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Section: M1

The Great Long March

The Long March took place under the background of Chinese Civil War, during the time when China was also experiencing the Second Sino-Japanese War. Namely, China was facing both internal and external problems. At that time, Chinese Nationalist Party was in power and their siege of the Red Army of the Communist Party of China, later becoming the ruling party of China, was successful. So Mao Zedong, the cofounder and the first Chairman of People’s Republic of China, decided to retreat from the south China to the northwest to meet other allies. The long journey marched during this retreat, which is said to be approximately 7800 miles, is known as the Long March. The Long March is famous for not only its length but also its toughness. The Red Army marched day and night and crossed glacier, raging rivers, desolate saline marshes and these bad conditions have killed many people. Their spirit of overcoming difficulties is respectable. Hence, I want to present a small story that took place during the march and this story is adapted from Dingyi Lu’s personal experience.

In Fall 1935, the Fourth Red Army entered a prairie and many comrades had some problems with their stomachs and intestines. Two comrades and I were too sick to catch the team, and thus political instructor assigned us a leader of cooking team to tend us. The leader was almost 40 years old. He was tall and somewhat hunchbacked. He had a square face with high cheekbone, massive wrinkles and whitish sideburns. Because he was the oldest in our military company and was benevolent to others, we all called him “Old Monitor”.

We three patients were slow walkers and could only walk about a dozen miles a day, so Old Monitor and us walked and rested all along the way. As soon as we arrived at camps, Old Monitor set off looking for wild vegetables and cooked them with highland barley noodles. We run out of noodles within half of a month and starvation was threatening us. Old Monitor sought for the wild herbs and their roots everywhere but it was far from enough for us to survive on them. Old Monitor was up at night for his anxiety about us being leaner and leaner. But actually, he was the leanest.

One day, when he was doing the laundry by the pond, he saw a fish jump out of the surface. He came back with great delight and took out a needle. He burnt it red and bent it into a hook. We immediately had a flesh fish soup that night. Although without condiments, the soup still tastes more delicious than everything else. Since then, Old Monitor had been trying to camp by the side of ponds. After settling us down, he went out with the hook and came back with bowls of steaming hot fish vegetable soup. Although still getting weaker, we felt better than eating merely the wild herb and its root. However, never had I ever seen Old Monitor eat fish.

Once I asked him, “Old Monitor, why do you not eat fish?” He touched his mouth as if he was recalling the aftertaste and said, “I ate it when I finished cooking, earlier than you guys.” I did not trust him and followed him secretly. When I got closer, I was greatly shocked. He sat there with the bowl, chewing the herb root and the leftover fish bone. After chewing a while, he swallowed them with frowning. I felt like there were tens of thousands of needles stabbing my throat and yelled, “Old Monitor, why are you…” He suddenly looked up and saw me staring at the bowl in his hands. He equivocated, “I have eaten. I just saw this not eaten up and do not want to waste it…” “No, I know.” I interrupted him. Having checked that those two comrades were asleep, Old Monitor said to me in a low voice, “Quiet, Liang! We are party members. Since you know, do not tell anyone.”

“But you should also take good care of yourself!”

“It does not matter. I am strong.” He looked at the night prairie. After a long time, he said in a low and deep voice, “The military instructor gave you three to me and before he left, he said, ‘They are young. You are the superior, the caretaker, the servant. No matter how hard it is, you have to bring them out of the prairie.’ Liang, look, the prairie is boundless and endless. I think it is going to take us more than twenty days to get out of here. It is not easy to endure these twenty days! You guys are becoming leaner every day. As long as I cannot find food, maybe you guys will not get up in the next morning. If something happens to any of you, how should I report to the party? Can I say, ‘Hey, instructor, I left them and overcame the difficulties and came out of the prairie myself’?”

“But, you should eat something with us!”

“No, we do not have enough food.” He shook his head, “Liang, honestly, it is not easy to get something to eat. Sometimes you wait until midnight and still get nothing. To get some bait, I have searched a lot of turf but still cannot find any earthworm… And my eyes are bad. When it gets dark, I have to touch and feel to find the wild vegetables…”

I could not tolerate this and said, “Old Monitor, I will help you. I can see.”

