

A SELECTION
OF
PROSE PIECES
BY YANG SHUO



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MARCH ON, ARMY OF STEEL!

ON February the third, 1949, at ten o'clock in the morning, a regiment of the People's Liberation Army marched into Beiping. They marched in the midst of an ocean of bobbing heads, accompanied by the flapping of colorful banners and the music of frantic drums, gongs and happy shouts. In step with the heroic strains of the *March of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, the soldiers entered Yongding Gate for the victorious celebration of their formal occupation of Beiping. This opened a new era for the city.

The two million people of Beiping, forming a human alley, warmly embraced their own soldiers. What a great, proud march this was! One after another, the armored cars and infantry trucks entered. No one knew how many vehicles passed! As an army truck moved slowly through the solid crowd, the people — workers, students, men and women — would, in great excitement, block it to shake hands with the soldiers. Some surged forward to chalk slogans on the trucks or on the soldiers' uniforms. A girl student, wearing a knitted red scarf, climbed up on an armored car and wrote: "You have arrived at last!" She was so roused that she was crying.

At the sight of the mighty artillery, many among the crowd uttered exclamations of awe. Scores of American

field artillery were in the lead, followed by anti-aircraft guns made either in Japan or Canada, Japanese cannons and American howitzers. Polished bright, the guns were all pulled by American ten-wheel trucks. Each gun had its own history. And what a sight! The guns were so frightfully huge, muzzles proudly jutting forward. Students and workers climbed up and sat hugging and fondling them like toys given by their mothers. On the guns, they wrote: "Take dead aim on Chiang Kai-shek!" But these were originally from Chiang Kai-shek's 12th Heavy Artillery Regiment, guns he had treasured like his own eyes. The 155 mm. giant howitzers had been assembled in India by the American imperialists and then shipped to northeast China to butcher the Chinese people. But in the Western Liaoning Campaign, in which Chiang Kai-shek himself took overall command, these guns, together with the American-trained troops of Liao Yaoliang, were like gifts to the Liberation Army. These guns, combined with the Liberation Army's artillery forces and battle-hardened infantry, liberated the whole of the northeastern part of China. In Tianjin, the magic cannon hands of the Fifth Artillery Company fired sixty shots without a miss, cracking open Heping Gate west of the city. Within an hour, the magic Third Artillery Company destroyed the headquarters of the Tianjin city commandant Chen Changjie. Precisely such forces of steel, in addition to the other meritorious troops, contributed to the peaceful liberation of the ancient capital, Beijing.

After these heavy guns, these "gods of war", passed, there was a flurry of excitement at Qianmen as a long line of tanks came rolling along. The tankmen stood up in the hatches, saluting and waving red flags.

Originally workers and farmers, they had quickly learned to master the weapons taken from the enemy.

Next came cavalry in the thousands that had galloped over the grasslands of northeast China. The men sat erectly, shining swords raised, their horses' heads held high, manes flowing. The sound of the hooves pounding the asphalt road of this ancient capital, together with the spectators' wild applause, grew into a sonorous chorus.

From the distance could be heard the sound of the army band, followed shortly by the arrival of infantry, marching in neat columns with forceful stride. Bursting from the ocean of people, shouts of "Our soldiers have come" resounded in the air like rolling waves. Gazing at the dust on the soldiers' clothes, a grizzled pedicab coolie said: "Look at them, so dusty! Who knows how many miles they have walked!"

He was right. Every man had come a long, long way and each weapon had been branded with memorable symbols of the great progress made over the years in Chinese revolutionary history. From the Jinggang Mountains, the cradle of the Chinese revolution, came these flag bearers who marched on with Mao Zedong's banner held high; here were some of the invincible warriors who had crushed the Kuomintang's five attempts to surround and exterminate them; there were also the heroes who had passed through the snowy mountains and marshland during their 12,500-kilometre Long March to the north to fight the Japanese. In greater number still came the heroes who had resisted Japanese aggression for eight years. Among them was the steely Eighth Company which had fought behind enemy lines in the Japanese-occupied Shandong Province. In May 1939, in the area

of Mount Taishan, it held off the frantic attack of a Japanese brigade for a whole day without a single step backward, displaying a strength as majestic as Mount Taishan itself. In the eight years, who knew how many such heroes had sacrificed their lives defeating thousands of Japanese attempts to destroy them. Finally, they were strong enough to turn the tables and launch a full-scale attack against the Japanese. Here were the Liuchuan Company whose rifles were booty from the Japanese army. Their bayonets, now flashing a chill light, had been soaked with Japanese blood at Pingxing Pass. In September 1945, during the march to the Jiaozhouwan-Jinan Railway, this company again made a raid into Liuchuan, crushing the secret schemes of collaboration among the Japanese, their puppet government and Chiang Kai-shek.

