

Forests Don't Grow from Single Trees, by William Gardner

Taoyuan, 1893

A spring wind washed over the bamboo groves of Taoyuan, stirring dangling shoots of pink blossom and carrying waves of heady pollen in through the latticed windows. Song Jiaoren brushed a fine layer of yellow fuzz off the book spread across the low table.¹

‘Okay, let’s finish here for today, Jiaore-’

Jiaoren jumped up off the floor and bolted out the door, craning his head around the frame to spare a goodbye for his teacher before sprinting across the rough paving stones to the gate, the slaps of his feet echoing around the courtyard.²

‘Son! Jiaoren!’ His mother called from the well in the middle of the yard, standing up from the rack of clothes she was wringing out.

‘Yes, mum?’ A dark face with a pointed chin and sharply raised eyebrows peaked in from behind the heavy wooden gate.

‘Come here-’ She paused knowingly.

‘But the guys are waiting outside!’

Before continuing, ‘-you’ll like it.’

A sigh, shrug, pitter-patter and-

‘What is it?’

‘Here,’ She said, reaching under her stool and pulling out a dark red fan imprinted with a map of China, ‘but don’t be out too late.’

Jiaoren took the fan with both hands, planted a sweaty kiss on his mother’s cheek and ran for the gate again, lifting the fan above his head like a flag. Soon, whoops of distant laughter filled the courtyard.³

‘Where we going today?’ Peiyuan shouted as the three boys ran, ‘Jinshan temple?’

The trio reached the end of the road and stopped.

‘We always go over there, Peiyuan,’ Zhehan grumbled, ‘I’m kinda bored of it.’

‘Let’s go the other way, then.’ Jiaoren said, turning on his heels and marching off.

‘Where to?’ Peiyuan asked.

‘Along Taoyuan road into town, across the river – we can pick strawberries on the other side – and up that mountain, Fuqing. You can see the whole valley from there.’ He called over his shoulder.

¹ 迟云飞, 2008, 《宋教仁与中国民主宪政》, 湖南师范大学出版社, p 3.

hllvshyy, 2014, 《这就是宋教仁故居? !! 政府也太不重视了吧! 》 Available from: <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/2852494480>. [07/04/17].

² hllvshyy, 2014.

³ 迟云飞, 2008, p 3.

‘But,’ Zhehan began, ‘we can’t cross the river at this time of year, and that mountain is like...’ He stretched his arms out as if trying to hug a tree.

‘It’ll be great,’ Jiaoren told him, walking backwards, ‘the current’s not too strong yet and it’ll be a fun climb. Come on, let’s go!’ He sprinted off down the road to Taoyuan, fan-flag held high, kicking up clouds of dust behind him.

Peiyuan and Zhehan looked at each other for a moment then took off after their friend.

‘Wait for us!’⁴

The boys ran west down the road, yelping, chasing and giggling as they went. Taoyuan emerged from groves of green leaves and spread out in front of them: a teahouse of strung together bamboo and hand-painted signs, a crop of limestone rock and the grey bricks of the Hall of Ancestors.

Groups of men lined one side of the road, sitting under a light blanket of pipe haze on roughly hewn stools and logs. Crosses of women huddled around tables, chatting loudly whilst throwing down cards and mah-jong tiles. The men talked more quietly, ending each sentence with a belch of smoke. They were dressed in body length tunics of blue and grey that were tied at the front with a coarse seam of black thread. Each man wore his hair down in a thick, long ponytail, their hairlines shaved back to their ears.⁵

The three boys giddied through the quiet afternoon scene, heads turned as they charged past each game and conversation. When they reached the end of the road and turned south towards the ford, the whole street was staring after their trail of dust and laughter.

Jiaoren reached White Bamboo Bay first. Across the river, green hills towered over the clear water. The boys pushed each other into the water, sending ripples downstream as they splashed their way across to the opposite bank. After half an hour, they scabbled their way out of the muddy river and stood for a second at the foot of Fuqing mountain.⁶

‘It looks even taller from here...’ Zhehan said uncertainly.

‘Yeah, and my dad said I had to be back before sunset to help him cut some bamboo up.’ Peiyuan said, looking back across the river.

‘Friends, brothers, revolutionaries,’ Jiaoren stepped forward, his hand tracing the outline of the mountain, his eyes staring at the sun falling behind it. ‘The battle to get to this mountain has been bitter. But as the sun sets, our victory rises.’

Zhehan and Peiyuan started to giggle, their knobby knees knocking together.

‘At the top of this hill is the last stronghold of the Manchu scum and evil foreign powers. If we capture it, we can return China to its people: to five thousand years of Han culture!’

