

The Fig Tree

**Memoirs of a Taiwanese
Patriot**

By

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Commentaries

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threw itself into the Greater East Asian War which subsequently led to its own bitter defeat.

And as a result of all this, the Japanese people themselves suffered terribly; millions of men were killed in the prime of their lives leaving behind them countless widows and orphans.

The flow of my thoughts was suddenly interrupted by the image of a young and beautiful Japanese widow—my colleague from my teaching days in Wuhu. In my twenty years as a teacher I had been good friends with a number of women colleagues but she had been the only Japanese. She often came over to our quarters in the evening to talk about novels—she was very keen on literature. She was innocent and utterly unaffected and would never have felt herself superior to me, a Chinese. She married a graduate from the agricultural college but he left her and her three sons and was later killed in action. What had become of her? She must be living in desperate circumstances...Should I go and see her? But then, if she was really in trouble, she would certainly look me up...At this stage in my musings I decided to look her up myself. If there were no objections from other people, perhaps she could find a Taiwanese husband. If she had been free to follow her own mind that one time, perhaps her later life would have been free of such misery. I felt tears of sympathy welling up in my eyes at the sheer awfulness of all she had been through.

My reverie was cut short by a burst of cheering and cries of "WANSUI". The noise went on and on without stopping and seemed to rock the very ground we were standing on. Everyone in front of me was frantically waving flags and it was difficult to see what

was going on through the confusion of it all. Then someone shouted:

"Here they are! The soldiers of the motherland!"

I stood on tiptoe and caught a glimpse of soldiers with umbrellas strapped across their backs, which struck me as somewhat odd. Some of them even had shoulder poles strung with woks and cooking utensils and bedding rolls. I thought it was all very strange indeed. Were these really the troops of General Chen Yi's 70th Army? Suppressing with difficulty my initial impression, I tried to persuade myself that while their external appearance was less than impressive these were the men who for eight years had been bravely waging war against the Japanese. Yes, these were indeed brave heroes! Having thus consoled myself I was suffused with a feeling of deep contentment. But this was mere self-indulgence on my part.

I did not say anything but for someone like myself who was used to seeing the awe-inspiring, well-equipped Taiwanese troops of the Japanese Army it was difficult not to feel disappointed. Just behind where I was standing some youngsters were quietly making remarks in the same vein.

On the day after the troops arrived my paper published reports of Japanese policemen being lynched by a crowd in Dadaocheng. The same afternoon two more Japanese policemen lost their lives. As soon as I heard the news I rushed over to the paper to warn the editor that if we published any more stories like that there was no saying what the consequences would be and that we really should consider what we were doing. There was a distinct possibility that unruly mobs might be spurred on by such reports to invade

the Japanese barracks at Tongmen and take out their aggression on the Japanese women they found there. If that happened we were finished. There were only three thousand Chinese troops on the island compared to one hundred and eighty three thousand regular soldiers of the Japanese Army. With the reservists, that figure became three hundred and fifty thousand. If three hundred and fifty thousand Japanese soldiers went on the rampage the consequences would be unimaginable. For a start they might ransack newspaper offices and probably kill us into the bargain. By great good fortune the danger was averted.

Among the Taiwanese resistance fighters in the motherland who had come back to Taiwan with the Advance Command was a school friend from the class above me. At the reception given for him I heard him say this:

"China is in fact rather a strange country, not in the least like Japan. In Japan two multiplied by two is four—no other answer is possible. But in China two multiplied by two can be three, or five, and sometimes even six or eight!"

At the time I just did not understand what he was saying however hard I tried and then, very much later, the riddle became clear. It was a warning, a moral tale: if we did not change our outdated concepts, Chinese society would suffer.

On 24 October General Chen Yi assumed his duties as Administrator General and on 25 October the surrender ceremony took place in the Sun Yatsen Hall in Taipei. The celebrations that day were even more magnificent than those of the first Double Tenth. The parade was enormous as all the paraphernalia which

had been prepared over the last two months of waiting was brought out.

Three hundred thousand people took part. There were Qinglong swords, great iron tridents and bronze batons and sceptres, all the traditional weaponry which had been hidden away for years. To the rhythm of booming gongs and drums the participants marched to the Hall, sending up three rousing "WANSUJ" as each section arrived. It was hours before the parade had finally passed.

The Hall itself was packed with people both on and off the platform. A portrait of the Nation's Father hung at the front; beneath it, on either side, stood rows of military top brass, honoured guests and allied generals and envoys. Ruddy faced, Administrator General Chen Yi looked on excitedly. After a while the historic surrender ceremony began and thus, to thunderous cries of "WANSUJ" and deafening applause that shook the hall to its foundations, Taiwan was restored to the motherland and liberated from fifty years of colonial existence.

Even in my dreams I could never have imagined that day. I made a secret wish to myself: from today onwards we must make Taiwan an even finer place than it was during the Japanese occupation and transform it into a model province based on Sun Yatsen's Three Principles of the People. This was not just my own personal wish but the wish of a whole island, of all six million islanders.

Regrettably, what inspired me then did not last. Five years ago, on the anniversary of Taiwan's return to China, I wrote in a poem that I could never have imagined what Restoration had brought in its wake.

Thoughts on Restoration Day

Seventeen years have passed since Restoration
 And the sores have still not healed
 An evil gentry cheats the commonfolk
 Tax collectors blackmail the businessman
 Corrupt officials spend their days in restaurants
 "Freedom!" they preach, but do not practice
 And few men sorrow for what the country has
 become
 Fifty long years we passed as slaves
 Fifty years we cannot now reclaim
 But pain passed, the suffering is forgotten
 The country's plight is what concerns us now
 The shameful days of history must be left behind
 While bent officials scheme with racketeers
 The city, dejected, suffers endlessly
 We hated what *Shimonoseki* wrought
 Yet what, we ask, has Restoration brought?

11. The Kanazuchi men

Once in office as Administrator General, Chen Yi lost no time in taking draconian action to freeze the bank deposits of Japanese residents and forbid the use of the overprinted Japanese thousand-yen banknotes. In less than no time at all Japanese suddenly found themselves unable to withdraw their considerable savings, and while this was somewhat unfair to law-abiding Japanese it was one way of dealing with the Japanese crooks and conmen, some of whom in any case, so it was rumoured, used their contacts with the banks to evade the law, just as they had in the past.

Among Chen Yi's subordinates there were some very capable people, but there were also many mediocrities. In this mixture of the good and the bad there were some progressive democratic elements and, at the other end of the spectrum, some diehard feudalists, but generally speaking the old-style bureaucrats outnumbered the enlightened modernists. Even more unacceptable was the presence in their midst of a hotpotch of individuals known collectively as the Three Blade Crowd, by which was meant barbers, cooks and tailors, from the sharp instruments they used in the pursuit of their trade. (In Japanese times these professions were dominated by overseas Chinese.)

Most of the people in the recovery administration considered that it was because of their activities that victory over the Japanese had been achieved and as a result felt distinctly superior to anyone not of their number. As they did not dare employ Taiwanese who