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HI244
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Crossing the Yalu River: A “Second-Class Citizen” in the People’s Volunteer Army 1

Interviewer: My name is Ran Liu. Today is October 8th, 2025, and I am interviewing Ping Liu through a WeChat video call for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Do you agree to grant the College permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Ping: Agreed.

Interviewer: Okay, first I would like to ask you to briefly recall and talk about your relationship with your father during your childhood, youth, and adulthood, and briefly describe your life with your father at that time.

Ping: Okay.

Interviewer: Including where you lived.

Ping: Let’s talk about childhood first. My childhood was in Beijing, when I was little. As long as I can remember, my father worked in an iron factory and came back once a week. Whenever my father was about to come back, my heart was especially happy, because he would bring us delicious food. This was during my childhood. After I grew up, since I started school, my father maintained this working status, always coming back once a week, sometimes once every two weeks, sometimes once a month. It was irregular at that time, and I didn't know what he was doing. He only told us he was working in an iron factory. That factory also had several names. Before, it was the Tatan Factory, later called the Long March Automobile Manufacturing Factory (*Changzheng qiche zhizaochang*). At first, it was just called the Iron Factory; everyone commonly referred to it as the Iron Factory.

When I started school, I remember when I was 9 years old, that was 1970. The state had a policy, called "war preparedness evacuation" (*zhanbei shusan*),—that was the term—and he [and his family] was [subsequently] sent down to the rural areas of Hebei. My father left earlier [than the whole family]; I remember he left in '68. By 1970, we [my siblings and my mother] couldn't live in Beijing anymore, because my father had already left, so we had to go and live with him.

At that time, the director of the Revolutionary Committee of the local office [Ma Zhensheng] worked on your grandmother¹, saying, "What good is there for you in Beijing? Beijing has pollution, bad weather, and people get cancer. How wonderful the countryside is, it’s a vast world!" He talked a lot to your grandmother. Regardless of what he said, the point was that since

¹ Ping’s mother.

your grandfather was not around [in Beijing], your grandmother couldn't make a living supporting the three of us. At that time, there was also a policy for family members of personnel who had already been sent away from [Beijing], like us. Your grandfather's² situation was called "war preparedness transfer (*zhanbei zhuanyi*)." Our situation at that time had a name called "war preparedness evacuation (*zhanbei shusan*)." There were documents at that time, but many documents were lost through our family's moves over the years. They certainly existed, but they are all lost. They were paper documents, irrefutable evidence, which could particularly prove that period of history.

So, starting from May 1970, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, we went to find your grandfather, and thus began the life of being sent down to the countryside.

Therefore, before that, the time I spent with your grandfather was very short, only Saturdays and Sundays. The education of the children was entirely handled by your grandmother. At that time, there were also few kindergartens; many were not in kindergarten then. After starting primary school, I started the first year of primary school when I was 9-years-old. I remember it was during the time of the Ninth National Congress of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party); I was on the playground then, and a teacher called me and told me to go home, saying that my family might be returning [going] to the countryside. From then on, the rural life began, so the time spent with my father before that was not much. This period was like this.

Interviewer: After moving to the countryside, did the time you spent together increase compared to before?

Ping: Yes, it increased a lot, very much so. In the countryside, it was essentially a collection of people from all units in the Beijing area who had historical problems and were sent down to the countryside. There were doctors who had studied in Japan, Chinese students who had studied in France, and people from the central government's financial sector. I called them "Grandpa" or "Uncle." There were about ten of them, including your grandfather, who were there together. At that time, not only did I spend more time with your grandfather, but I also spent more time with these people who were sent down to the countryside from Beijing. I listened to their teachings, including their stories, and I am particularly clear about the stories that happened over all those years. In short, in that era, the era of Beijingers going to the countryside, they all lived a hard life, difficult to endure.

Interviewer: Can you share one or two examples of interactions you had with your father in the countryside? Can you talk about that?

Ping: Yes, I can. At that time, no matter how difficult the family situation was, your grandfather and grandmother taught us to study hard. Only by studying hard will we have a future. For

² Ping's father, Ziyang Liu.

example, once I skipped school—I went bird catching—and the teacher found out and told your grandfather. Your grandfather came back and gave me a good talking-to. I was very naughty when I was little, but I never did that kind of thing again afterward.

There are many other things, including some issues he encountered in agricultural production, simply because they were amateurs at farm work. I remember one time when they were weeding the fields. Your grandfather, along with a few people who were sent down from Beijing, was working with local peasants, guided by dedicated local personnel. Your grandfather weeded thoroughly and meticulously from beginning to end. However, when the inspector came, he said that he had removed all the real millet seedlings, leaving only the weeds. Why? He explained to them, "The millet plants are taller than the weeds, so I kept the tall ones. Besides, when you asked me to weed, you didn't tell me how I should do it, right?" "Then why didn't everyone else weed incorrectly?" the person asked. "I don't know," your grandfather said. Actually, his state at that time was not limited to this; he was very miserable [in his heart], and his mind wasn't entirely focused on weeding. There are many small examples like this.

