge of middle age, I had many mental obstacles to overcome. At first I hardly opened my mouth to shout slogans such as 'Long live!' at mass meetings. Even small things like swapping my scholar's gown for a Mao suit felt very strange, to say nothing of bigger changes.

The adjustment period was not very long for me, and I did not experience any particular difficulties. I immediately felt as if I were a changed man. Everything seemed very positive and worthy: the sky was bluer, the grass greener, the flowers redder and the mountains clearer. The whole of China was opening up like a gorgeous rose; the Chinese people now had a splendid prospect before them. I felt ten years younger, just like an overgrown child. At meetings or when travelling around, when shouting slogans or yelling 'Long live!', my voice was no less strident than anyone else's, nor was my enthusiasm less apparent. Thinking back now, it was the happiest time of my life.

Looking inwards, however, I was conscious of numerous failings. Deep inside, I felt that I was a 'peach-picker' who merely reaped the rewards of the labours of others. The Chinese people had stood up; even I had straightened my back a little. Any thoughts of slavish subservience were swept away at a single stroke. What had I done to deserve a share in the happiness of 'liberation'? What was my contribution? I certainly had not been a traitor, nor had I joined the Nationalists, nor had I submitted to the Nazis in Germany. On the other hand, I had cowered in a foreign land ten thousand miles away, hankering after

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<sup>3</sup> Babaoshan ('Eight Treasure Mountain') is Beijing's famous crematorium.

my own fame and fortune, while the outstanding sons and daughters of China had put their lives on the line, plunged into bloody war, and heroically sacrificed themselves. Was there anything more shameful than this? I felt terribly guilty. I even felt ashamed of the little learning—if you could call it that—that I had acquired.

Racked with guilt, I turned this over and over in my mind. I felt like a criminal and regarded all intellectuals as somehow unclean. It was as if I had become a Christian who deeply believed in the doctrine of ‘original sin’, and for many, many years, this ‘original sin’ left a profound impression on my psyche.

At that time, I often entertained strange ideas about turning back the wheel of time, and going back to the war years to give myself the opportunity to expunge this feeling of guilt through meritorious action. I would sacrifice my own life for the revolution, for the people. I even had a wild fantasy that if our leaders’ lives were threatened, I would certainly offer up my own. I would shed my own blood and sacrifice my own life to protect our leaders.

I disgusted myself, but at the same time, I honoured and revered three types of person: old party functionaries, the PLA and the working class. In my mind, their stature was unrivalled and their sanctity inviolable. I saw them as ‘the people most worthy of love’, whom I would emulate for the rest of my life, even if I could never match them.

My ‘original sin’ was a heavy cross to bear and gradually I prepared to probe deeply into my own thinking in order to reform my bourgeois ideas, and to establish a truly proletarian way of thinking—although apart from ‘nothing for myself, everything for others’, I could not say what constituted ‘a proletarian way of thinking’, even today. I vowed to make a complete change and become a new person. Buffeted by wind and rain, sometimes the going was tough, sometimes I faced ‘serried mountains and winding rivers’, at others I found the ‘shade of willows and bright flowers’. This was to be the pattern for the next thirty years.

The first large-scale political movements in the early days after liberation were the campaigns against the ‘Three Evils and Five Evils’ and the campaign for thought reform.<sup>4</sup> I participated diligently and sincerely, my heart brimming with devotion. I had never in my life dishonestly taken a single cent of public money, so the ‘The Three Evils and Five Evils’ movement did not affect me. In ‘thought reform’, on the other hand, I acknowledged that I had a very urgent and significant responsibility. In general, my thinking was bourgeois. In practical terms, I could discern several aspects of this. First, from my observation of the Nationalists before ‘liberation’, I had come to the conclusion that politics was dirty and that I should keep my distance from it. Secondly, I considered that Outer Mongolia had been

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<sup>4</sup> The ‘three evils’ were corruption, waste and bureaucracy. The ‘five evils’ were: ‘violating the law by bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts and stealing economic information’.

stolen by the former Soviet Union, and that the Chinese Communists were at the beck and call of the Soviets. During 'thought reform', I first investigated and criticised these two ideas. At that time, investigating one's own thought before the masses was called 'washing', and could be carried out in a small, medium or large 'basin'. As department head, I was 'washed in the middle basin', which meant I underwent public examination at a mass meeting of all staff and students in the department. I was not promoted to the 'big basin', which meant that I was not investigated before the entire university, because I had not roused popular animosity.

