



# Seven Decades of Struggle and Reflection

The Years of War

Bo Yibo

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## Preface

This is an autobiographical work which deals primarily with my experience of struggle under the leadership of the Party during the seventy year period from 1925 to 1995. In this work, I contemplate major historical events, issues, personages, and experiences from the vantage point of the present. It is thus entitled *Seven Decades of Struggle and Reflection*.

In July of 1993 I completed *A Retrospective Account of Certain Important Decisions and Events (Volume II)*, fulfilling a personal aspiration of many years standing. In the symposium held to discuss that book, the comrades of the Standing Committee of the Politburo gave it a fully positive evaluation. I therefore felt that I had a responsibility "in my lifetime to continue my retrospection and study of the long years I have devoted to following the Party". This idea quickly gained the support of the Party Centre and was the impetus for writing this book.

I intend to divide this work into three volumes.

The first volume, entitled *The Years of War*, will recount my experiences from my induction into the Party in 1925 to the establishment of the New China in 1949. This volume will chronicle how I, a youth from a peasant family, came to choose faith in Marxism-Leninism during a time of intense struggle among various currents of social thought. It will recount how my character was forged in the movements of students, workers, and peasants. It will recall the arduous and tortuous struggles I experienced when working in the white areas during the decade of civil war, including several periods of capture and imprisonment. It will describe my role in helping to establish a special form of united front in Shanxi with the regional overlord, Yan Xishan, in the new context of the anti-Japanese struggle. Finally, it will document how, in the final battle between China's two possible fates, I strove from leadership positions in the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Military Region and the North China Bureau to realise the overthrow of the "Chiang dynasty" and usher in the birth of the New China. In this volume, readers will be able to see just how hard-won was the victory of the Chinese revolution. A Chinese proverb tells us that "the past, if not forgotten, holds lessons for the future." A generation of great leaders of the Communist Party of China under

the leadership of Mao Zedong, together with other founding luminaries of our nation, have bequeathed us a wealth of achievement, a treasure store of spirit which must not be forgotten, but which must be passed down from generation to generation. Their great accomplishments should serve as an inspiration for all the people of China to continue to struggle toward the strengthening of our nation. In this way, we can build a thriving and prosperous China which shall forever stand proudly in its unique and dignified place among the nations of the world.

The second volume, entitled *The Period of Construction*, will record my experiences from the birth of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. It will describe how the Party Centre and Chairman Mao nurtured me as a relatively young Central Committee member during the first seventeen years after the establishment of the New China, and allowed me to participate as a non-voting delegate in meetings of the Central Party Secretariat while at the same time supervising the work of the North China Bureau. This volume will detail our efforts to revive the rotten, worm-eaten basket of an economy left to us by the Old China and how I assisted Comrade Chen Yun in running the economic affairs of the New China. I will then outline how Chairman Mao entrusted me with increasingly more important roles following the unmasking of the plot by Gao Gang and Rao Shushi to "target Liu Shaoqi by attacking Bo Yibo" and the dispelling of "misunderstandings". I will describe how, in the years of the "Great Leap Forward", I moved from unswerving adherence to scepticism, began raising dissenting ideas, and was subsequently subjected to severe criticism. I will speak of how, in the early 1960s, I applied myself to the task of restructuring the national economy under the leadership of Comrade Deng Xiaoping by supervising the drafting of the "Seventy Articles on Industry" which explored routes of enterprise reform. The historical information recorded in this volume will supplement my book *A Retrospective Account of Certain Important Decisions and Events*, and the two taken together may, I hope, serve as complementary sources of insight. During the ten years of civil strife under the "Cultural Revolution" and the subsequent two years of vacillation, I endured an exceptional twelve year period of struggle in prison. While my personal suffering can be put aside, lessons painfully learned should not be relegated to silence. It is hoped that the experiences, feelings, and thoughts recorded here

may serve as a reference for succeeding generations, and that they may contribute to the future development of the Party and the nation.