How was it that the rifles used by that company were all made in America? This was the heroic Second Company, formed out of the battles in the Northeast. In the winter of 1947, during the fighting that liquidated the enemy's major forces in Gongzhutun northwest of Shenyang, this company fought to the last; only thirteen soldiers remained. Before his death, Squad Leader Gong Fangchen said: "Don't worry about me. Go and kill the enemy!" Such sacrifices finally won the major battle at Wenjiatai. This victory laid the groundwork for the destruction of Chiang's New Fifth Army which was totally armed with sophisticated American weapons. In addition, there was the Siping Heroes' Company that had carved out its name in the liberation of Siping city and the Dagger Company that had acted as vanguard in storming the fortified city of Jinzhou. The hero of the Dagger Company, Huang Defu, had climbed the town wall in a short five minutes and planted the red flag there.

Winning Jinzhou was as good as slitting Chiang Kai-shek's throat in the Northeast since it was decisive in liberating the whole of the northeastern part of the country.

Such were the heroes, and thousands like them, who made up the great Liberation Army. From the day they started in Nanchang, this army had fought a civil war for ten years, against the Japanese for eight years and then two and a half years in the War of Liberation. They had made a long, trying journey, marching into battle and fighting for every advance. From the Kuomintang armies they had taken various weapons, from the Japanese their arms and again, during the War of Liberation a large quantity of American weapons. This was how they had grown strong and become the present army of steel. They paved the road for the Chinese revolution and finally entered this ancient capital — Beiping. This accomplishment was a great landmark on the path of the Chinese revolution but not its final goal. With tears, an old lady tugged at a soldier's uniform: "You have come a long way. You should rest for a while." With a smile, the soldier answered: "Thank you, aunty, but we have to go on."

The bugle sounded while the troops marched on. Under the advancing feet of the people's army, the thousands-of-years-old feudalism fortress was trampled down and the hundred-year-old imperialist yoke broken. A horizontal banner was raised in the crowd, reading: "Bring the Revolution to Its Final Goal!" The army of steel was marching direct toward this banner.

SPRING IN THE GOBI

IT is the end of April. In Beijing, it would be in the middle of the blooming season. But in the Gobi desert, it is far too early for spring. Once out of Jiayu Pass, all you can see is a boundless stretch of sand; and here and there tufts of camel grass, evoking some feeling of spring. Everywhere are whirlwinds, rising one after another, lifting smoke-like yellow sand from the ground and rapidly rolling and swirling about in the desert. As soon as the weather changes, with the slightest wind drifts of snow float down from the sky. In the hot summer, snow covers the peaks of the undulating Qilian Mountains which run along the southwest of the Gobi.

No matter how far you walk and what desolate places you come to, you will see the miracles created by our people for the motherland. Right under the Qilian Mountains and in the desert, a "petroleum city" has been built by the people from all over China. This is the Yumen oilfield. If you do not believe it, just stand on top of a hill at night and look around. Far and near, electric lights in the desert are thicker than the stars in the sky. In the north, the sky flashes red from the refinery. You cannot help thinking: "What a wonderful place! It does not even feel like a desert!"

But in actual fact we are in the desert. Here, each brick, each stone and each drop of oil contains the sweat of our people and a part of their lives. We cannot but thank those geological surveyors. In order to find more oil for our motherland, they rode on camels, taking with them tents and dry provisions, deep into the desolate Gobi, without meeting anyone for days; only desert gazelles and wild horses showed their faces in panic.