Interviewer: Based on what you just said, how would you describe your father's personality?

Ping: His personality is very resilient, and he is a frank and candid person. And in some respects, he is also a very gentle father. Regarding the education of his children and for the family, the impression he gave me was gentle. There were times he was strict, but not many. But he felt not satisfied at all with the conditions that led to him being sent down (*Xiafang*), the life he was living. He fought all his life, participating in many wars—the Anti-Japanese War, the Liberation War, and the Korean War—and suddenly, he was sent down to be a peasant. He certainly couldn't bear the huge disparity in his heart. But he was a soldier; he wasn't like some people who couldn't hold on, hanged themselves, slit their throats, and died. These things happened. But your grandfather still survived. Your grandfather said, "Why should I die?" If we talk about this in detail, it's a long story.

Interviewer: Can you briefly tell us about your father's original family, before he started a family with your mother?

Ping: My father's family and my mother's family lived far apart.

Interviewer: Your father's family before they were together.

Ping: I learned about my father's family only through listening to him speak, but I actually visited my mother's family.

Regarding my father's family: He told me that when he was little, his family was quite prosperous. He said they had people to lead horses, people hired for *kang chang huo* (long-term laborers), or short-term laborers—they had long-term and short-term laborers. Long-term

laborers were called *kang chang huo* (carrying long jobs), that's what he called them then. Their family life was quite good. When he was little, he also attended *sisshu* (a private school owned by the teachers themselves), I think. Despite my age, I still don't know exactly what the concept of a *sisshu* is. Supposedly, it might be the equivalent of primary school education, schooling received in a private academy.

Moreover, they also supported his older brother, who later might have attended the Whampoa Military Academy. If the family's economic situation hadn't been good, it would have been impossible to support such a person; they wouldn't have had the means to support him.

Later, he said the Japanese arrived, and society became chaotic. He started serving as a soldier at 16-years-old, and continued through the Anti-Japanese War, the Liberation War, and until after *kang mei yuan chao* ("War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea," also known as the Korean War), in 1951 or 1952, after returning from Korea. For more than 10 years, he had a military career; he was always fighting or preparing to fight. He was a genuine soldier. The straightness of his posture marked him as someone who would not engage in illicit activities—a military temperament, a military style.

Interviewer: Did he mention anything about his past... he grew up in Inner Mongolia, right?

Ping: Before the age of 16, his childhood and teenage years were spent growing up in Inner Mongolia.

Interviewer: Did he mention what his family members and relatives in Inner Mongolia were like? What was his relationship with them?

Ping: He was a child of mixed heritage: his father was Han Chinese and his mother was Mongolian. At that time, if a Han person married a Mongolian wife, it required certain conditions. Mongolians at that time, the Mongolian ethnic group in Inner Mongolia, still had a certain social status, politically and economically, because that area is [today's] Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. I remember him telling me when I was little that his uncles and relatives often came to his house, and he would also go to his maternal grandmother's house to stay. He had good relationships with these uncles and aunts, and they were very close. He recalled his childhood life at that time as being quite wonderful.

Interviewer: Did he mention specific things that made him feel his childhood was wonderful? Did he mention any?

Ping: He mentioned specific things... he was reminiscing about his childhood with me. He recalled that some families were not as well-off as theirs. Sometimes, poor families couldn't afford to eat meat during the New Year, even in the pastoral area. Your grandfather and grandmother would send meat and grain to those people.

Interviewer: Your father and mother sent meat and grain to people who couldn't afford to eat?

Ping: People from your grandfather's hometown—you were asking about his childhood, right? This was about my paternal grandfather (your great-grandfather) at that time. You asked me to tell a specific example of how good his childhood life was. It's because of these examples, because his family's conditions were prominent, that he felt his childhood was quite happy. That's what he told me, based on my recollection.

Interviewer: Do you think his life before joining the military influenced his personality?

Ping: Life before joining the military... Influencing his personality...

Interviewer: Yes, his childhood life.

Ping: That certainly influenced his personality. And he was also influenced by others. One example of him being influenced was by his brother. He joined the army because his third-oldest brother was also a soldier.

During the Cultural Revolution, after the Public Security Bureau arrested and questioned your grandfather, they asked if his brother was in Taiwan. They wanted your grandfather to write a letter to his brother [telling him] how good Socialism was now. I personally experienced that event.

Interviewer: Do you think it influenced him to join the military?

Ping: It certainly did. Because he was influenced by his brother. His brother was also a Nationalist soldier then, and he [Liu Ziyang] was originally a Nationalist soldier. Later, after his rehabilitation and return to his hometown, he heard from locals—although there was no concrete evidence—that his brother was executed (*zhengfa*) after Liberation.

Interviewer: Was *zhengfa* (execution) the same as being put to death?

Ping: Executed. But there is no evidence. We don't know if he was in Taiwan or what happened; in any case, there has been no news.

Interviewer: Do you think he was influenced by him?

Ping: He was definitely influenced.

Interviewer: Why did he join the military?