Even in the middle basin, however, the water was sufficiently hot. Everyone spoke out with greatest enthusiasm; some were motivated by honest and noble intent, others were not. This was the very first time in my life that I experienced such a situation. Every comment pierced me like an arrow aimed at my soul. But because I had become like a Christian whose breast was filled with pious notions of 'original sin', it seemed that the more furious the onslaught, the more relieved I became. I was so relieved that my whole body was drenched in sweat, as if I was in a Turkish steam bath. After the mass meeting when they let me pass I was so moved that I wept genuine tears. I felt lighter and stronger as if I had been cleansed of my bourgeois thought.

There were quite a few true believers like me, but there were also some who thought they could bluff their way through, or 'put on a mask to get over the pass'. One professor—who knows how many times he had been 'washed' in the small and medium basins without being allowed to pass by the masses—was finally promoted to the big basin, where he made a desperate attempt to get through on his first attempt. He spoke with great eloquence, and abused himself in the most degrading terms. He even dragged in his equally bourgeois parents, saying many terrible things about them. The masses were deeply moved. By chance, however, the chairman of the rally somehow noticed that he had written the word 'Weep' on the text of his speech in large red characters. Every time he got to this place, he would sob most convincingly. As soon as the chairman made this exposure, the crowd let out a terrific roar, and the outcome needs no description.

Next came the criticism of the film 'Annals of Wu Xun', attacks on the book *Research on 'Dream of the Red Chamber'*, and criticism of bourgeois academic thought, featuring Hu Shi and Yu Pingbo. Next was the exposure and criticism of Hu Feng's 'counter-revolutionary clique', which was classified as a matter of 'contradiction between our enemies and ourselves'. Apart from Hu Feng himself, many others in the arts and in academia were implicated. Incidental to all this was the movement to root out historical counter-revolutionaries, and we began to hear of suicides. One driver at Beida told me that at about this time he was especially careful when driving at night. He was terrified that people would suddenly spring out of the darkness hoping to end their lives beneath his wheels.

By 1957 political movements had reached their first climax and were certainly unprecedented in terms of scale, momentum, scope and duration. At first, the new movement was said to be merely for 'adjustment of style within the Party'. Everyone was invited to make suggestions, to 'say what you think and to speak without reserve'. At that time, the reputation of the Party had never been higher, and many simple-minded people who supported the Party made suggestions for improvements in good faith. Some of their observations were not at all complimentary, but the vast people majority of people acted with complete sincerity. As a result, they were 'seized by the pigtail' and branded as Rightists. In the opinion of the 'leadership', Rightists constituted a 'contradiction between ourselves and the enemy' but should be treated as a 'contradiction among the people'. Moreover, the 'leadership' earnestly pledged that the Rightists would never be permitted to overturn verdicts made in relation to prior events.

Some of those who had been 'seized by the pigtail' promptly asked if it had not been promised at the outset that no 'pigtailed' would be grabbed, that no big sticks would be brandished and that no labels would be slapped on individuals. Was this or was this not some covert plan? Answer: No, this was no covert plan, but an overt one. But by now it was too late for any regrets. Those who had been branded as Rightists, although they were 'of the people', were teetering on the brink of becoming the enemy. They were walking the fine line between humans and demons, which must have been unbearable emotionally. Some were not exonerated until twenty years later, and were by then in old age. In any case this demonstrates that the Communist Party has the courage to correct its mistakes, and is an expression of its authority and its confidence.

