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Mr. Greco

English 3H

28 April 2020

### From Fish to Birds

My grandfather, Bo Yun Shi, has always been an enigma in my life; relatives would often compare us, claiming I'd inherited his artistic proclivities. My parents also told me I was similar to him, citing our mutual love of raising birds. They also told me we shared an aversion to eating fish. But other than passing comments like these, I wasn't really sure what he was like because he passed away before I was old enough to remember him.

What I do know about Bo Yun Shi was that he was a young adult during the second Sino Japanese War and the Cultural Revolution, and his life was full of constant change and controversy. He persisted in his artistic passions and humanitarian efforts for most of his life. The social and political events that he experienced and even participated in shaped China into what is today. China is currently being criticized by outside nations on how their government is run and how it handles human rights.

Bo Yun Shi was born in the countryside of Nantong, north of Shanghai, in the 1930's. He

was the youngest of six children, with five older sisters. In old traditional Chinese families, couples would keep having children until they had a son who could carry on the family name, and he was that son. In the 1930's in China, not many people were literate, especially in the countryside. But Bo Yun Shi's father insisted that he go to school, as it would have benefitted him greatly to be one of the few literate and well educated persons of his generation. He moved to Shanghai by himself to become an apprentice in a produce store. Travelling alone from his small countryside village to a large city was a feat in itself, as Norman Shi, Bo Yun Shi's youngest son, explains: "So if you go from Shanghai to great grandmother's house (Nantong), you take the boat overnight, then take the bus, then sit at the back of a bicycle. It's quite some journey." He had a strong love for art, though he barely made any money, but what money he did make was spent on art lessons from local artists. After his apprenticeship he learned to teach, this was because of his literacy, his teaching skills would also come into great use later in his life.

Bo Yun Shi was a young liberal in Shanghai in the 1930's, and this was a dangerous period of time for progressive thinkers. As a young, underprivileged person from the countryside, the communist ideals fit like a puzzle piece into his vision of equality. However, the government at the time (Republic of China) was arresting and cracking down on progressive thinkers because they were a threat to the current regime. So Bo Yun Shi had to escape from Shanghai to the countryside without getting caught. After this time, the second Sino-Japanese War started to stir, and the Japanese started to enter China through Manchuria. Both the CCP (communists) and the KuoMinTang (Chinese nationalists) also known as "...the old order,

symbolised by Chiang Kai-shek and his corrupt Nationalist party, had joined with Mao Zedong's Communists to fight the Japanese..."<sup>7</sup> When the Japanese had occupied the whole eastern front of China, the Chinese guerillas and rebels had to hide in forests and swamps. Bo Yun Shi was stationed in a large marshland swamp for months, for this period of time, he could only attain raw fish to eat. He rarely talked about his time in the marshlands, but what he did experience affected him for the rest of his life. It showed his behavior and habits, it was in the big things and the small things: he was always in a cautious, alert state, and he refused to eat fish for the rest of his life.

Directly after the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War ensued. "Mao presented a more attractive, less corrupt vision of a new Chinese state (one that he soon betrayed). His victory in the ensuing civil war (1945-49) and control during the cold war that followed ensured that a narrative of the Sino-Japanese war that did not include Communist heroism was airbrushed out." It was the start of when the communists took power in China and what Chinese people now call the "Great Liberation". The kind of government that was created by the communist party could be described as Orwellian, but instead of technology surveilling your every word and action, friends and neighbors tried to prove themselves as loyal to the party by spying on one another.

Another even was "The Great Leap Forward" and was known as "a catastrophe of devastating proportions inflicted by Mao Zedong on the Chinese nation"<sup>8</sup>. Millions starved because of mismanagement of crops, resources, and a strong drought. One example is when Mao

started the Four Pests Campaign. Birds that fed on farmed grain and seeds were considered pests, and the Chinese citizens were ordered to exterminate them. What actually happened was a shift in vermin populations, the lack of birds in the country led to an outburst in the population of bugs and locusts that consumed all of the crops due to their lack of predators. My father, Norman Shi, was born shortly after the Great Chinese Famine but the country had still not recovered. There was still insufficient food to feed the Chinese citizens, my father recollected that Bo Yun would eat a small portion of pickled food and leave the rest for his three sons.