Ping: It was because he saw his third-oldest brother become a soldier, and he also felt he should join the military. His third older brother was KMT, and he was also KMT. His third older brother

was in Feng Yuxiang's unit at that time. Your grandfather was in the Northwest Military Region, specifically the core unit of Fu Zuoyi's 35th Army. He was stationed in the Forbidden City.

Interviewer: During what period was he stationed in the Forbidden City?

Ping: He stayed in the Forbidden City for two or three years; he didn't mention the specific years, but he always told us that. On September 19, 1949 (9/19), the Nationalist army staged an uprising. Whether you say uprising [or] surrender, it means the same thing. He also said he was part of Lu Jingyun's guard regiment—oh no, Guo Jingyun, *Guo Damazi* (Guo the Pockmarked). The commander of the 35th Army was named Guo Jingyun, and your grandfather said his nickname was Guo Damazi. They were stationed in the Forbidden City. This was Fu Zuoyi's core unit, which could also be called Fu Zuoyi's ace unit at that time.

Interviewer: So, this was before Liberation³, right?

Ping: Before Liberation. When he was stationed in the Forbidden City, your grandfather also told me that they had detective teams then. If they encountered situations of extortion, bullying, or kidnapping/raping women, they would be immediately executed (*zhengfa*) upon capture, shot on the spot. It was very strict then. They managed those tyrants and social ruffians and gangs when they were stationed in Beijing.

Interviewer: Okay, let's move to the next topic, about your father's life in the military, his military career. First, do you think he was willing to discuss or talk about his stories from the military? And under what circumstances would you usually talk about or mention this topic?

Ping: Before his rehabilitation, he never talked to us about his military career. He only spoke about it after his rehabilitation. Why? I realize now that before he was rehabilitated, he didn't dare to speak. Why didn't he dare to speak? Before his rehabilitation, the reason they persecuted him was the entire process of his military career, whether it was before the uprising, after the uprising, or because of his historical problems. After the uprising, he was also sentenced to prison because his historical issues were brought up. These things were considered shameful to talk about at the time, and they were not beneficial for his children, so he didn't tell us. It was only after his rehabilitation, when his unjust and false case was reversed and exonerated (*zhaoxue pingfan*), that he dared to talk endlessly about where he had served before. Before that, he certainly didn't dare to speak, fearing it would implicate his family. A legal editor named Xu Chang once asked him to write about the Nationalist Party's resistance against Japan on the positive battlefield, but your grandfather refused him. He said, "Don't interview me, he said, even if you write it, it's useless."

Interviewer: Why do you think he said that?

³ "The Liberation" refers to the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949.

Ping: Because his experience taught him that you cannot go against—how should I say it—the current state of affairs, you know? If they say you have it, you have it; if they say you don't, you don't. That's for sure. If you speak out, there's a good chance, especially during the time of the Gang of Four and the Cultural Revolution, you'd be labeled a counterrevolutionary. How would you handle that, right? Take our family's problem, for example: because of a mistake committed by your grandfather alone, including my third uncle (his brother), your grandmother said, "We were implicated by the person whom we haven't even met once." Whether it was your oldest uncle or me, or your oldest aunt and youngest aunt, especially the three of us⁴, suffered repercussions in terms of schooling. I passed the high school entrance exam, but they wouldn't let me attend.

The local commune Party Secretary said, "Why are you going to school? If we don't let you attend, you're already so reactionary; if you go up, you'll be even more reactionary."

Therefore, your grandmother took me to find the commune Communist Party Secretary. Your grandmother even flipped the commune Party Secretary's desk: "Why are you preventing my child from going to school?"

Interviewer: Let's return to the topic of your father joining the military. Do you think there was a correlation between his responsibility to his family at age 16 and his decision to join the military?

Ping: At that time, I think the biggest correlation was that he was influenced by his brother to join the military. At that time, I felt he didn't know who he was fighting for or why. Society had reached that point where everyone was joining the military, fighting domestically and internationally. So, as a boy, you had the obligation to be a soldier. Moreover, joining the military might have been a trend at the time. How many people weren't soldiers then, right?

Interviewer: Did he mention why he chose to join the Nationalist army instead of the Communist army when he decided to join the military? Did he talk about how he made that decision?

Ping: He just said that the Nationalist Party was wealthy, while the Communists were poor. That's how it was for them. Moreover, Fu Zuoyi's and Dong Qiwu's units were all in the Suiyuan area, in their region. The Communists were also in Suiyuan. After he joined the unit, the Nationalists fought against the Communists. A representative figure was Ulanhu. They were the KMT army, and Ulanhu belonged to the Communist army. Your grandfather once fought against Ulanhu as a KMT soldier, fighting for nine days and nine nights in Daqingshan without returning home. He spent his whole life fighting, but he had great luck; he didn't die many times.

⁴ "The three of us" refers to the Ping's elder brother, one of his younger sister and himself. The youngest sister was too young to go to school then.