I do not know precisely how many were branded Rightists at that time. We heard it said that there was a quota to be met, and that this quota had been relayed down to each organisation at the grassroots level. If the target was not met, then additional people had to be drummed up. Many jokes were doing the rounds, but we can leave these aside for now. There was one point that suddenly came to my mind: this movement, like all the previous ones, was aimed at intellectuals. I still nurtured a deep-rooted sense of 'original sin', and therefore faithfully supported it.

By 1958, the tumultuous movement to counterattack Rightists gradually drew to a close, but even 'before the carriage had stopped and the horses came to a halt', a new campaign was promptly inaugurated, one that was to transcend all prior movements in many respects. It seized on both the mental and the material, as it was intended both to unleash productive forces and to eliminate bourgeois thought. The mental aspects concerned mostly university professors, and the movement was picturesquely called 'uprooting the white flags'. 'White' stood for political backwardness, revisionism and bourgeois thought. This was the polar opposite of 'red', which represented progress,

revolution and proletarian thought. Some 'bourgeois professors' in the universities and in the Chinese Academy of Sciences were energetically 'uprooted' for being 'white flags'.

The material aspects were expressed in the large-scale production of iron and steel. In the case of the people's communes, it appeared that both mental and material aspects applied. The most sonorous slogan in those days was 'Communism is paradise, to which the people's communes are the bridge!' The production of iron and steel was in fact a complete disaster. Everyone in the country responded to the call, collected scrap iron and melted it down. There was nothing inherently wrong with this, but eventually all the scrap had been collected, and to meet their production targets, perfectly good iron goods, including the cooking pots, were broken up and were returned to the furnace to be melted down again. All over the country little steel furnaces shone like stars both day and night, as splendid as some great galaxy. What came out of furnace after furnace, however, was nothing but worthless slag.

Everyone wanted to reach that paradise as soon as possible, and to those ends, people's communes spread over the entire country overnight. Luckily, there happened to be an excellent harvest of grain, and everyone had plenty to eat. Cooking stoves in private houses were dismantled, and people ate together in communal canteens. Grain was left to rot in the fields as there was no one to harvest it. The power of the mass movement was exaggerated to the skies, as was the human capacity to overcome nature. Sparrows were declared to be one of the four pests, and the whole country set about exterminating them. Grain production per *mu* was grossly inflated from several hundred *jin*, to several thousand *jin*, to tens of thousands of *jin*. Districts competed with one another to falsify their statistics, and exemplary producers known as 'satellites' were launched on a grand scale. It was said that if the production of grain per *mu* really was in the tens of thousands of *jin*, then every *mu* of land would be buried under a deep layer of grain or corn, which was of course completely ridiculous.

At this time I was already forty-seven or -eight and was certainly no longer a child. I had received higher education, I had studied abroad and I was a university professor, and yet I deeply and uncritically believed all this. I firmly accepted that 'the more courageous the people, the more the earth will produce'. In my heart I secretly mocked those 'cowards' whose 'thinking had not been liberated' and felt that 'I alone was the only Marxist, that I alone was the only revolutionary'.

Then the three years of natural calamities struck. Were they really 'natural' calamities? Looking back today, this was not necessarily the case. Whatever the truth, everyone went hungry. As I had already experienced five years of starvation in Germany, this time I was not inconvenienced at all. As the poem says, 'Other waters mean nothing to me, for I have experienced the mighty ocean'. I never uttered a single word of complaint.

Taking the situation in the country as a whole, the policies of the day were already as far to the 'left' as they could possibly be. The most pressing task for those in authority was naturally to oppose such 'leftism', and there were reports that some high up in the Party also considered this to be the case. Peng Dehuai suddenly came to the fore at the Lushan Conference and presented his 'Ten Thousand Word Address'. This contained some home-truths which brought great wrath down upon him. What should have been an anti-'leftist' movement became an anti-rightist one. From the beginning of the People's Republic up until today, the person I honour and respect the most is General Peng. He was a rare and hardy individual who would rather risk his life than indulge in hollow flattery. He embodied the best aspects of the Chinese national character.