The third volume of this work, entitled *The Years of Reform*, will recount my experiences during the period of socialist development following the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. Early in 1979, I was restored to a leadership position and resumed participation in leadership and decision-making within both the Party and the state. In particular, during this period I worked under the direct leadership of Comrade Deng Xiaoping, the foremost architect of the reform policy, and Comrade Chen Yun to articulate the lessons of the past, to promote unanimity of understanding within the Party over the policies of reform and opening and over the basic Party line, and to co-ordinate some relationships within the Party. Moreover, I chaired the work of the Central Advisory Committee and contributed to the resolution of several important issues within the Party. This volume will probably be written in a format similar to that of my previous work, *A Retrospective Account of Certain Important Decisions and Events*.

Over the past decade and a half, the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics has achieved outstanding results. We have ushered in an unprecedented era in China's development by successfully establishing a socialist system in this ancient, vast, populous, and economically backward nation which has suffered bullying and humiliation at the hands of foreign powers throughout its modern history. We must now continue our struggle in this great land for several generations to come in order to achieve socialist modernisation and make China a prosperous, powerful, democratic, and civilised socialist nation. This will mark the beginning of a great new epoch in China's development and lead to the resurgence of the Chinese nation.

As an old soldier who has fought untiringly for the Party cause, I find great joy in this vision. Today, it gives me boundless comfort to be able to take part in the cause of reform and opening in this new era even as I look forward to the bright future of the modernisation of our motherland.

The realisation of socialist modernisation is an immense project of social engineering; the responsibility weighs heavy, and the road is long. We have not yet reached the light at the end of the tunnel, and the Party must persist in its endeavours. The progress of such a great cause cannot always be smooth and devoid of difficulty. The path forward will not be lined with fresh flowers and no thorns. Nor can the march forward see only success and no bitter lessons. The objective laws of history do not spell smooth progress along a straight path. Because there will be difficulties, we must have fearlessness in the face of hardship and the mettle to overcome all odds. Because there will be thorns, we must be keen at identifying them and extirpate them in a timely fashion. And because errors may occur, as we forge courageously ahead, we must use extreme caution and take to heart the lessons we have learned. Nevertheless, any great cause which reflects the will, the interests, and the demands of the people will inevitably succeed.

I am as confident today of the certain success of opening and reform and of achieving modernisation as I was in the past of the inevitable victory of the revolution. It is my hope that my tentative exploration of and personal thoughts on major events in the New Era which I experienced and in which I participated, and the successes won and lessons learned along the way, will be of some value to those engaged in the task of modernisation today and in the years to come. The completion of this book is perhaps the final important task that history has left for me to complete.

I have written this preface on the eve of the publication of the first volume of this work. This work will unavoidably suffer from shortcomings and inaccuracies, and I warmly welcome any corrections that my comrades may have.

Bo Yibo

Beijing, January 15, 1996

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# Chapter I

## My Youth

I was born on February 6, 1908, the fifth day of the first month in the Chinese calendar during the 34<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the Guangxu Emperor. In November of that year, the Guangxu Emperor (Dezong Zaitian) and the Empress Dowager Cixi passed away one after the other. Three years later in 1911, the success of the Wuchang Revolution led to the overthrow of China's millennia-old feudal imperial system. After a brief period of optimism, however, Yuan Shikai designated himself emperor, Zhang Xun attempted to restore the previous Qing dynasty, and these events gave way to an era of incessant clashing among warlords throughout China. On the other hand, this period also saw the rise of the New Culture Movement and the birth of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. The years of my youth, then, were spent in the midst of these dramatic social changes.

### 1.1 My Family

I arrived in Yan'an in early November of 1943 on my first ever visit to Party headquarters since joining the Party. The day after my arrival I met Chairman Mao for the first time, at his invitation. He began the conversation by asking me where I was from. I told him that I was from Dingxiang County in Shanxi Province, to which he replied, "The mother of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty also had the surname Bo. Her younger brother was called Bo Zhao. Emperor Wen enfeoffed him as a vassal king and he established his capital in Zhongdu of your Shanxi province (south-west of modern-day Pingyao --- Bo Yibo's note)."