I met such a group of surveyors, mostly students who had left school shortly before. Among them were a few girls, from the provinces south of the Changjiang (Yangtze River), who loved to talk and laugh. The young group leader named Deng told me that just after they had left Shanghai and arrived in the Northwest, the girls would rather go hungry when they sometimes found the cooked rice not clean. Their faces and hands cracked in the high winds, and since the air is thin in the high plateau, they had difficulty breathing after the least exertion. But because of their love for their country, they overlooked all. Their only unhappiness, however, concerned work. On the days when there was no progress, they returned from the survey without a word. But the slightest good news they would let everyone know about, and their laughter pierced the sky.

It was not uncommon for a Mongol to jump off his camel and ask a surveyor at work: "Have you found oil?" The geologists understood very well that even the desert people cared about what they were doing, and willingly dedicated their youth to the people's enterprise. What wonderful young men and women they were!

All the more reason to remember the hundreds of oil workers. Whenever the survey disclosed a favorable geological structure they would go to drill test wells. Once,

I left that "petroleum city" and went with a group leader of the workers, called Wang Dengxue, deep into the Qilian Mountains. In the desolate mountains, the workers had already set up machinery, constructed drilling rigs, and were working day and night to drill the well. Their shining aluminium helmets and high boots of cowhide made them look brave.

"You look just like combat soldiers," I said.

Wang Dengxue answered: "On the Korean front the Chinese People's Volunteers sleep on ice and crawl through the snow. Compared to theirs, our hardship is nothing."

Actually, it was very tough for the workers to combat nature. In the cold of January, the wind blew hard, snow drifted in the desert and stones cracked. The workers had to keep the drill going throughout the night in the open air. It became so cold that their gloves stuck to the machinery at a touch. There should have been time for rest. But how could one rest? The Volunteers were fighting at the front. How could their tanks and trucks run without oil? Furthermore, the workers were building their motherland. Who could think of taking a rest?

They would not rest, working like tough, brave soldiers in battle. There were also real combat soldiers among the drillers. I met a young man, called Cai Guangqing, really good looking with a healthy red complexion, who had taken part in the War of Liberation. His attitude, to use his own words, was: "We go wherever Chairman Mao wants us to go." On the production front, this soldier, in a new kind of battle, displayed his combat spirit. He told me: "For us who were in the army before the problems we come across here

are nowhere near as difficult as the fighting we experienced then. Nothing scares us. We can learn to do anything." As soon as he heard I had returned from the Korean front to visit the reconstruction of our country, he gripped my hand and said: "Go tell the comrades, we'll drill through the Qilian Mountains and bore into the desert. We'll make the oil flow like rivers to support the front and to build our motherland."

These were not idle boasts; they conveyed the very spirit with which our people mined the underground treasures. Not only were new wells drilled, but abandoned wells were being repaired. Many excellent oilfields had been ruined by the Kuomintang government. They cared only for oil and many of the wells were not properly drilled. The oil would gush out suddenly and went on spouting for a few weeks. The structure of the field was damaged and the well discarded. These were the riches of our motherland. Who could bear to waste them? Liu Gongzhi, one of the older workers, was a master at repairing the old wells. He did not care that the mud spurted out so hot it scorched his face and hands as he worked. Although he appeared slow-witted he was actually very bright — he knew from experience that it was the mud that had blocked the oil. Let it spurt, the oil would follow. Despite the burns he went on supervising repairs. One well, two wells . . . the abandoned wells were brought to life and oil gushed out as though from a fountain.

Petroleum — how much of our people's labor had been spent in bringing it out of the earth and processing it to form a variety of petroleum products before being shipped to every corner of the country! Oil, the blood needed by our motherland, each drop costing a drop of

sweat! I cannot forget one incident. One night I rode in an oil truck running shipments. All the way the trucks rushed about with their headlights burning, coming and going without a break. This went on day and night. It reminded me of the Korean battlefield. The driver next to me was a smart young fellow, driving so fast that only the sound of the whistling wind could be heard. I looked about: it was pitch black on both sides of the road.

"You're going very fast!" I could not help shouting at him.

"I'm rushing to get there," he shouted back.

"Are you rushing to Zhangye?" I asked.

Shaking his head, he shouted: "No. Much farther."

I suddenly recalled that I had noticed a diary on the driver's seat when I got into the car. I remembered that on the first page was written: "For the sake of constructing a socialist society. . . ." I stretched over and shouted laughingly into his ear: "Are you rushing toward the goal of socialism?"