He said, "My life is already worth it; God just won't take me." On the battlefield, he showed a lot of mercy, letting those young prisoners go. On the Korean battlefield, he let those children, teenagers go. He fired two shots to let them run. These old, experienced soldiers (*bing you zi*) don't like fighting or killing. Fighting and killing are government behavior, having nothing to do with ordinary soldiers. But on the battlefield, if you don't shoot him, he'll shoot you. It's just to protect yourself, right?

Interviewer: Can you recall the story he told you about releasing POWs on the Korean battlefield? Had he told you the complete story?

Ping: Yes. Once, they captured many people, including Turks and Americans. And many of the prisoners—because he said they had no food in the tunnel then—if you have prisoners, you have to feed them. They themselves didn't have food, but they still had to feed the prisoners. The Communist Party had this strict discipline: don't kill prisoners. They really achieved this point.

Then he told me about a few Americans, including two Black children, Black people, and white people, none of them old, and also Turks, maybe about 10 people. They let them go. After letting them go, they watched them run far away and then fired a few shots, which was essentially reporting back to the superiors. [If asked] why they fired, [the answer was] because they ran, [and they] shot but missed. What was the reality? One reason was that they wanted to let them go, as they were young; they thought, "Hurry up and go home." Another reason was that there was no food in the tunnel. If they gave all the food to the prisoners, what would the soldiers eat? That was the truth, unlike what is depicted in movies, which are often fake.

Your grandfather also loved watching war films, and he said many things were different from the reality of the battlefield and were fake. Think about how many battles he participated in. Although he mostly worked in logistics, he still participated in combat when the enemy approached. He fought many battles domestically. In Korea, they didn't stay for long, he didn't know why, but they were sent back home.

Interviewer: When did you first find out your father participated in the Korean War? That is, when did you first hear about the Korean War, or the concept of the "War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea," and how did you know your father participated?

Ping: I found out when watching the film *Heroic Sons and Daughters* with your grandfather.

Interviewer: When was that?

Ping: After his rehabilitation. He said that the movie was not realistic. In the Korean War he experienced, the American planes leveled the mountains, let alone the trees. In one battle, only three people from their regiment survived—he and his two bodyguards were alive. How

incredibly brutal. American devils⁵, American big leather boots, stepped right over his head. [He] smeared blood on his body. He was lucky to be alive.

In any war, regardless of which side, the common people are the victims. I appeal for no war, for world peace, that is the most important thing. According to your grandfather, the people who die in war are the common people, whether from the enemy side or your own side; it is always the people who suffer. He hated war deeply, despite being a soldier who fought. This is because of his personal experience. Imagine several young guys eating together, and just after meal, a battle breaks out and they are all gone.

There was a guard who was with him. Before the uprising, this person was with him; he was an old fellow townsman nicknamed *Lengzi* (Dumb/Simpleton). He was also with him at the Senior Infantry School, and they went to Korea together. *Lengzi* eventually **died in his arms**. He was shot, [the bullet] exited through the corner of his mouth. Your grandfather talked a lot about similar war scenes, but let's not dwell on it, it was too tragic. Like the American white phosphorus bombs. What kind of bomb is a white phosphorus bomb? After it burns, it can rot the person's flesh where it hits. The Volunteers fought a particularly difficult and arduous war. Those people relied on a kind of spirit, I think. Whether they were KMT soldiers, uprising soldiers, or Communist soldiers. They also concluded—when your grandfather was rehabilitated, many old Nationalist Party members came to our place to drink and eat with your grandfather, saying: "Everyone has relatives, so if you don't get along with me, I'll send you up first, or if you are good with me, I'll move you back." The units that came over from the KMT uprising were generally used as spearhead troops (first wave) on the Korean battlefield. Your grandfather said few came back alive. He also mentioned that later the trains were bombed, the trains on the Yalu River [Bridge] were bombed. The old Yalu River Bridge and the new Yalu River Bridge are different; the old bridge was destroyed by war fire. Those were paved with human lives.

There were many experiences in Korea. As an old soldier, he had some combat experience. If you are in this profession, you cannot be afraid of death. Your grandfather said, "The more afraid of death you are, the faster you die." Everything is fate.

Interviewer: Did you feel that your father often or easily talked about his experiences in Korea, or was it difficult for him to open up about it?

Ping: Regarding this question... When he told us about the Korean War, sometimes he spoke very smoothly, but sometimes, when he reached a certain point, he would stop talking.

Interviewer: Can you give an example? What things would he stop talking about when he reached a certain point, and what things did he talk about more smoothly?

⁵ In Chinese 美国鬼子(*meiguo guizi*), a derogatory term widely used in the PRC in the 20th century to describe American soldiers.

Ping: He spoke smoothly about things like winning battles or just waiting around without fighting. Your grandfather told me that a person smiles before freezing to death. I don't know, but there are no smiles in the movies. He said people who freeze to death have a grinning smile with bared teeth. He almost froze to death then. Fortunately, a North Korean People's Army soldier was carrying two sets of large felt boots (*zhanzi xue*). I don't know what felt boots are, but they had felt shafts made of wool. They padded the inside with wheat stalks, and he wrapped his feet with that. He wore thick layers; otherwise, his toes would have been frozen off.