Since the authorities called for opposition to the right, that is just what they got. Having lived through several decades of uninterrupted political movements, intellectuals had all been tempered into 'movement professionals', and were by now all skilled players. 'This time I rectify you, next time you rectify me': everyone was familiar with the routine. It was also unpredictable, and could be quiet at times, tense at others; now extreme, now more moderate. This continued right up until the Socialist Education Campaign.

As I see it, the Socialist Education Campaign was actually the prelude to the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', so I will discuss the two together. Beida was a testing ground for the Socialist Education Campaign, and always took the first step. As soon as the campaign got under way, it was apparent that the campus was split into two factions: those who were to be rectified and those who were to do the rectifying. Somehow I joined the ranks of the rectifiers, but there was one thing that I could not understand or appreciate, and which was to become the first tiny sprout of 'reactionary thinking' in my mind since 'liberation'. The leadership of the university had always consisted of senior party members and experienced functionaries who were assigned to us from above. We bourgeois intellectuals played only a very minor role in the leadership. Why then did the authorities maintain that we were 'controlling' the university? I thought this over hundreds of times, but could never get to the bottom of it.

The Beijing Municipal Committee eventually intervened and called a meeting at the International Hotel. The verdict on the members of the University leadership who had been criticised was overturned, and the seeds of the Cultural Revolution were sown.

In the autumn of 1965, after I had attended the conference at the International Hotel, I was sent to Nankoucun in the suburbs of Beijing to promote the Socialist Education Campaign in the village. We really were the leaders here, and held complete responsibility for the Party, administration, finance and education. At the same time, the demands on us were very great: we were not permitted to cook for ourselves, but had to eat in the villagers' homes in rotation. Even then, we were not allowed to eat fish, meat or eggs. Nor were we permitted to reveal our positions or salaries. Farmers at that time were earning

less than half a *yuan* per day, but my salary was four or five hundred *yuan* per month. If this became known, the farmers would have been upset. If we were to return to the village today, thirty years on, we would be still be reluctant to mention our salaries, for fear that the farmers with laugh at how little we are paid. Looking back on all this, I cannot help but sigh.

The winter of this year witnessed the publication of the essay by the political thug Yao Wenyuan, 'Criticising the new historical drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*', which was the opening volley of the 'Cultural Revolution'. The three masters of the so-called 'Village of Three Families' were all known to me, and I casually mentioned this fact while we were in Nankoucun. One of my 'outstanding disciples' immediately stored this fact away in his memory. Later, during the 'Cultural Revolution', this 'outstanding disciple' revealed his true colours, and in order to make a name for himself behaved appallingly. For example, he personally signed the big slogans he had written, which was considered a terrible faux pas, and caused a great furore. He also added to my woes, and 'dropped rocks on me when I had fallen down the well', by accusing me of being an accomplice of the 'Village of Three Families'.

I was summoned back to the university on 4 June 1966 to take part in the 'Cultural Revolution'. The earliest stages centred on the criticism of 'bourgeois academic authorities'. As this movement was also very obviously aimed at intellectuals, I was naturally in the firing line. Although I would not have dared call myself an 'academic authority', I was happy to admit that I was bourgeois, and made no complaint. Although this stage of the movement unfolded very viciously, I got through without too much difficulty.

Later, Beida set up a 'revolutionary committee', headed by the 'Old Buddha', the author of the so-called first 'Marxist-Leninist Big Character Poster'.<sup>5</sup> This individual also had her high-level supporters, and a broad network of contacts which reached, it was said, to the very top. She was also very close to Jiang Qing.<sup>6</sup> She had no particular scholarly or artistic ability, and every time she spoke, she always made mistakes. She was an overbearing bully, but was regarded as a significant player by the leadership. At that time she was famous throughout China, and every day tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of 'pilgrims' came to Beida to 'receive the scripture'. Beida was reduced to complete chaos and was filled with 'dark fumes and foul vapours'.

