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HI244
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Crossing the Yalu River: A “Second-Class Citizen” in the People’s Volunteer Army 2

Interviewer: Could you briefly introduce the religious background of your father’s original family?

Ping: Yes. From when should I start talking about the religious background? During the Cultural Revolution, no matter what kind of religion it was, it was not allowed. They were all superstition. These religions—such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and including Islam—were all marginalized in China at that time. Therefore, the fact that your grandfather was a Catholic during the Cultural Revolution was never mentioned to the family; he didn't dare to say it. Coupled with the fact that he himself had many historical issues, he didn't dare to say it.

Later, there was an instance during the Cultural Revolution when militiamen from the Armed Forces Department came to our house carrying guns—people standing under the eaves carrying guns came to search our house, understand? They searched our house [to check] if there were any reactionary items. Among the items seized was one of your grandfather's old military uniforms, the herringbone military uniform.

In addition, there was another thing: his maternal uncle, who was a Catholic *shenfu* (priest), had sent him a letter. At that time, our family was close to being rehabilitated [cleared of charges], [but] the political atmosphere was still so intense. In the letter, he said: First, you must thank the Lord. Second, you must thank the Communist Party for rehabilitating you and clearing your unjust, false, and wrongful case. The rest below was written quite long. He wrote it vertically using traditional characters. He was old and wrote traditional characters. From that time on, I learned that your grandfather was originally a Catholic. The reason he didn't say it, and didn't dare to say it, was [because] the political climate did not allow it. Not allowed to speak, so he didn't say it.

Later, after your grandfather left home at age 16, he didn't return to his hometown until our family was rehabilitated. It was the first time he returned home in decades. The locals, the people of his own clan, hired an opera troupe to perform. And the very first thing he did was return to his maternal grandmother's house, [which is] his maternal uncle's house, who was the Catholic priest. Those people treated him extremely well. He said you must never forget the Lord. So, from that time, I truly understood. Otherwise, I would not have known at all that your grandfather was a Catholic. Their family had a heritage [of Catholicism], and many people in that area joined Catholicism. As far as our relatives are concerned, they could also be called leaders of Catholicism in the parish. His maternal uncle was primarily the Catholic *jiaofu* (godfather), understood? Anyway, the whole family was Catholic.

Interviewer: A *shenfu* (priest), is that right?

Ping: Godfather (教父), priest. Yes, a Catholic priest. That's called a priest. I think it's called a priest.

Interviewer: Did he have any behaviors in life, or based on what you know...

Ping: Yes, spontaneously and unconsciously, when I was little, he would perform the Mass/blessing. Before eating, he would perform the Mass/blessing¹. He would use this hand gesture to make the sign of the cross: first up, then down, then left, then right. Because this was a habit formed in his bones since childhood, spontaneously and unconsciously—regardless of whether the social climate allowed it or not—he would naturally and unconsciously perform these small actions. He was like this. Therefore, the way he viewed people, events, and the world seemed somewhat different from ordinary people.

Interviewer: But he never voluntarily mentioned anything about his religious background to you, your siblings, or the family, right?

Ping: He did mention it. It was after he returned to his hometown, after all these years, from the wartime period, through the Liberation, up to the rehabilitation, until '81 or '82. When he was rehabilitated and returned to Beijing, the first time he went back home, the first relative he visited was his maternal grandmother's house, which was his maternal uncle's house.

Interviewer: Did he have any...

Ping: Regarding that period of his life when he was little, I mentioned earlier that he felt his childhood was quite happy and beautiful. That included the time he spent at his maternal grandmother's house. He stayed at his maternal grandmother's house for perhaps one or two years, I think I heard him say. He stayed at his maternal grandmother's house when he was little.

Ping: This is in my memory, and this has been going on for many years. Your grandfather mentioned things like this more than once, you know? The older he got, the more he thought about family matters and childhood events, and he would spontaneously and unconsciously talk about these things. It was like telling a story, but actually, it wasn't just a story; it was a real event that happened to him. He himself was the story. And he was telling the facts.

Interviewer: But did he ever, for example, have actions similar to wanting you and your siblings to convert to the religion?

¹ By "Mass," Ping means doing a cross gesture.

Ping: When he came back, he said that if there was a chance to go back to the hometown (Inner Mongolia), they should go back and receive a baptism.

Interviewer: When did he say this?

Ping: Let me think... It was in the eighties... '82 or '83... '82. I remember it was '82.

Interviewer: Okay, do you have anything else to add?

Ping: Actually, there's a lot to say, but if you don't ask, I can't immediately recall it. Where were you asking about?—Because he told me too much, all kinds of things. Think about living with him at that time.

I don't have anything else to say. If you have further needs, ask me again. Propose a question for me to recall. Look, regarding this background of his Catholic family, you brought it up, and I was able to remember, and I knew how to explain, based on my recollection of what he told me. These things are firsthand experiences. Your youngest auntie went back to the hometown with your grandfather that year; your youngest auntie knows all about it.

Interviewer: Okay, understood, alright, thank you very much for your supplementary information.

Ping: That's it.

Interviewer: You can turn off the recording.