And at that time, some Volunteers didn't even have clothes. He seemed to have a cotton-padded jacket, and he was also arranged to stay in a cave. In some battle—I don't know which one—during reconnaissance, you had to crouch and lie there, and people literally froze to death. When your grandfather talked about people freezing to death, he said those people were so pathetic. He didn't want to continue talking about how that whole area of people died. Later, I thought, maybe your grandfather participated in some kind of campaign. Because transferring and changing garrison locations were frequent in their unit. He didn't like to talk about the tragic scenes. When a person is bombed into minced meat, their head and shoes separate, hanging on trees—those scenes, the smell of dead bodies, lingered near your nose for a week; even taking a bath didn't help, the smell remained. So your grandfather crawled out of piles of dead bodies.

Interviewer: How do you think his attitude when telling you about the Korean War shaped your own view of the Korean War?

Ping: I feel that so many people died in the Korean War. If there hadn't been the Korean War, would so many people have died? Right? For us, the Korean War is said to be a just war, protecting the home and defending the nation. Everyone thinks this way in this environment. Regarding this war, your grandfather said, as I mentioned before, it brings no benefits to either side. Since there is fighting, there are no benefits. The feeling he gave me was: prohibit war. The message your grandfather conveyed to me was to prohibit war, don't fight. Whether it's the U.S., China, or other countries, it's the same; it's not good for the common people. Speaking honestly, on the battlefield, how can you distinguish right from wrong? Your grandfather once said that too. The person facing you might be a Ph.D., and the person who kills you might be an uneducated person, but you are equal on the battlefield. If he shoots first, you die; [if] you shoot first, he dies.

Any war destroys the common people; your grandfather always told us that. People who have fought wars don't want to fight wars; that's just how it is, regardless of who they fight.

Interviewer: Okay, did he mention what impression he had of the Communist Party before the uprising?

Ping: After his rehabilitation, many of your grandfather's old subordinates came to our house to celebrate his return to Beijing and his exoneration. Their conclusion was this: the reason the

Nationalist Party failed was because of two words: "employing people (*renren*)," specifically, nepotism (*renren weiqin*). Why did the Communist Party win? Because they recruited talents (*zhaoxian nashi*). The Nationalist Party failed because of those two words, "employing people." They were all Nationalist Party members. Their view of the Communist Party was that the Communist Party did well in ideological work; they were good to the vast numbers of poor people. That's why the Communist Party won the hearts of the people and gained control of the country. That's what he believed. He told me that there were too many factions within the Nationalist Party; they didn't recruit talents and only practiced nepotism. Regarding the Communist Party—for the Communist Party to go from an old, semi-feudal, semi-colonial society to where the country is now, they must have had something real, something that the common people truly believed in, or they wouldn't have succeeded. No other party could have done it; this is true.

However, there were indeed many problems within it. Just like our family, being sent down to the countryside and later being rehabilitated—wasn't this a case of having a problem before and now the problem has been cured? There were mistakes, absolutely there were mistakes, and this mistake can be called a wound to our family (*jiashang*). For the country, it was a national wound (*guoshang*). During the Cultural Revolution, it wasn't just our family; tens of thousands of young people, educated youth, older people, intellectuals, the stinking ninth category (*chou lao jiu*), and all sorts of other people were all overthrown. But is there a righteous person I can mention? Deng Xiaoping. After Deng Xiaoping rose to power, he rehabilitated all these people. It can be said that without Deng Xiaoping, there would be no China today. I think so. Deng Xiaoping consolidated the country.

Interviewer: Do you think your father mentioned his views on his former Nationalist unit surrendering in 1949 and being incorporated into the Communist army?

Ping: He mentioned it. He said he had no choice; they were defeated, after all. It was the general trend; they were heavily surrounded, so they had to surrender. But there were also opponents [to the surrender]. He did not side with the opponents. He didn't take the stance that he would rather not surrender and fight to the end, because he had to execute the orders of his superiors. Most people were unwilling to fight, he told me. Most people at that time were willing to surrender, willing to stage an uprising. A small portion of people were unwilling to stage an uprising, but he was not one of those unwilling.

Interviewer: After their unit was incorporated into the PLA, where did he live? What was his profession then? Or what were his experiences after '49?

Ping: After 9/19/1949, your grandfather told me that after a little over a week or two weeks of reorganization, he went to the Shijiazhuang Senior Infantry School to study, which is now the Shijiazhuang Army School. Your grandfather told me that the principal at that time was Zhou Enlai. I don't know what history says, but your grandfather told me the principal then was Zhou

Enlai. The current Shijiazhuang Army School was formerly called the Senior Infantry School. After that school, he went to Korea. He was there for nearly a year, your grandfather said. The reason they were sent was because they were fighting the Americans, and they understood how to use American equipment, because the KMT army used American equipment at that time.

Interviewer: What kind of training did he receive before going to Korea? Besides the Senior Infantry School, was there any specialized training for going to Korea?

Ping: I don't know that. Your grandfather never mentioned it. Anyway, he said that right after he attended the Senior Infantry School, the Korean War began, and they were transferred to Korea. They went by train.