⁴ The Economist, 2012, *The death of a revolutionary: The song of Song*, Available from: <http://www.economist.com/news/christmas/21568587-shot-killed-song-jiaoren-was-not-heard-around-world-it-might-have-changed>. [07/04/17].

⁵ 驱动中国, 2015, 《清朝建立以后的满人如何处理与汉人之间的关系?》, Available from: <http://news.qudong.com/2015/0914/247913.shtml>. [07/04/17].

⁶ The Economist, 2012.

‘My brothers,’ the boys laughed harder still and even Jiaoren struggled to keep his pose, ‘we must fight. We must struggle,’ He lifted the fan up, where it caught the wind and opened out, ‘We must get to the top of the mountain!’ Jiaoren shouted, pointing it at the silhouette before them.⁷

They charged, bellowing and whooping, stabbing and slashing. Battle cries echoed down into the valley as they fought their way up to the top. The sun edged behind a jagged ridge and a shadow suddenly swept across them from left to right, smothering them with wave of cool air.

‘To the top!’ Jiaoren cried, conducting with his fan, holding a shiver at bay as he fixed his eyes ahead. A moment later he scrambled up to the summit, Zhehan and Peiyuan a step behind him, all three of them staring out at the world beneath them.⁸

The Three Suns River mirrored the reddening sky, weaving into the distance, twisting around knolls and through thickets of reed, splitting and splitting again, sending three streams of sunset soaked wispy cloud into the horizon. The boys stood for a moment, poring over the villages laid out like a map.

Jiaoren took a step forward, his fan like sugar paper before the sun, the outline of the coastline emblazoned in the glow.

‘This land in front of you, the people who live on it, the food it grows – it’s all ours again. We’ve driven the foreigners out!’ He proclaimed, his dark eyes flashing red as he turned to face west, his lip trembling.

A wind blew towards them, plants bowed as it swept by, and the surface of the river trembled with waves as a great noise gusted from beneath them. The fan twitched in Jiaoren’s hand and lifted away, burning scarlet as it passed in front of the sun. Jiaoren’s ponytail whipped around in front of him, obscuring the map as it was buffeted away.

‘And it’s time to build a new China!’

Nanjing, March 9th 1913⁹

‘Based on a constitution that promises democracy, that promises republicanism, that promises protection from abuses of power. A constitution that is a promise to the people, because our sovereignty is in the people.’¹⁰

Song paused and the room thundered with applause. A red banner strung across the rafters read *Nanjing branch of the Guomindang welcomes Song Jiaoren*. People lined the walls and squatted in between rows of seats, craning their necks to get a clear view.

‘People often ask me,’ Song continued, ‘why do you place so much emphasis on a powerful constitution? My answer is simple. Eight years ago, when I moved to Japan, I lived in a country that went through a revolution - just like China, I lived in a country that went

⁷ 迟云飞, 2008, p 207.

The Economist, 2012.

⁸ 吴相湘, 1914, 《宋教仁 中国民主宪政的先驱》, 传记文学出版社, p 23.

⁹ 迟云飞, 2008, p 207.

¹⁰ 迟云飞, 2008, pp 66, 69, 208.

through a period of restoration – just like China. The Japanese government claims to have had a constitution for more than thirty years, but still they’ve been unable to cast away a small number of people who monopolise power through autocracy. Everywhere I looked, the business of the state was tied down by a few powerful military men – we can’t afford for this, too, to be just like China.’¹¹

As Song paused again, the silence was absolute. Expressions of triumph and pride had fallen, turned solemn.

‘But this *is* just like China. General Yuan Shikai’s government is despotic, impotent; it is ideologically opposed to the revolution that brought it to power! And its power is once again centred around a single man: how is Yuan different to an emperor? It is for this reason that we form a republic, it is for this reason that that republic must be based on a cabinet system, and that that cabinet is given its mandate by elected parties. In essence, it is for this reason that power must be shared, not centralised.’¹²

Song surveyed the room as the crowd stood up, applauded and whistled, the red banner gleaming in his shiny eyes.

Beijing, March 10th 1913

‘Read it to me, Ying.’ Yuan Shikai ordered, his eyes fixed on the detailed map painted on the wall, which was dotted with black pins marking the Beiyang army’s troop deployments.

Ying Guixin hesitated, cleared his throat then began to read from the newspaper he was holding.¹³

“‘Song Jiaoren, who many refer to as “the father of constitutional government”, gave a speech yesterday in Nanjing in which he enumerated the failings of Yuan Shikai’s interim government. He also outlined the shape of his future government-”

‘Get to the point, Ying. I know what he thinks, I need to know how people reacted to it. What was the editorial line?’ Yuan spat, slamming his fist down on the heavy wooden table.