Chairman Mao's observation stimulated my interest in researching the origins of the Bo family name. However, being busy, I was never able to pursue this interest as I would have liked. It was not until half a century later, when I had retired from leadership duties, that I recalled his comments. Only after consulting several experts in the field and searching

through the *Yuanhe Index of Family Names* and reference books of its kind did I learn that the Bo family had originally been a branch of the ruling family in the Shang dynasty. After King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty destroyed King Zhou of the Shang, the family was exiled to Bo (now Bo County, in Anhui Province), where they adopted the name of the district as their own family name. The family name “Bo” later came to be written with a different Chinese character which is a homophone of the character for the name of the county.

Lü's *Spring and Autumn Annals* record a certain Bo Yi of Wei, in probably the first reference to the surname Bo in ancient records. The first emperor of the Han dynasty, Han Gaozu, had a concubine with the surname Bo who was venerated as empress dowager when Emperor Wen rose to the throne. Her younger brother, Bo Zhao, once a general of the charioteers, was given the title of marquis. However, because he killed a messenger dispatched by Emperor Wen, he was compelled to commit suicide.

When I was a child, I heard my elders speak of an ancestor of the Bo family who had served as an inspector of a circuit or as an official, perhaps of the rank of prefectural magistrate, in the province of Fujian. There was an embroidered portrait of him in the ancestral hall of the Bo family in Fanglan township. Every time there was a marriage in the Bo family, the portrait was brought out from the ancestral hall, incense was burned in worship, and his descendants kow-towed before his image. Once, while I was conducting an inspection tour in Fujian after Liberation, I leafed through the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of Fujian*. At the time there was a directive from Chairman Mao to read local gazetteers whenever we were sent on inspections to other parts of the country, in order to understand the local history, customs, and manners of these areas. As I skimmed through the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of Fujian* I recalled what the elders of my hometown had said and searched through its pages, but could find no mention of anyone by the name of Bo.

My family have been farmers for generations immemorial. Our original home was in Fanglan township, a large town of about 2,000 households in which the main surnames were Bo and Liu. Fanglan was heavily populated, yet land was scarce, and it was difficult to make a living. During my great-great-grandfather's lifetime, it had become impossible to

make ends meet, and so in 1827 the family moved fifteen *li*<sup>1</sup> away to a village called Zhangjiazhuang [Zhang Family Village], a small mountain village with an abundance of land and a sparse population. My great-great-grandfather bought over ten *mu*<sup>2</sup> of slope land there. After that, my great-grandfather and his brother also settled down there.

Upon the death of my grandparents, my father's elder brother became head of the family. Uncle had completed several years of schooling and could write and handle figures. Together with a partner, he opened up a papermaking shop in Jiang Village which he managed. People called him "the prosperous shopkeeper".

My father never attended school, working from childhood at odd jobs instead. While working in Zhangjiazhuang at the age of twelve, he was injured when some scaffolding fell down and broke his arm. He had his arm set by a shepherd who looked after the sheep for all of the farmers in the village who raised them (usually not more than four or five per family). Since shepherds often had to set bones for sheep, those who had a modicum of talent would become their village's "resident bonesetter". This shepherd managed to set my father's arm, after a fashion; even though his arm never healed to its original position, his injury did not prevent him from earning a living.

My uncle was a petty, niggling man when it came to money, and was, moreover, callous and hardhearted. Upon the death of my grandparents, he suggested splitting up the family assets. My father was fifteen years younger than my uncle and very much feared and respected him as his elder. Therefore, my father obeyed his wishes, and the result was predictable. Uncle did not so much divide up the family assets as leave his younger brother out in the cold.