Spreading his lips wide, the driver laughed. As I looked again out of the truck, I no longer saw the deserted borderland. It seemed that everywhere were trees, flowers and people. Spring had quietly arrived in the Gobi desert, as could be seen in the camel grass and other vegetation. And yet I saw another kind of spring. Not an ordinary spring, but the bright future which our people are creating.

1953

RANDOM NOTES ON THE CAPITAL

AUTUMN is a long, but also the best season in Beijing. This year, the autumn wind started well before the frost set in. Treading on the noisy fallen leaves gave one a dry, pleasant feeling. A warm-hearted comrade said to me: "You've been away too long, you should go and take a look at the city. Lots of interesting things go on. There's no reason to bore yourself in the house. Take care that you don't grow mildewed."

Scared that my thoughts might indeed grow mildewed, I was quite ready to go out with him for a look at the scenery. We went to Joyous Pavilion which was in the south of the city. It had been known for its famous scenery as I had learned long ago from books. I was impressed, after we reached there, by the sparkling clear water of the lake. Rising north of the lake was a delicate range of hills embellished with a scattering of pavilions. The lake was framed in greenery — everywhere were willows, lantanas, pines and silver poplars. There were flowering trees, too, all of a healthy growth: peach, cherry, lilac, hibiscus, flowering plum and Peking mock orange. If it were spring, how beautifully these would trim the lake in a blaze of colors. But there were also

autumn flowers: the tiny purple flowers were in bloom in the lake; pearly clusters of false spirea grew all along the bank; and then there were strings of little purple flowers with a marvelous fragrance hanging from a tree, which I later found out to be called *buzbizi*.

After passing through a tall vermilion-colored passageway, we climbed to a pavilion on a hilltop. There were many tourists here who looked like factory workers; some were playing "five-piece" chess, others were gazing out at the crowded city below. Those who were familiar with the elaborate Summer Palace or the Winter Palace were unexpectedly delighted by the plain though natural scenery here. But we still did not know where the ancient Joyous Pavilion was.

Upon my inquiry a young printer, who was sitting on the bench along the pavilion railing, pointed ahead: "Isn't that it?"

An ancient temple, it had a neat appearance after recent repair. I really liked this place and gazing at the hills and lake said over and over again: "Well, well! After all it is Joyous Pavilion and well deserving of its reputation."

The printer retorted with a smile: "Do you think this is what Joyous Pavilion looked like before?"

Of course I did not believe it had been like this. Much work had been done here; the hills had had to be heaped up again, the lake dredged and the flowers and trees replanted. But even so, Joyous Pavilion had originally been an ancient scenic spot; it could not have been all that neglected.

The printer could not help but burst out laughing: "You think it couldn't be that bad? Like the proverb says: A sore on the head and an ulcer on the bottom of

the foot; rotten through and through! Earlier the water was a weedy pond, full of dead cats and dogs and what not! It was a burial ground for the poor: shallow graves piled one on the other, layer on top of layer, sometimes as many as three deep. At that time not even the least fortunate would want to live here!"

On another day, I met a woman, a deputy to the district people's congress who had lived by Joyous Pavilion for many years. She was a spirited woman who loved to talk. When the subject was mentioned of what Joyous Pavilion had been like, she covered her face with her hands and frowning with a disdainful smile on her lips, said: "This place stank like anything! There were more dead than alive. And the stench — it was enough to suffocate a man! You didn't even dare to open the door. Once it was open, the maggots trooped in, sometimes even up to the edge of the water basin. The mosquitoes became little mischievous spirits, buzzing about as though they were coming down through a sieve. They hit you right on your head if you walked out. In those days I only had one thought, how best to move away some day."

Now, no matter what, she would never move. On summer evenings, after dinner, the neighborhood women frequently bring little benches to sit by the lake to cool themselves. Often hearing visitors say: "How good it would be if we could move here, just like living in a big garden," they whisper among themselves: "We've paid enough in suffering to live here."

Not suffering but work with their own hands created this park-like place. When the lake was being dredged, did the women not carry baskets of the dirt? How many times a day had the old ladies boiled drinking water for the men who were digging the mud out of the lake.