“‘Song, who advocates a cabinet... Touring the South canvassing opinion... Delivering speeches as his campaign gathers momentum...’ Ah, here it is: “The establishment of our official government is not far away, and all hopes rest on you, Song, shouldering the responsibilities of this epoch.”’¹⁴

¹¹ 叶曙明, 2013, 《谁谋杀了中国“宪政之父”宋教仁?》, Available from: <http://lz.book.sohu.com/chapter-1661149.html>. [07/04/17].

迟云飞, 2008, p 76.

¹² 迟云飞, 2008, p 77

叶曙明, 2013.

¹³ Fenby, J 2013, *Chinese Democracy: The Silencing of Song*, Available from: <http://www.historytoday.com/jonathan-fenby/chinese-democracy-silencing-song>. [07/04/17].

¹⁴ 迟云飞, 2008, p 198.

Yuan remained still and silent for a moment, his eyes glossed over, staring beyond the map. Ying edged backwards, his body braced, waiting for an explosion of anger. But when Yuan finally spoke his tone was level, his gaze scheming.

‘I can accept Sun Zhongshan’s remonstrations, his vacant idealism. He’s fundamentally an optimist, easy to get along with, to deal with; as for people who are hard to control, there’s only Song Jiaoren.’¹⁵

‘How should I deal with him?’ Ying asked with a lap dog’s deference.

‘I’ll do it. He may be a revolutionary, but he’s also a man. All men are susceptible to certain things. If that fails, I’ll need you to take care of this. Head down to Shanghai, get in contact with the gang trash you keep company with and find someone who’s able to be bought.’¹⁶

Ying nodded and left, leaving Yuan alone, his fists clenched.

Hotel in the Shanghai Concession, March 14th 1913

‘Mr Song, we’re holding a message for you sir.’ The concierge said, his Western suit steam-pressed, top hat held at his side.

Song looked perplexed. ‘What’s the message, can’t it be delivered?’

The concierge shifted a little, his steady voice suddenly ill at ease. ‘The message has to be delivered, ah, in... person.’

‘Very well, thank you, I’ll take the message.’

‘Certainly, sir.’ The concierge bowed and walked out.

No sooner had he left than there was a knock on the wooden door, three gentle taps.

‘Come in!’ Song called, not looking up from the newspapers he was reading.

‘Mr Song,’ A woman’s voice said softly. She advanced over the threshold with two small steps, placing her feet slowly and deliberately, ‘I’ve got a message from Mr Yuan.’

Song looked up and turned around, his face flushing red. The messenger was wearing a slim black silk dress, tall elegant heels and scarlet lipstick.

‘Yes? And what does Yuan have to say to me?’ Song replied, his voice throttled.

She took two more careful steps, her dark eyes taking him in, his grey suit, white shirt, thin moustache. She stopped an arm’s length away from Song, her hand moving inside her dress, eyes still fixed on Song, and withdrew two letters.

She read from the first, ‘Dear Mr Song, I’ve taken great interest in your service to China, in your work to building a new future. To this end, I hereby invite you to come to Beijing to discuss the future of the government with me. I hope our talks will be fruitful and

¹⁵ 迟云飞, 2008, p 184.

¹⁶ Fenby, J 2013.

productive, and as a mark of our mutual understanding and cooperation, I have sent two gifts to you.’¹⁷

The woman finished reading and offered Song the second piece of paper, a thick red envelope. He ignored this, his eyes pointedly fixed on her face, his expression stony. She placed the envelope on his knee, her fingers brushing his thigh, slipping one of the straps of her dress off with her other hand.¹⁸

Song turned back to his newspapers, the red envelope fell to the ground.

‘Leave and tell Mr Yuan I will see him in Beijing next week.’ He said evenly, his voice low, a newspaper scrunched in his right fist.¹⁹

Teahouse in Shanghai, March 15th 1913²⁰

‘You want to go to Europe, right, Wu? Do this and we’ll buy your ticket.’ Ying said, his voice forceful.²¹

‘Well, yeah,’ Wu replied, stammering, ‘but I’m not sure I want to do *that* to go...’

‘Want to do what, serve your country? So, you’re a traitor as well as a coward, then.’ Ying stood up quickly, his stool toppling over and crashing to the ground. His knees slammed into the table, causing tea to spill out and run along the wood grains and onto the floor. Wu flinched, staring at the steaming tea dripping.

‘Fine I’ll do it!’ Wu blurted, facing Ying for a second before once more looking away.