“No, we had already split our work earlier, right? And you are still sick. If you do not rest well, you will barely survive.”

I still insisted on my opinion. Old Monitor said in a serious tone, “Liang, as a member of Communist Party, you should follow the command of the party. Your task is to walk and to pacify the two little comrades and increase their confidence!” Seeing his serious face, I could not say anything and started crying in his arms.

The next day, Old Monitor served us with little soup with a small catfish and little vegetable in each bowl. He laughed, “Eat. It is just not that much. I just caught a big fish but it slipped away.” I hold the bowl in my hands, feeling like the bowl has thousands of pounds and unable to move it close to my mouth. Weirdly, the other two comrades were also not eating. Seeing this, Old Monitor stopped laughing and frowned. He said, “What happened? Do not want to eat? If you do not eat, you cannot get out of this prairie. Guys, for the revolution, you have to eat. Liang, do not be so fragile!” His last sentence was rigorous and only I knew its meaning. I moved the bowl close to mouth, and my tears dropped into the steaming hot fish soup. I turned my back, wiped my eyes and swallowed the fish soup. Seeing us finishing up the soup, Old Monitor smiled and his wrinkles were unfolded. Nonetheless, my heart felt so heavy.

As time went by, although we were closer to the border of the prairie, we became sicker. I could almost walk, but my comrades could not even stand up. Although skins and bones, Old Monitor still encouraged us in high spirits. We supported each other to walk and finally we reached the end of the prairie. We could see the mountains in the distance. “Guys, we stop here and get some food. After that we will go straight out of this prairie.” Old Monitor said happily to us this morning and then he left with his hook. We were also motivated and looked for the wild vegetables and hay as if we were celebrating a festival. However, after a long time, Old Monitor did not come back. We searched him everywhere and finally found him in a coma by the side of a pond. We were panicked. We had seen many people with respectful persistence to climb snow mountains. But once they fell down, they would never get up. To save Old Monitor, we had to feed him food. We divided our labor immediately: I went fishing. One tended Old Monitor, and the other made a fire. I squatted by the side of the pond and rattled, hoping fish to come. The more anxious I am, the harder for fish to get hooked. Finally, the fish pole moved and I pulled the fish out right away. The fish is about 3 inches long. When I sent the fish soup to Old Monitor’s mouth, he was at his last gasp. He barely opened his eyes and saw the fish soup in my hands. He said, “Liang, do not waste food. I am done. You eat. Only ten miles left. Finish the food and you must get out of this prairie!”

“Old Monitor, please, eat! We would rather lift you out of this prairie!” I almost cried. “No, you eat. You must get out of this prairie. If you see the military instructor, tell him, I did not finish the task our party gave me. I did not take good care of you guys. Look, you are so lean…” Old Monitor touched my forehead with his rough hand, and suddenly, it dropped down. “Old Monitor!” We shouted, but he eyes were slowly closed. We sobbed on his body for a long time.

Wiping out tears, I carefully packaged the hook Old Monitor left us and put it into my pocket. I thought: After the victory of revolution, I will send this to the martyr museum and let our descendants to visit it with reverence. On this reddish rusty hook, there was a brilliant golden glow!

This story is a very typical Chinese text. Via an inconspicuous object, the author conveys an educative truth. In this case, Lu uses this small hook to record the Old Monitor’s heroic behavior, sacrificing himself and being devoted to the Communist Party. His shining humanitarianism is glowing on this hook, which also represents that his lofty revolutionary spirit is immortal. The text also contains many descriptive details about people’s motion and expression, meaning this experience is very impressive to Dingyi Lu and Old Monitor’s mentality is constantly being missed. Now the precious hook is displayed in a museum in Beijing.

Old Monitor is the epitome of all the Chinese soldiers during Sino-Japanese war. It was their persistence and selflessness that saved the China out of domestic trouble as well as foreign invasion. I hope my audience could learn more about China through this story.

References:

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