The Cultural Revolution was, yet again, a tumultuous time in China. Weihong Zhang noted in our interview, “we don’t talk about that” because she did not want to speak against the Chinese government. There were “Five Red Categories”: peasants, workers, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary cadres, and relatives of soldiers killed in action. These were classes that were considered favourable in the Communist Revolution. In contrast, there were the “Five Black Categories”: landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries, rightists, and bad influences like intellectuals. These classes were considered dangerous and a threat to the government, intellectuals were able to create their own ideas and possibly rebel against the government. Bo Yun’s two oldest sons were sent to different places to work by the government, his middle child was sent to serve in the national army while his oldest son was sent to the northwest tip of China to work in coal mines. The mines were dangerously cold and filled with lots of water, his oldest son returned with parts of his legs rotted off from these flesh eating bacteria from the conditions in the mines. The only reason that Bo Yun’s oldest son was able to return before the culture revolution was over was because the government needed an educated French translator, he was

one of the few people that had studied the french language in China. Bo Yun Shi was a former soldier, which was held in high regard, but also a teacher, which was held in low regard. The fact that he was a traditional artist didn't help, "During China's Cultural Revolution traditional artists were condemned as counter-revolutionaries and imprisoned. In their place the government attempted to create a new visual culture: one that celebrated workers, soldiers, industrial progress and Chairman Mao." During this time, Bo Yun Shi mostly kept to teaching and didn't paint, probably partly because he was very busy and partly for his own safety. He was really passionate about teaching and education, even though it was a dangerous occupation to have at the time, he kept at it. He got promoted from teacher to principal, and eventually to superintendent. The personal memoir and novel, *Red Scarf Girl* by Ji Li Jiang, is about a young girl in the Cultural Revolution. There is a scene where the students have to write papers and signs about why teachers are a threat, "An Antirevisionist." An Yi read aloud, "Although teachers do not hold bombs or knives, they are still dangerous enemies. They fill us with insidious revisionist ideas. They teach us that scholars are superior to workers." (Jiang 58) <sup>1</sup> The Cultural Revolution put many traditional art masters out of work because their trade was shamed and considered counterrevolutionary. Many couldn't make money because art was the only skill they were trained in. So to support them, Bo Yun hired them as teachers in the schools he worked at; it was one of the few jobs that artists could have at the time. Even though he never went to college, he was considered highly educated for his generation, so like many others in the culture revolution he was accused of betrayal and being a danger to the communist government. But because of his intellect and cautious

personality, he was able to evade any tortures, public humiliation, and harm. Norman Shi stated, “...there was Cultural Revolution...there was political upheavals, and he was relatively unscathed. They didn’t really get him.”<sup>2</sup>

Many years after the Cultural Revolution, Bo Yun Shi retired from teaching and started to paint again because the government had become more tolerant of intellectuals and traditions. He retired from his teaching and was finally free to do what he wanted. He did several styles of traditional Chinese painting, ranging from realistic to more abstract styles. Like most traditional painters, he tended to paint nature. Traditional painters are supposed to “study nature in the large, concentrating his faculties upon understanding the greatest and the smallest of her phenomena, brooding with her. But his pictures are less a report of something seen than a distillation of a mood or a spirit felt,” according to painting experts<sup>6</sup>. His paintings shared a common theme, including tigers, cats, and especially birds. Bo Yun Shi was particularly fond of raising and painting birds like canaries and parrots. Yuan Yang, the mandarin duck was his favorite bird. “They reminded him of something,” said Norman Shi. He’d often paint them surrounded by swamp weeds, as if to pay homage to his months living in the swamp.