Interviewer: Okay, what were his feelings about going to Korea at the time?

Ping: Your grandfather said that when they went to Korea, he didn't know the war was so huge. He just knew Korea was participating in the war. He told me then that he never expected the war to be so massive. It was probably larger than any domestic war he had participated in, he said. Where were there so many planes in domestic wars? In Korea, there were planes flying everywhere. The Volunteers' weapons were too backward; American modern weapons were too superior and strong at the time. To anyone looking, it was a war they couldn't possibly win, but the Volunteers won it. Isn't that impressive? And the soldiers who went to Korea were veterans who had participated in various domestic wars, constantly fighting, like your grandfather. They all had combat quality; they knew how to fight. Your grandfather also told me that Chinese people are not afraid of death. The American prisoners your grandfather captured said, through a translator, that the soldiers without beards were too fierce. Translated, this means the "baby soldiers" were too fierce. These Volunteer soldiers didn't grow beards, but didn't Americans generally have big beards? Your grandfather told me. The Americans gave them a thumbs-up. Actually, I see them all as sacrifices now.

Interviewer: Did he describe how he interacted with other soldiers while fighting in Korea? Did he tell you any related stories about his relationship with the other soldiers in his unit?

Ping: These detailed things, he only told us about the Korean War many years later; I think he couldn't remember clearly either. I think your grandfather contracted some kind of illness during the fighting. What is that war-related illness called? It was very evident in him. Right before his death, he was still shouting, "First platoon, charge!" It was still a scene from the war. The attending physician was startled, saying that this old man was still talking about fighting. The war left the deepest impression on his heart and caused him the greatest trauma. He only survived because he had a long life, because he fought too many battles. He never told me the specifics of how he communicated with his comrades or what their thoughts were. But his relationship with his comrades was generally good, especially since he seemed to have bodyguards then. But he said, on the battlefield, there is no good or bad. In the Korean

battlefield, you cannot turn back; when charging forward, you cannot turn back. If you turn back and walk three steps, they will shoot you. The supervisory team (*duzhundui*) behind you will kill you. Who dares to be a deserter? Military discipline was very strict, your grandfather said. Those shot in the back were usually deserters running away. This is a summary; these are some details he mentioned because you asked about his interaction with his comrades. What interaction is there on the battlefield? Military orders come down like a mountain, and if you disobey a military order, you are treated like the enemy. Because war is ruthless, and even war now is ruthless. So, constantly facing life and death was very shocking to him as a young man, so the war was always in his heart throughout his life. The impression he gave me was: no war, there cannot be war.

Interviewer: You just mentioned the story of the North Korean People's Army soldier giving him felt boots when he was close to freezing to death. How did he describe North Korea and the North Korean people, including the soldiers, during the war?

Ping: He said the Korean locals were very good to him. They were especially kind to the Volunteers, giving them food and drink. The so-called food was fried flour (*chao mian*), which things wrapped around their shoulders. Sometimes in the trenches for days, even if there was food, there was no water. You won't die without food, but you can die of thirst without water, your grandfather said. He experienced it. If you have water to drink, you won't die for a while. You can even eat mud or wild vegetables. But without water, you can be killed by thirst. I asked, why is there no water in such a big place? The war restricts the water areas; they won't let you go and get water, that's how they trap you. Sometimes, the people sent to get water were killed more often than the people drinking the water; half of the squad might go and all be killed, and still not bring back water. He talked a lot about things in Korea. I can't remember the small, detailed stories he told. After his rehabilitation, whenever we had nothing to do, we'd ask your grandfather to tell us again, "Tell us again, tell us again." Actually, the stories he told are all true. Your grandfather wouldn't lie; he had that soldier's demeanor.

Interviewer: So, he felt that the Koreans were very good to him?

Ping: Yes. He said the Koreans were poor and very pitiful. Their homes were drafty and they had nothing to eat.

Ping: When the Volunteers arrived, they would throw a bag of fried rice or fried flour or other food to the Korean locals.

Interviewer: The Volunteers gave the Koreans food?

Ping: Yes. Later, they, in turn, helped the Volunteers. At that time, your grandfather told me that South Korea and North Korea were not differentiated; they were all one Korea. Anyway, I remember him telling me that the locals were very good, regardless of whether they were locals

in South or North Korea. Common people are naturally scared when they see soldiers, no matter which side. I'd rather be nice to you, regardless of what I think of you internally, I definitely have to be good to soldiers outwardly. But the locals in Korea were genuinely good to the soldiers.

Interviewer: North Korea?

Ping: South Korea too, they were not differentiated at all then. The common people are benevolent, your grandfather told me. Talking about who is good or bad in a war is actually a mistaken premise, your grandfather once said. Who is good, who is bad? There is no good or bad. I'll tell you what is wrong and what is not wrong: it's the people who start this trouble, who wage this war. There is no right or wrong; everyone has a reason, "A mother-in-law says she's right, and a father-in-law says he's right." Let's just say, it's not about confusing right and wrong, but having no war is better than anything. Your grandfather said this. It's the same regardless of who you fight. Eliminate war, your grandfather told me then. There should not be war.

