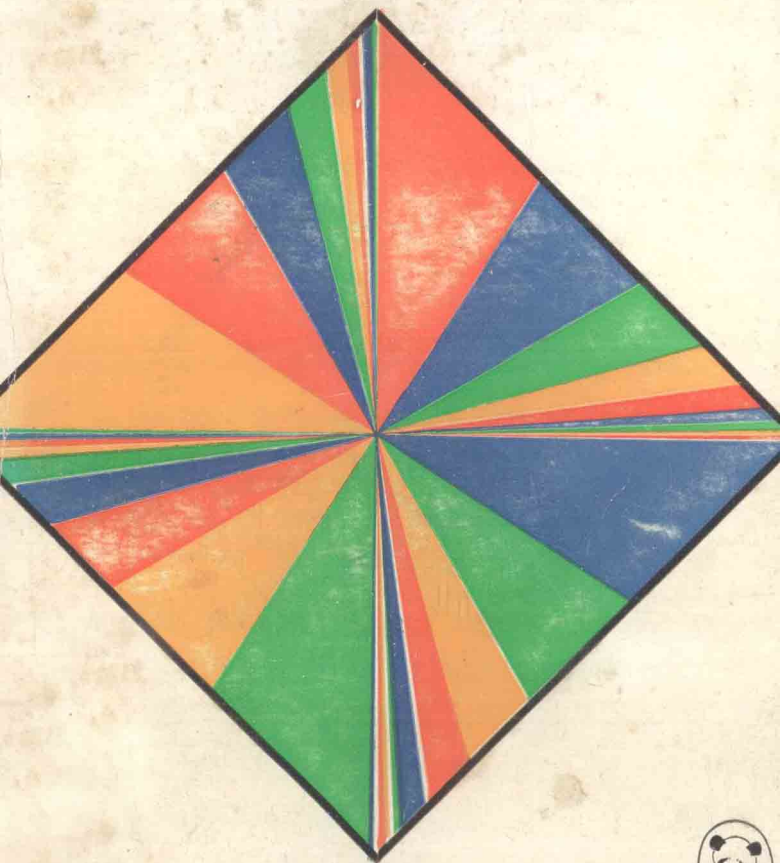


ALL THE COLOURS OF THE RAINBOW

JIANG ZILONG



Panda Books



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All the Colours of the Rainbow

Jiang Zilong was born into a peasant family in 1941 in Cangxian County, Hebei Province. He left his small village to attend middle school in the large city of Tianjin. In 1958 he started work in the Tianjin Heavy Machinery Plant. Conscripted into the navy in 1960, he spent five years there, working as a surveyor and in the propaganda section. Encouraged to write skits and articles, he began the short story *A New Station Master*, which was published in 1965. After demobilization, he went back to the plant and because of the "cultural revolution" did not publish anything until 1972. But it was not until 1979, with the publication of *Manager Qiao Assumes Office* that this amateur writer achieved nationwide popularity. This story and more recent works have won him several important literary prizes.

In 1981 he visited Yugoslavia and in 1982 went to the United States as a part of a Chinese writers' delegation.

He is a council member of the Chinese Writers' Association and also vice-chairman of the Tianjin branch. He is married and has two children.

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Translated by Wang Mingjie

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Preface

WHEN "Manager Qiao Assumes Office" appeared in the *Worker's Daily* in 1979, the author Jiang Zilong, the head of a workshop in a large heavy machinery plant in Tianjin, was a relatively obscure amateur writer who had been publishing fiction since 1965. The story was immensely popular and thus marked a turning-point in Jiang Zilong's literary career. It was broadcast over the radio and adapted for television. Almost overnight Manager Qiao entered the ranks of Chinese folk heroes, and his creator became something of a celebrity.

Slogans welcoming Manager Qiao were pasted up by some workers in their factories, while others bought copies of the story and gave them to their managers to read. An anecdote, quite authentic, tells how a certain vice-minister of a certain ministry telephoned Jiang Zilong's editors to ascertain who the model for Manager Qiao was in order to promote him. Yet the story was regarded as controversial, and some critics had misgivings about the socialism of Manager Qiao's peremptory methods. The *Tianjin Daily* launched a full-page condemnation of the story. Fortunately Jiang Zilong had strong nerves. Angered by the attack, many people wrote letters to the paper supporting Jiang Zilong, while some individuals even went to protest in person. Opinion remained divided, and Jiang Zilong

was asked by the director of his plant to give up writing altogether.

Then a forum of writers and editors was held in Beijing to discuss "Manager Qiao Assumes Office", which Jiang Zilong attended. While certain weaknesses in the story were pointed out, Jiang Zilong was finally vindicated, praised and encouraged to write more. Moreover, the story went on to win the first prize in the first-class awards section of the 1979 National Short Story Competition.

Industry is notoriously difficult to write about even in China, where literature about factories and workers abounds. In the West such writing is rare. While reports carried in English-language publications are packed with facts and figures concerning the problems and progress of Chinese industry, they are often hard going for the foreign layman. Jiang Zilong's talent lies in his ability to communicate vividly what it feels like to be a worker, manager, Party secretary or bureau chief at a time when China's modernization means being flexible and not rigid, discarding archaic, useless practices and experimenting with new techniques.