My parents, together with my elder brother, were then forced to retrace the steps of their forbears by leaving the place that had been their home for three generations and moving to my maternal grandparents' home in Jiang Village. My parents had a good reputation, and

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<sup>1</sup> 1 *li* = 0.5 kilometres -- trans.

<sup>2</sup> 1 *mu* = 0.0667 hectares -- trans.

everyone in Zhangjiazhuang, relatives, friends, and fellow villagers alike, disapproved of my uncle's actions. All of them were deeply sympathetic to my parents' plight. Later on, my family continued to return to Zhangjiazhuang each year to sweep the graves of our ancestors and to visit friends and relatives. Many years later, after I joined the revolution, when there was an outstanding warrant for my arrest and I had to leave Jiang Village for fear of capture, I still gave first consideration to Zhangjiazhuang as a temporary refuge.

Jiang Village is situated 20 *li* to the east of the county seat in one of the most prosperous areas of the county, just on the edge of the Xinzhou-Dingxiang Basin, with its back to the mountains, facing Pingchuan. In Jiang Village there was an abundance of groundwater, many wells, and a well-developed papermaking industry with a history of almost two hundred years.

One peculiar phenomenon in Jiang Village is that many people whitewash only half of their courtyard walls. The plaster is applied so smoothly that it shines. These half-painted walls were originally used for the drying of paper. For this reason, outsiders nicknamed the people of Jiang Village "half-jobbers". This tradition shows how closely the townspeople were tied to papermaking. At the time, Jiang Village probably had a little over 600 households, or more than 3,400 people. The main industrial and commercial papermaking enterprises, including such firms as Wanyuanchang [Myriad Fountains of Prosperity], Fushunyong [Fortune Fair Forever] Deshengheng [Virtue Rising Permanently], and Fuheyong [Fortune Harmony Forever] numbered sixteen in all. In addition, there were many smaller papermaking shops as well as individual family-run papermaking businesses.

The other strange thing about Jiang Village was that not one family in the village actually had the family name Jiang.

When I was in school in Taiyuan, our homeroom teacher once asked us to write an essay titled "My Hometown" over the vacation, to be handed in when classes resumed. Having read my essay, my teacher asked, "You wrote about many famous people from your hometown, yet did not mention a single one by the name of Jiang. How is it then that your



hometown is called Jiang Village?” I couldn’t answer. When I returned to my hometown during the vacation of the following year, I did some searching and found a stone which was a remnant of the Jiang family’s wall. This stone fragment probably represented traces of what had once been the home of the Jiang family. I expect it must have been a small village, which the inhabitants for some reason all vacated over time, or which suffered some kind of disaster.

There were a great many family names represented in Jiang Village, including most, if not all of China’s most common “hundred names”. The family name Hu was the largest by a significant margin, and the Hu’s dominated the village. Quite a few villagers had the family names Zhou, Du, Guo, Liu and Bo, and these families also had some clout. The rest of the villagers were all part of smaller family groups. Within the village, there was a wide gap between the rich and poor, and the bonds of kinship ran deep. Internal feuding arose even within the Hu family, and it was divided into eastern and western branches. Still, the differences between the rich and poor of each clan were greater than those between the various clans.

There was a steady influx of outsiders into Jiang Village which was clearly driven by the papermaking industry. The papermaking industry was relatively large and employed many people, so its attraction was quite strong. There were usually at least a dozen men in the village working as short-term labourers drying paper. My parents joined their ranks.

Every papermaking shop in Jiang Village displayed a tablet to the “father” of the trade, Cai Lun. On New Year’s day and other festivals, the head of each workshop would present offerings and bow to his image.

The papermaking process had changed greatly since the invention of paper by Cai Lun of the Han Dynasty 1,800 years earlier. The main raw materials were hempen rope, new and old books and periodicals, discarded newspapers, and miscellaneous paper fibres. When making top quality “*dalaolian*” paper, bolts of foreign [i.e. Western] paper were also added. The tools and equipment of the papermaking trade were numerous, and most were heavy.