Interviewer: How did he describe his enemies at the time?

Ping: How did he describe his enemies at the time? He just said that the enemies he faced were not as brave as the Volunteers. That's what he said. The first group dies, and the second group goes up the same way. The dead piled up like mountains, but people continued to climb over the dead bodies. That's how the Volunteers were: not afraid of death. The Americans themselves said the Chinese Volunteers were not afraid of death. The character of Koreans and Chinese are similar; they are both yellow-race types of character. The UN Forces were composed of several countries, many of whom were mercenaries, people fighting for money. One coalition team fighting one strong team. The strong team had been together for many years, while the coalition team was newly assembled. I believe the Chinese side was a complete team, while the UN Forces were makeshift troops, and that's where the Volunteers' strength lay.

Interviewer: What image did these enemies hold in his mind?

Ping: He told me they were also very courageous. Your grandfather mentioned that the Turkish army in the UN Forces was very powerful, fighting similarly to the Chinese. He personally told me that the Turks were brave fighters. The U.S. had strong weaponry; there was rarely close-quarters hand-to-hand combat with them, but more with the UN Forces. Among the UN mercenaries and those few national troops, the most courageous fighters, in the opinion of the Volunteers, were the Turkish army on the Korean battlefield. But the Chinese army was not intimidated by them, he told me. At that time, after he went to Korea, everyone was Chinese. It didn't matter whether you were a KMT defector or not; or whether you abused defectors or not, in their hearts, it didn't matter. Anyway, you were going to the battlefield sooner or later, and you were going to die sooner or later. If you didn't die, you'd live somehow. That's what your grandfather believed.

Interviewer: Did he mention whether he, as a soldier from an uprising unit, experienced, for example, abuse or being looked down upon during the Korean War, as you just mentioned?

Ping: Yes, he said that. Soldiers from the uprising units were generally used as spearhead troops (*xiantou budui*). Spearhead troops are the ones scouting and creeping forward with nothing prepared. Speaking plainly, they were essentially being used as cannon fodder, and you just had to go. Regarding abuse of uprising troops or anything, I told you, in their hearts, they didn't focus on that; they just had to accept their fate. But were there instances [of discrimination]? There was a tendency towards it. Even now, in a military unit, there are close and distant relationships, which is normal, just like how human fingers are not all the same length. That is certain. Because look, your grandfather participated in many wars before Liberation, and then the Korean War after Liberation. After fighting for so many years, he was sentenced to prison upon returning, still being held accountable for his historical issues. Speaking of those historical issues, how should I put it? There is also an example of how good the Korean locals were to them. When they ran out of supplies, they went to the Korean locals for supplies. Then, when the locals ran out of grain, the locals slaughtered their cattle and gave them to take back. Your grandfather got into trouble because of this; it was interpreted as slaughtering the locals' livestock. What was written on the verdict is now completely irrelevant nonsense. We just put it that way. Who knows if it was a slaughter? He needed food.

Interviewer: Did he feel that the Korean locals voluntarily slaughtered the cattle for them to eat?

Ping: Yes.

Interviewer: But he was still charged because of this incident?

Ping: He was charged after returning. What did they mean? Your grandfather said at the time, "We had no food, but we shouldn't take everything; you can't slaughter the local's farming cattle." They had a dispute here over whether the locals voluntarily slaughtered it—your grandfather said the locals did it voluntarily—but they [the authorities] didn't admit it, saying that those few soldiers slaughtered it.

Interviewer: You mentioned the Beijing Military Court's accusation against him in February 1952. Besides robbing the masses' livestock, there was also an accusation of killing civilians. Did he explain that incident?

Ping: No, he never mentioned it. This part is confusing. Was it domestic or in Korea? It wasn't clear; even his verdict didn't have a clear conclusion. I think it is not true.

Interviewer: He never mentioned the incident of killing civilians, and no one ever asked him about it; and it is unknown whether this happened during the Korean War?

Ping: He never mentioned it, and I never asked. I did ask, but your grandfather wouldn't say. Your grandfather would just say, "Why talk about the past? I have already been rehabilitated; the state has rehabilitated me." That's all he would say.

Interviewer: But he explained the incident of robbing the masses' livestock?

Ping: Yes. I don't know if they are the same incident. It was written very vaguely in the document. Some historical issues—he served as a soldier for so many years, constantly holding a gun. Isn't a soldier's job fighting and killing? So he drew the conclusion: there cannot be war, and people cannot be killed, after being a soldier his whole life. After finishing his military service, he was persecuted. Persecution in the city wasn't enough; he was sentenced to four years in a correctional labor camp, and shortly after that, he was sent to a labor reform and employment farm. A few years later, he was sent to the countryside, where he was persecuted for over 10 years. Your grandfather left earlier than us; he left in 1968, and we left in 1970. The Cultural Revolution was in 1966.

Interviewer: So what happened after he returned to China from Korea? Did he go directly to the iron factory and undergo labor reform?