As the campaign unfolded, the university gradually split into factions. The Old Buddha's faction, known as the New Beida Commune, was 'in authority' and wielded the most power. Opposing it was the faction called 'Jinggangshan', which they sought to subdue. There was very little difference between the two factions in terms of their behaviour: both

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<sup>5</sup> Nie Yuanzi, b. 1921. Communist Party Secretary of the Peking University Philosophy Department.

<sup>6</sup> Chairman Mao's wife.

beat, smashed and stole, and neither was familiar with anything called 'the law'. Higher authorities had issued the instruction that 'Revolution is not a crime; it is right to rebel', so this was their highest law.

I had weathered the first onslaught of the storm, and the nature of my political 'problem' had been determined. I was free to wander about at leisure for a time, and I passed the days in comfort. Had I continued to meander along like this, I would never have been in any particular danger, and would have lived on in security. I am a timid person—such is my normal disposition—and yet on occasions I have felt great courage. This has only occurred several times during my life, and may be called my 'abnormal disposition'. Reflecting on this today, if I have any worth as an individual, then this worth is manifest in my abnormal disposition.

This disposition revealed itself on one occasion during the 'Cultural Revolution'. When the 'Old Buddha', relying on her high-level supporters, was vigorously pursuing her own ends 'without regard for law or Heaven', acts of utter barbarity were on the rise on campus. Searches, 'struggle' sessions, beatings, abuse, the hanging of large wooden plaques around individuals' necks, the setting of tall hats on their heads, arbitrary humiliation of people, brazen fabrication of rumours, even the killing of individuals with spears: these acts were not merely inhuman—even animals do not stoop to this. I believed that all this was incompatible with the mass line, and with Someone's revolutionary line.<sup>7</sup> Knowing the risks, and giving up any chance of a tranquil existence, I charged into the fray like a bull. As I wrote in my diary, 'In order to protect Someone's revolutionary line, though my body be beaten and my bones broken, I will never give up.' I wrote this in all sincerity, without a trace of hypocrisy.

At the same time, I was still confident: I had no obvious shortcomings from which my enemies could benefit—I did not have 'a plait on my head or a tail on my backside' that they could seize on to. I had not joined the Nationalists or any other reactionary organisation, nor had I done anything to oppose the people. I knew I was taking a risk, but I trusted fate and my own self-confidence. I decided to stand up to the 'Old Buddha', and jumped right out into the open.

I never realised—or perhaps I had realised subconsciously—that by jumping out like this, I had headed straight for the 'cattle yard'.<sup>8</sup> I had a certain amount of influence on campus, but I had taken a terrible risk, and the 'Old Buddha' thoroughly despised me. She would only be satisfied once I was out of the way. My home was ransacked, I was 'struggled' in public. I was beaten so badly that 'my head was cracked and my blood flowed'. My face was bruised and swollen. I am not, however, one of those forgiving or accepting people. Once, after I was beaten to the point of unconsciousness, I made the decision to end my

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<sup>7</sup> The 'Someone' refers to Mao Zedong.

<sup>8</sup> The make-shift prison erected at Peking University.

own life. Having reached this resolution, I felt strangely calm—so calm in fact that it was almost frightening. I filled my pockets with all the sleeping pills and prescriptions that I had accumulated over the years, and took a final glance at my old aunt and my wife with whom I had shared so much suffering. Just as I was about to step out of the house to make good my escape, there came a thundering roar at the front door. Red Guards from the New Beida Commune had arrived to frogmarch me to the main canteen to ‘struggle’ me yet again. My life really was hanging by a thread. This particular denunciation was especially vicious and barbaric. I was beaten so badly that I could not get up, but I also experienced a ‘sudden enlightenment’: a person’s capacity to tolerate physical abuse has no limit. I could take it—I was not dead—I wanted to live!