Bo Yun Shi lived in China almost constantly experiencing turmoil in his early life. He fought for his country, thinking it would bring equality and freedom, but it ended up making it so he would struggle to be able to do one of the things he loved most, art. Only in his later life would he get to enjoy art to the fullest.

Reflection:

The changes I think I need to make are to add more research and detail, especially around the section about my subject's transition through wars. That part is hard to understand, even for me.

My sentence structures should be improved, and for the sake of being more interesting to read, I should include better vocabulary.





## Bibliography

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5. Sullivan, Lawrence R. *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party*. Scarecrow Press, 2012.
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**Rubric:**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Focus (Angle and Research)	No angle present. Feels summarized where narrative style and structure should be creatively developed. Information dominates the article – boring the reader – or writer obviously exploits the subject.	Angle is present but reflects a fairly obvious perspective of documentary subject. Article lacks balance between information and entertainment. Ethical line between exploration and exploitation may be hazy.	Angle communicates journalist's perspective of documentary subject, although it could be more distinct, allowing for a more interesting (informative and entertaining) picture of the subject within the context of a current researchable topic.	Angle communicates journalist's distinct perspective of documentary subject, sustaining an entertaining & informative article that illustrates how the subject is interesting as well as important within the context of a current researchable topic.
Organization (Profile Structure)	No clear profile structure. Existing parts don't connect in a logical way, making the profile difficult to follow.	Profile structure is somewhat apparent, but some parts are missing. Feels too summarized. Needs more anecdote/story and quotation/dialogue to define the narrative arc.	Profile structure is complete and easy to follow, but could be better arranged to enhance reader's experience. Somewhat effective use of anecdote/story and quotation/dialogue. Narrative arc is present but has some weakness.	Profile structure is organized professionally, enhancing the reader's experience. Highly effective use of anecdote/story and quotation/dialogue to create a compelling narrative arc.
Style	No literary devices or significant details are used. Paper may read like an obituary or a Wikipedia page. Vocabulary is overly simplistic or vague, with no attention to purpose/audience.	Language is fairly plain, with some specific details about the subject, but more/varied details and literary devices needed. Portrait of subject seems incomplete. No visual metaphor present. Vocabulary may reflect	Obvious thought has been put into the use of diction, imagery and detail to portray the subject creatively, although the visual metaphor needs to be more clearly developed to communicate writer's angle. Vocabulary occasionally	Obvious thought has been put into the use of diction, imagery and detail. Visual metaphor is well developed, communicating writer's angle. Overall, stylistic choices give the article a fresh and original creative texture. Vocabulary reaches a level of

		a couple instances of specificity or sophistication, but it largely lacks attention to purpose/audience.	reflects attention to specificity and sophistication, although it could be improved in consideration to purpose/audience.	specificity and sophistication that is appropriate for the purpose and audience of this article.
Research and MLA Format	Writer doesn't use interview transcripts and/or there is no indication of secondary research. No indication of research-backed questioning. In-text citations and works cited page are missing.	Writer makes limited use of interview transcripts and secondary sources, or relies solely on the "star" interview transcript. Interview testimony prompted by research-based questions is vague. Not a clear sense of an informed angle. In-text citations and works cited page exist, but they contain many errors or inconsistencies.	Writer makes satisfactory use of the required interview transcripts and secondary sources (see Level 4 description), although some interview testimony or secondary source material may be either overused or too limited. Interview testimony prompted by research-based questions is apparent, but could create a clearer sense of an informed angle. In-text citations and works cited page are close to MLA standards, but there are some errors.	Writer makes intelligent use of the required three interview transcripts and three secondary sources ( <b>Honors students need at least five secondary sources, including two scholarly database sources and a nonfiction book</b> ). Effective use of interview testimony prompted by research-based questions gives the reader a clear sense of an informed angle. In-text citations and works cited page are perfect by MLA standards.
Mechanics	Writing obscured by spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.	Writing contains some errors, affecting the reader's understanding.	Writing contains a few errors, but not at the expense of understanding.	Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

**Grade: B+**