Ping: After they returned from Korea, they were managed by the Public Security Fifth Division (公安五处, *Gongan wuchu*). After they returned, your grandfather said, they were sent to a centralized location. Those who were not former Nationalist army soldiers were separated from them. The society at that time seemed to have prejudice against them. First of all, the Nationalist Party—isn't the Nationalist Party still in Taiwan now? And they were all considered Nationalist officers, regardless of rank. Before your grandfather went to Korea and before the uprising, he was a company-level cadre. After the uprising, he was demoted by one level, he said, all officers were demoted. What he told me is sometimes one-sided. Sometimes I think to myself, he told me one-sidedly, but I can't remember everything he told me; I never took notes then. And they were all oral accounts, all of which were your grandfather's true experiences. Anyway, regardless of what happened, in the end, he survived, and even though he was persecuted, he was exonerated and rehabilitated. He eventually changed from a counterrevolutionary to an "old cadre." Whether this is ironic or not, it means he was no longer forced to live in the lower strata of society. That's the only way to explain it.

Interviewer: Okay, you just mentioned his military rank before the uprising. Can you share any fragmented stories he told you about the battles he participated in while in the Nationalist army, before '49?

Ping: Yes, he did. He participated in the Xinbaoan Campaign and the Laishui Campaign. He also fought at Yangcun, Tianjin. He told me he almost died under the Yangcun Bridge. He was saved by two people.

Interviewer: Who saved him?

Ping: His comrades. He had a deep hole in his buttocks. There were shrapnel holes all over his body. A bullet grazed his temple; there is still a black groove there after all these years. It didn't pass through; it was a burn. He had shrapnel holes everywhere on his body. He was lucky to be alive; it didn't hit any vital organs.

Interviewer: Did he mention whether these old injuries were sustained during the Liberation War or the Korean War?

Ping: Mostly in Korea, from plane bombing; there was more shrapnel. Others were bombed to death. Gunshot wounds were generally sustained during the domestic wars, like the Self-Defense War, the Liberation War, and the Anti-Japanese War. At first, I didn't know what the Self-Defense War was. The Self-Defense War might be what the Nationalist army called it. China called it the Anti-Japanese War; the names were different.

Interviewer: I basically have no other questions, but can you recall any other stories he told about his time in the Korean War?

Ping: In the Korean War...

Interviewer: Take your time to recall.

Ping: He had many stories from the Korean War. I told you about going to the Korean locals for supplies, and later, the locals slaughtered their ox and gave it to them as supplies because Korea had no grain then. That's one story. Another thing he told me, I remember, was about people smiling before freezing to death, those things. Oh, yes, there was also rescuing the wounded, you know?

Interviewer: Rescuing the wounded?

Ping: Yes, after people were wounded, during the cleanup (*souji*) of the battlefield, they rescued the wounded Americans, American devils, American soldiers who hadn't died in the fight. They also managed that. Also in Korea, there were French people who later went to Beijing in their unit. A French person, the UN soldier, was captured and later joined the Volunteers. They even have descendants living in Beitaipingzhuang⁶; I know them, your grandmother knew them, and they often came to our place.

I don't know the specifics, but he had quite a few stories from Korea. What I remember is that when they first went, they crossed the Yalu River Bridge by train. The second time they came back, the Yalu River Bridge was bombed. They walked back.

⁶ A community in Haidian district, Beijing, where the Ping was born.

Interviewer: Walked from where to where?

Ping: From the Korean border to the Sino-Korean border. The Yalu River Bridge was gone, so they took small paths, with planes bombing them as they walked. Coming back was also dangerous. Taking the train was fast. If there had been a bridge, China would have used American trucks [to cross] then. Without a bridge, the trucks couldn't cross. He told me he didn't take the train back. I don't know the exact time, but it wasn't long; he stayed in Korea for a few months, it seems. And it was right when the fighting was most intense. Anyway, the impression the Korean War left on him was that too many people died. Because he was personally present in that battle, he was a witness. Too many people died; it was too pathetic. Whether they were from the enemy side or our side. Regarding whether this war was just or not, he didn't discuss that. He only talked about his comrades who died on the battlefield, or the soldiers on the enemy side. Because he didn't have the grand perspective to stand on a high ground and judge whether the war was right or wrong. I can say he didn't have that kind of perspective as a soldier. I joined the military, I go to fight, that's it. But the message he conveyed was no war, which was the simplest and most basic requirement in his heart.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much for accepting my interview. I have asked all my questions. Do you have anything else you would like to say?

Ping: What I've said is fragmented and in pieces. I told you what I could recall based on my memory. You can verify whether some parts are correct or not, and see if they are logical. The substantive nature of this narration relies on my own memory, without any true theoretical basis. It is a person speaking in person, based on my memory of the words your grandfather genuinely told me. I believe there is no falsehood; it is all true. I can guarantee that point.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you again for participating in this project and accepting my interview. We can now turn off the recording.

Ping: I am very willing to participate in your interview, and I hope to continue when you need me again.

Interviewer: Okay, bye-bye.