Indeed, I did survive, but by the time I got out of the ‘cattle yard’, I was more dead than alive. I was like a half-wit. I did not know how to ask for things in the shops. I was unused to walking around with my head up. It felt strange not to hear words like ‘mother-f\*\*\*er’, ‘bastard’ and ‘ass-hole’ being yelled in my ear. Whenever I saw someone, I would open my mouth to speak, but could only mumble. I tried to walk, but I could only stagger. I had become a living corpse. I had been transformed into a non-human.

Indeed, I did survive, but one thought has always gnawed away at my conscience. I always believed that ‘death is preferable to humiliation for a warrior’, so how could I, even today, have pushed this principle out of my mind? I had the courage to speak frankly in the cause of justice and to fight against wrong-doing. Why then did I lack the courage to lay down my life to oppose these atrocities? Sometimes I even feel that it is dishonourable to have endured the humiliation and to still be alive. This regret is not the strangest thing. Stranger still is the fact that for a long time I did not connect all these matters with the ‘Cultural Revolution’. Right up until the overthrow of the ‘Gang of Four’ in 1976, I had always supported the idea of ‘a revolution every seven or eight years, each one lasting for seven or eight years’. It is obvious that my political ‘sense of smell’ was not at all highly developed.

I had a dream for more than forty years. For more than forty years I harboured a ‘feeling of original sin’. For more than forty years I continually honoured the three objects of my respect (old party functionaries, old soldiers and the working class) that I mentioned above. All these things that I held sacred were smashed by the ‘Cultural Revolution’. Do they still exist today? I would not deny that, for the greater part, the objects of my reverence are still good, and I would not like to swing from one extreme to the other. As to the ‘Cultural Revolution’, which I had faithfully supported for ten years, that is another matter. It was the most brutal, most violent, most idiotic and most absurd tragedy; one without precedent in the history of China. It brought shame to the great Chinese people. Let us never forget that!

After the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’ and the conclusion of the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’, those at the centre of the Communist Party imposed order on chaos,

and implemented policies of reform and openness which have won the approval of the whole country. It is apparent to all that even in a short time, these have been successful. In the eyes of the entire nation, and in the eyes of intellectuals nationwide, sunshine has returned, and we have hope once more.

I have described above my experiences and impressions of the forty years or so since 'liberation'. During this period, the mirror of my heart reveals an image of campaign after campaign after campaign. It reveals my experiences and those of the majority of intellectuals. It reveals my progress from ignorance to realisation. It reveals the entire nation turning back from the brink of political and economic crisis and progressing towards a more felicitous state.

I have lived for more than eighty years in the twentieth century. In another seven years, this century and this millennium will draw to a close. This has been a century of great complexity and transformation. The events reflected in my heart naturally reveal these many changes and are dazzling in their infinite variety. It reflects the broad bright roads and the narrow by-ways that I have travelled. It shows the 'serried mountains and winding rivers, the shade of willows and bright blossoms'. I am not prepared to guarantee that the mirror of my heart always reflects with perfect accuracy, yet I believe that it is generally reliable, and that the images it reveals are in accord with reality.

I have been carrying this mirror for over eighty years. How should we evaluate the image of the twentieth century that it reveals? How should I evaluate its image of my own life? Alas, this is too hard to express in words. It is said, 'Although you say that the weather is cold, it is a good autumn'. I would like to modify this a little: 'The weather is cold, but this is a good winter!'

There is one thing that I believe: the twenty-first century will be the century of the renaissance of Chinese culture (which is the core of East Asian culture). There are in the world today many challenges which will affect the future survival of humanity. These include the population explosion, environmental pollution, loss of ecological equilibrium, destruction of the ozone layer, the limits of food production, the depletion of water resources, and so on. Only Chinese culture can address these. Such is my final conviction.

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