History 2C

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The Epical Long March

The Long March took place under the background of Chinese Civil War. At that time, the leaders of the Communist Party of China, Bo Gu and Otto Braun, due to overconfidence from the previous four victories over the besiege launched by Chinese Nationalist Party, used aggressive strategies in fighting against the Fifth Encirclement Campaign, resulting in a significant loss in their territory. Confronted with a hopeless military and economic situation in Jiangxi, the base of Communists in southern China, and well aware that the man most responsible for their plight was becoming increasingly more powerful in the Yangtze Valley, the Communists had no alternative but to withdraw from the province and seek a haven in the west.[[1]](#footnote-1) The long journey of attrition, approximately 7800-mile long, marched by the Communists during this retreat, is known as the Long March. The Long March is famous for not only its length but also its toughness. For a year, the troops marched, climbed, and crawled; swam, rafted, and waded. They fought their enemies and they battled the terrain. And they faltered and died; enemy bullets and bombs found their marks; disease struck; fatigue overcame them; the terrain balked at conquest; hunger slid over into starvation. They died and they deserted and defected.[[2]](#footnote-2) Their spirit of overcoming difficulties is highly respectable. Hence, I want to present a story that demonstrates such spirit and took place during the march. 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 keep up with the team, and thus our military 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 team and benevolent to others, we all called him “Old Leader”.

We three patients were slow walkers and could only walk about a dozen miles a day, so Old Leader and us walked and rested all along the way. As soon as we arrived at the camping site, Old Leader set off looking for wild vegetables and cooked them with highland barley noodles. We ran out of the noodles within half of a month and starvation was threatening us. Old Leader sought for the wild herbs and their roots everywhere but it was still miserably insufficient for us to survive on them. Old Leader was up at night for his anxiety about seeing us leaner and leaner. However, he was indeed 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 and delicious fish soup that night. Although without condiments, the soup still tasted more palatable than everything else. Since then, Old Leader had been trying to camp by the pond. After settling us down, he went out with the hook and came back with bowls of steaming hot fish vegetable soup. Although getting weaker, we felt better than eating merely the wild herbs and their root. Yet, never had I ever seen Old Leader eat fish.

Once I asked him, “Old Leader, why do you not eat fish?” He touched his mouth as if he was recalling its aftertaste and said, “I ate it immediately when I finished cooking, before you eat.” I did not trust him and followed him secretly. When I got closer, I was greatly shocked. He sat there with a bowl, chewing the herb roots and the leftover fish bone. After chewing a while, he swallowed them, frowning. I felt like tens of thousands of needles were stabbing my throat. “Old Leader, why are you…” I yelled. He suddenly raised his head and found me staring at the bowl in his hands. He equivocated, “I have eaten. I just saw these left over and do not want to waste them…” “No, I know.” I interrupted him. Noticing that the two comrades were asleep, Old Leader spoke 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!” said I. “It does not matter. I am strong.” He looked into 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 survive these twenty days! You are becoming leaner every day. As long as I cannot find food, maybe you will not get up in the next morning. If something happens to any of you, how should I report to my superior? Can I say, ‘Hey, instructor, I left them, overcame the difficulties and came out of the prairie myself’?”

“But, you should eat something with us!” said I. “No, we do not have enough food.” He shook his head, “Liang, honestly, it is not easy to find 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 bear this and said, “Old Leader, 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. Then Old Leader said in a serious tone, “Liang, as a member of the Communist Party, you should follow the command of the party. Your task is to walk and to pacify the other two little comrades and boost their confidence!” Watching his serious face, I could not say anything but started crying in his arms.

The next day, Old Leader 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 once got a big fish but it slipped away.” I held the bowl in my hands, feeling like the bowl is thousands of pounds heavy and unable to bring it up to my mouth. Weirdly, the other two comrades were also not eating. Seeing this, Old Leader stopped laughing and frowned, “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 lifted the bowl to my mouth, and my tears dropped into the steaming hot fish soup. I turned my back, wiped out the tears and gulped the soup down. Watching us finish up the soup, Old Leader 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 walk, but my comrades could not even stand. Albeit skins and bones, Old Leader still encouraged us in high spirits. We supported each other to walk and finally we almost reached the end of the prairie. We could see the mountains in the distance. “Guys, we stop here and I will get you some food. After that we will go straight out of this prairie.” Old Leader said cheerfully 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 Leader did not come back. We searched him everywhere and finally found him in a coma by a pond. We were panicked. We had seen many people with remarkable persistence when climbing the snow mountains. But once they fell down, they would never get up. To save Old Leader, we had to feed him. We divided our labor immediately: I went fishing. One tended Old Leader, and the other built a fire. I squatted by the pond and rattled, hoping fish to come. The more anxious I got, the harder for fish to get hooked. Eventually, the fish pole moved and I pulled the fish out right away. The fish was about 3 inches long. When I brought the fish soup to Old Leader’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 Leader, 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 meet the military instructor, tell him, I did not finish the task our party gave me. I did not take good care of you. Look, you are so lean…” Old Leader touched my forehead with his rough hand, and suddenly, it dropped down. “Old Leader!” 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 Leader left 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 shined a brilliant golden glow.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This primary source is a very typical Chinese text. Via an inconspicuous object, an educative truth is conveyed. Obviously, the hook leaves a deep impression on Dingyi Lu, as it not only saves his life but also records the Old Leader’s heroic behavior, sacrificing himself and being devoted to the Communist Party. His glowing humanitarianism and lofty spirit are glowing on this hook. This narrative also contains many descriptive details about characters’ activities and expressions, which increases the persuasiveness of the story and implies that Old Leader’s mentality is constantly being missed.

The major issue I had was how to structure my narrative. So I chose Anthony Garavente’s and Karen Gernan’s articles to be my secondary sources to supplement my article. The former is used for complementing the background introduction, and the latter focuses more on the describing the toughness of the Long March. These information enriches my narrative and lays a good foundation for me to begin narrating the story.

The Long March is a great epic of revolutionary heroism, and Old Leader is the epitome of all the Communists during the Long March, even all the Chinese soldiers in the following Sino-Japanese war. It was their persistence, selflessness and belief that saved the China out of domestic trouble as well as foreign invasion. Their “Long March Spirit” illustrates that they place the most fundamental interests of the country above everything and such patriotism provides strong mentality for them to strive for the victories. I hope my audience, no matter who read this, could learn more about China and Chinese spirits through my narrative.

References:

1. Garavente Anthony. “The Long March”, The China Quarterly, No. 22 (Apr. – Jun., 1965), 89-124

2. Gernant Karen. “Attrition Sustained by the First Front Army of the Chinese Red Army on the Long March”, Journal of Asian Story, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1985), 166-187

3. Lu Dingyi. “The Text of the Golden Hook”. Accessed September 03, 2018. http://www.lbx777.com/yw10/x\_jsdyg/kewen.htm.

1. Anthony Garavente, “The Long March”, The China Quarterly, No. 22 (Apr. – Jun., 1965), 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Karen Gernant, “Attrition Sustained by the First Front Army of the Chinese Red Army on the Long March”, Journal of Asian Story, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1985), 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dingyi Lu, “The Text of the Golden Hook”, Accessed September 03, 2018, http://www.lbx777.com/yw10/x\_jsdyg/kewen.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)