China aims to quadruple production by the end of this century, and for that an annual growth rate of 7.2 per cent must be maintained. This cannot be achieved without modernizing the economy. According to an article in the magazine *Red Flag*, there were 382,000 industrial enterprises in China by 1981. Many of these do not run at full capacity and some have already closed down. Only a few are technologically advanced by international standards, while most meet only the standards of the 1960s or even the 1950s. The Chinese labour force lacks sufficient education with too few

skilled workers, technicians, engineers and competent managerial staff. It is against this backdrop that Jiang Zilong writes.

He knows the industrial scene intimately, for he has been attached to Tianjin Heavy Machinery Plant since 1958, except for a five-year stint in the navy. He said, "I've been a worker, a foreman, a secretary to a manager and now I'm head of a workshop. I've also studied how enterprises are run in Hungary, Yugoslavia, Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union. I know much more about industry than literature." He has witnessed the developments and setbacks from the disastrous Great Leap Forward of 1958, the economic recovery, and the chaos of the "cultural revolution" to the present drive for modernization.

"Manager Qiao Assumes Office" was the result of Jiang Zilong's systematic study of economics, bureaucracy and politics. "It was inspired by my political sense. I don't really regard it as a work of literature. I paid little attention to style." His characters accurately voice the thoughts and feelings of millions of Chinese workers, and Qiao Guangpu embodies the kind of qualities they wish their managers to have: energy, expertise, confidence, resourcefulness, boldness and vision. Jiang Zilong remarked, "Whether you like it or not, only people like Qiao can achieve anything in our society today. I've visited many factories, and those that are efficient have managers like Qiao."

Jiang Zilong draws heavily on his experiences and acquaintances for his plots and characters. Qiao Guangpu was modelled on five managers he knew. In 1979, when Manager Qiao made everyone in his plant

sit exams to separate the skilled and capable from the untrained and incompetent, such ideas were still new. Those who failed were demoted to a service team until they improved their levels. Now 60 per cent of Chinese factories have such service teams. Also debatable were rewards or penalties for good or bad work. Only in the summer of 1982 did Premier Zhao Ziyang at a National Conference on the Reorganization of Industrial Enterprises stress officially the policy of rewarding the hardworking and penalizing the lazy. This was further emphasized at the 12th Party Congress in September 1982 by the Minister in Charge of the State Economic Commission, Zhang Jinfu.

The city of Xiangfan in Hubei Province made the front page of the *People's Daily*, cited as a successful example of rapid industrial growth in China. Among the measures taken there was the removal of 21 incompetent leading cadres from their posts, while 38 engineers and technicians were promoted to be directors and factory leaders. Also more than 400 factory directors and high officials were rotated through training sessions in business management and related subjects. In Fuxin, Liaoning Province, however, 78 industrial enterprises continue to suffer financial losses, mainly because of mismanagement or lack of responsibility by the leadership. According to the *Liaoning Daily*, serious steps are being taken. Leaders of these unprofitable enterprises have been advised to resign if they feel they cannot improve the situation. Those leaders, including directors and secretaries, who do not resign, will be removed and demoted if their enterprises still show deficits by the end of 1982. The city government will also award and promote those managerial

staff who turn their enterprises from losing into profitable concerns.

When people remark on his foresight in predicting trends in industry, Jiang Zilong explains that he is merely describing existing situations which he tries to record truthfully. As head of a workshop with nine hundred men under him, he himself was confronted with seven slackers who refused to mend their ways. Finally he removed them from their jobs and formed them into a service team to clean the lavatories and showers and do other menial chores. Furious, the men complained to their Party secretary, who went to talk to Jiang Zilong. "I told him, if you don't agree, then dismiss me. If you want me to lead this workshop, then don't interfere." The Party secretary decided to turn a blind eye to the whole affair, thus giving Jiang Zilong his tacit support. The young workers therefore had no backing. Their personal lives were also affected, for like Du Ping in "Manager Qiao Assumes Office", who is ditched by his girlfriend, these young men found themselves in similar predicaments. After about six months, when their attitudes had changed, they returned to their old work.

It is interesting to note that the 60 million young workers aged under 35 account for 60 per cent of the total industrial work force in China. An article in *Red Flag* analyzing this force stated that 20 per cent are advanced workers; 50 per cent make high demands on themselves; 25 per cent fulfil their production quotas but lack proper motivation; and 5 per cent lead meaningless lives and work in a slapdash manner. It also stated that less than 5 in every 1,000 actually violate rules and discipline.

“Manager Qiao Assumes Office” and its sequel “More About Manager Qiao”, like all Jiang Zilong’s writing, introduce readers to the realities of Chinese factories. It’s a warts-and-all portrait. Qiao Guangpu is confronted with the importance of connections (*guanxi*), something to which he is not naturally inclined. Ji Shen, however, excels at this, having helped some high cadres in difficulty during the “cultural revolution”. Now they are back in power, they owe him some favours. There is the “iron rice bowl”, which guarantees job security: a person will normally receive his salary or wage and cannot be sacked, even if he is lazy or unfit for the work. But this is changing. Some leaders hesitate to make decisions or take the initiative for fear of incurring political risks.