‘Good,’ Ying said, still standing, ‘I’ll pass you the when and where a day before.’²²

Shanghai Huning Railway Station, March 20th 1913²³

‘Tickets please! Please display your tickets!’ The ticket inspector’s voice echoed across the marble atrium and down from the vaulted ceiling. Song Jiaoren and Huang Xing paced towards the queue of travellers huddled around the mouth of the platform.²⁴

‘We need to hurry - it’s already ten thirty - we might miss our train...’ Huang said, turning around to face Song.

‘What time is the train supposed to get into Beijing at, Xing? I want to meet with Yuan as soon as possible – tomorrow would be best.’

‘We stop at Nanjing first and then go straight to Beijing overnight, should arrive by mid-morning.’²⁵

¹⁷ 叶曙明, 2013.

¹⁸ 迟云飞, 2008, p 183.

The Economist, 2012.

¹⁹ 叶曙明, 2013.

²⁰ Fenby, J 2013.

²¹ Fenby, J 2013.

²² 叶曙明, 2013.

²³ 迟云飞, 2008, p 203.

²⁴ 叶曙明, 2013.

²⁵ 吴相湘, 1914, p 13.

The pair joined the line of passengers under an English ‘Please present your tickets’ sign: men stood in muted, loose-fitting Western suits, women clutching flasks of steaming water, and foreigners with flowing white linen dresses and dark woollen hats, all holding stubs of sky-coloured card. Slowly, the queue shuffled forwards, the clock showed a quarter to eleven.²⁶

Three sharp cracks broke the babbling hubbub of the busy station. A man fell forward.²⁷

‘Someone shot me! Someone shot me!’ Song shouted.²⁸

People screamed and ran in all directions, either throwing their luggage aside or clutching their cases to themselves. A man dressed in a black shirt tucked something into his trousers and slipped into the stream of people heading for the thick wooden doors at the opposite end of the hall.²⁹

In the middle of the chaos, a body lay prone on the shiny white marble, a stream of crimson leaking from beneath his jacket, pooling in the guttering between the floor tiles. A second figure was slumped at his side, shouting for help. Suddenly, Song reached up and gripped Huang’s lapels, pulling him closer. He shook violently but held on, his bristly moustache pressed against his friend’s ear.

‘Get some paper. Write this down and deliver to President Yuan.

“To the President in Beijing, Yuan: This evening, I was to board the Shanghai-Nanjing train to Beijing to pay you a visit. At ten forty-five, whilst in the train station, a bullet was fired at me from behind by a villain. It travelled through the upper section of my waist down into my lower gut. Undoubtedly, this will be my death. Ever since I humbly began receiving teachings, I have bound myself to loving; and even when transgressions were not mine to bare, I have never felt enmity towards other people. The Qing government was bad, so I took up the revolution, valued humanitarianism, protected public order, and haven’t dared to let even a trace of their power remain. Currently, the foundations of the state are not yet settled and the people’s prosperity has not yet increased; and suddenly I’ve let go. In death, I am filled with regret. I humbly desire that your presidency shows an honest heart, propagates justice, and does his utmost to ensure civil liberties; all to enable the state to obtain an unshakable constitution; thus, the day of my death will be like a year of my life. As I approach death, I speak from the heart and I implore you to take note.”³⁰

‘Xing... I have more to ask of you. My books; please take all my books - in Nanjing, Beijing and Tokyo - and give them to the Nanjing City Library. And my mother: please care for her, make sure she’s looked after... And this, the revolution. Everything we have worked

²⁶ 百度文库, 2011, 《上世纪珍贵上海老照片-下》, Available from: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/cd591f6b7e21af45b307a824.html>. [07/04/17].

²⁷ 迟云飞, 2008, pp 203-4.

²⁸ 叶曙明, 2013.

²⁹ 叶曙明, 2013.

³⁰ 叶曙明, 2013.

for. I beg you: don't forget your duty to the revolution, especially not in the name of remembering me. Work for the revolution and always – always – work looking forward.’³¹

Song collapsed back onto the marble, his body limp. An ambulance drove across the empty ticket hall and stopped by the pair, two foreign doctors jumped out and hurried over.

Beijing, March 21st 1913

Yuan Shikai clutched three brown pieces of paper. The longest, a message from Song Jiaoren, was scrunched in his left fist. In his other hand, he held two one-line messages from Ying Guixin on top of each other.

The urgent order has been executed.

*The insurgent leader is already annihilated.*³²

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吴相湘, 1914, 《宋教仁 中国民主宪政的先驱》, 传记文学出版社.

³¹ 迟云飞, 2008, pp 181-204.

³² Fenby, J 2013.