There was the problem, uncommon today, of unqualified persons ordering expensive yet useless foreign equipment, thereby wasting precious foreign currency. A recent report in the *Shanghai World Economic Herald* pointed out that in 1978 the wrong decision was made to import 22 unnecessary sets of equipment, squandering 12 billion dollars of China’s foreign exchange. The projects also needed 55,000 million yuan of domestic investment which could not be met. Thus the whole foreign currency situation worsened. Ji Shen, who indulges in this, is described by Jiang Zilong as “a country moneybags shopping in Shanghai in the old days”, who wants everything he sees, the more expensive the better.

Manager Qiao makes this anguished reply when he is asked how he spends his time: “Forty per cent on production, fifty per cent on wrangles and ten per cent on slanders.” To which Huo Dadao, the bureau chief,

comments: "You should spend eighty per cent of your time on production and the rest on research." Unfortunately it is not an ideal world.

Though he presents many of the negative aspects that impede China's modernization, Jiang Zilong also describes the positive forces that are combatting them. There are responsible and far-sighted leaders like Huo Dadao, who supports and encourages Manager Qiao with these words: "Modernization doesn't mean technique alone. You'll have to offend some people. Of course, it's safest to do nothing, but that's criminal. . . . If you want to achieve something, demand a free rein. We're racing against time." The minister also asks Qiao to be bolder and experiment with new methods. At all levels from the top down, men and women are using their imagination and initiative to overcome the problems. Jiang Zilong's stories chronicle the changes in the industrial scene and inspire Chinese workers to strive for a better future. While analyzing and criticizing, Jiang Zilong also points to solutions. His tone is optimistic not defeatist.

In "More About Manager Qiao" for example, Qiao starts to introduce ideas new to China, but well established abroad, such as modern selling methods to compete with foreign products on the world market, setting up a sales department, advertising products, printing attractive brochures for home and foreign consumption, meeting orders promptly, servicing machines, supplying spare parts and doing market research. It may be an uphill struggle, but reading Jiang Zilong's stories one is convinced Chinese workers will make it to the top.

His characters are realistic. Manager Qiao is not a

shining plastic hero of the type manufactured *ad nauseam* during the "cultural revolution". He emerges as credible, a man with fine qualities and certain weaknesses. One failing is his quick temper. He is not the easiest of men to work with, nor the most understanding of husbands, of which latter fact he is cheerfully unaware.

His stories often contain interesting glimpses of Chinese life. There is, for example, a delightful scene at the home of Tie Jian, the chief of the Municipal Economic Commission. From a poor peasant background, Tie has risen to become a leading cadre. Readers see how the extended family system works in China, as Tie's relatives and fellow villagers descend on him to seek his help. Though he cannot meet their demands, he must, out of politeness, at least offer them some hospitality. His home is like a country inn full of peasants consuming bowls of noodles, which they feel he can easily afford on his high salary, while his wife, like the innkeeper, bustles about providing food and drink day and night.

"Pages from a Factory Secretary's Diary", in terms of writing, is a more polished piece of work, yet paradoxically Jiang Zilong finished the basic draft in only one night. The language is terse, the style ironic. Before he wrote it, Jiang Zilong had been reading the essays of Lu Xun, and perhaps something of their economic prose stuck. In the form of a diary kept by Wei, secretary to the new manager Jin Fengchi, the story describes how Jin revives the enthusiasm of his workers and increases production in his factory. A somewhat jaded observer, Wei has watched three managers come and go in the space of four years, all victims of

Luo, the ruthless Assistant Manager. Wei, believing that he has seen it all, takes nothing to heart any more. That is until Manager Jin arrives, for he soon shakes Wei out of his lethargy. Jin establishes his authority over Luo and shows his concern for the workers' welfare, winning their support. His unorthodox methods, however, bring him into increasing conflict with Liu, the Party secretary. A decent man, Liu is, as Wei notes, "too old-fashioned and too inflexible", whose ideas pre-date those of 1958. The times have changed, but Liu has not. While not actually breaking any rules, Jin is prepared to bend them to the limit. When the question of the bonuses arises, Jin must either offend Liu or his workers, and he chooses the former.

Like Qiao, Jin is a believable character. Though he cares for the interests of his men, he ignores the needs of his family. As a result of his neglect, his home is the opposite of domestic bliss. Jiang Zilong explained that the model for Jin was a friend of his. "He's a Party member and his factory is well run. He knows the problems of the bureaucracy and the importance of connections, so he has found his way of dealing with the system as it stands now. He's totally selfless and does everything for socialism, but he does it his way. For example, bonuses were supposed to be equivalent to two and a half months' pay maximum, but he stretched it to three and a half months. He gets results and his factory is one of the best. He's trusted by the workers and production keeps going up."

One night he visited Jiang Zilong's home and sat drinking and grousing about some problems. After he left, Jiang Zilong decided to write about him and the story took shape within a few hours. When it was pub-