Individual Choices Amidst Ethnic Crisis and Hometown Transformation: The Formation Mechanism of Zhu Yanfu's Moral Character

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Abstract: Zhu Yanfu, a "People's Role Model," dedicated himself to the revolutionary cause at the age of 14. He endured over a hundred battles and suffered severe injuries during the Korean War, ultimately becoming a first-class disabled veteran. Despite his physical challenges, Zhu Yanfu remained resolute in his commitment to hometown development, continuing to script his resilient life journey. His unwavering determination in the face of adversity, selfless dedication to the people, and loyalty, pragmatism, and integrity as a party member serve as concrete manifestations of the Communist Party of China's party character ideals. Yet, within Zhu Yanfu's remarkable life story, moments of doubt and frustration emerged when confronted with setbacks, challenges, and temptations. Under the guidance and education of the party, his path was a testament to the refinement process of an outstanding communist party member's character, and it held the key to the cultivation of party character.

Keywords: Zhu Yanfu, Character development, Party character, Mechanism.

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of General Secretary Xi Jinping, the Party Central Committee has comprehensively strengthened party leadership and party construction, resulting in significant achievements in the comprehensive and strict governance of the Party. Within the framework of comprehensive and strict party governance, party members play a pivotal role, and the cultivation of their party character has gradually become a contemporary focus. In his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need for all party members, especially senior cadres, to strengthen their party character development, continually raise their political awareness and abilities, and maintain unwavering loyalty to the Party, taking the interests of the Party and the well-being of the people as their fundamental political responsibility. This reflects a clear demand for the personal thoughts and actions of party members. The public's perception of the Party, its likeability, and its effectiveness largely depend on the strength of the party character and work ethics of the broad membership. Consequently, strengthening party character development has become an essential aspect of various party-building efforts. Currently, academic research primarily focuses on the theoretical and practical aspects of improving the party character of contemporary party members. Few studies delve into the formative processes of historical figures with exemplary party character, and even fewer undertake individual case studies based on extensive historical materials. Considering this, this paper attempts to use the case of Zhu Yanfu's exemplary spirit as an example, supported by rich personal diary records, to illustrate the refinement process of his exemplary spirit, uncover the mechanism behind its formation, and offer historical insights into the development of party character and spirit for today's party members.

Zhu Yanfu was born in 1933, and at the age of 14, he enlisted in the People's Liberation Army. He participated in over a hundred battles during the Huaihai Campaign and the Crossing of the Yangtze River Campaign. In 1949, he joined the Communist Party of China. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, he continued his service in the Korean War, during which he suffered severe injuries in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, resulting in the loss of all four limbs and his left eye. He was recognized as a first-class disabled veteran. Despite his profound disabilities, he was compelled to set aside his "rifle" but refused to settle for a life of comfort. Instead, he shouldered the "hoe" and devoted himself to the poverty alleviation efforts in his hometown, Zhangjiaquan Village. In 1982, after stepping down from his position as the village party branch secretary, he grasped the "pen" with determination and wholeheartedly completed the writing of two autobiographical novels, "The Limit of Life" and "A Man's Regret." Through these works, he forged a life journey as resilient as steel. There is no doubt that Zhu Yanfu stands as an exemplary Communist Party member and a representative of grassroots rural cadres. However, when faced with the torment of illness and the decisions regarding his personal life and the destiny of his hometown, he often found himself in a state of inner conflict and distress. What was Zhu Yanfu's source of strength for overcoming the numerous obstacles on his path and realigning the course of his life? The answer to this question cannot be simply attributed to his unwavering belief in communism. It must also be explored through his struggles and moments of uncertainty, examining the process by which his party character, exemplary spirit, and even his commitment to communism were established. Only through this approach can a genuine and specific reference path be provided for the cultivation of party character for the broader membership of the Communist Party.

2. National Crisis and Life-and-Death Choices

In October 1950, the stage was set for the Korean War, and Zhu Yanfu joined his unit in deploying to the Korean battlefield. During the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, Zhu Yanfu's unit engaged in a fierce battle with two well-equipped
American battalions on Hill 250 in North Korea. In the harsh conditions of a bone-chilling minus 30 degrees Celsius, his unit fought the enemy for three days and three nights, with only Zhu Yanfu surviving. After being rescued by fellow soldiers, he fell into a 93-day coma and underwent 47 surgeries. As a result, he lost all four limbs, his left eye, and his right eye had a vision of only 0.3, which he described as a "flesh eyeball."

Returning from the Korean battlefield, Zhu Yanfu had already experienced numerous battles, yet he had not even reached his twenties. The profound physical and psychological suffering inflicted by his severe disabilities had eroded his will to continue living. His first choice was suicide, and he attempted self-starvation, consuming medications, and even contemplated jumping from a building, though each attempt was thwarted in the nick of time. Three factors influenced Zhu Yanfu's life-or-death decision at this crucial juncture: first, the psychological guidance from his comrades; second, the unyielding determination he had cultivated on the battlefield; and third, the spiritual support he drew from his fallen comrades. Zhu Yanfu believed that he was the sole survivor of his unit in that battle, and he regarded his life as a tribute to his fallen comrades. He felt compelled to document the heroic deeds of his fallen comrades, using their stories to educate future generations. The motivation for his renowned works, "The Limit of Life" and "A Man's Regret," originated from this desire. At this juncture, Zhu Yanfu found a reason to prolong his own life.

The initial motivation behind Zhu Yanfu's involvement in the revolution during his youth remains unverifiable. However, judging from his extraordinary early experiences—having participated in over a hundred battles, achieving distinction three times, and enduring injuries ten times before reaching his early twenties—it is evident that a young Zhu Yanfu had already developed a tenacious will through his experiences on the Korea battlefield. This tenacity proved to be a crucial factor supporting his decision to continue living despite the harsh realities he faced. Nevertheless, choosing to persist was only the first step. The more daunting choices for Zhu Yanfu were how to survive and, more significantly, how to survive on his own. To do so, Zhu Yanfu had to overcome three challenges.

First, this young man from Zhangjiaquan Village only had two fingers on his right hand, which he could use to grip a spoon or fork. To walk independently, he had to develop his balance, walking on his toes to avoid tripping. To do this, Zhu Yanfu practiced by pushing himself against a wall, which he held with his remaining arm, and if that was not feasible, he would bite the spoon with his mouth. This one simple task led to countless broken dishes and exhaustive repetitions. He persevered through every action, such as walking, using the restroom, bandaging, handling prosthetics, and even learning to flip pages with his tongue to improve his educational qualifications. When Zhu Yanfu decided to return to his hometown, he had already identified his life's purpose. He was determined not to be a burden who merely enjoyed the generous treatment offered by the state, but instead, he sought to find a path for his hometown's transformation and development. To achieve this goal, he had to first equip himself with the capacity for independent living, which would form the foundation to confront the challenges in his work.

Confronted with numerous difficulties in both life and work, Zhu Yanfu faced moments of confusion, desolation, and even contemplated giving up. In his diaries, he wrote, "Some people say, 'You're so severely disabled, you've already achieved a lot, why not simply enjoy life and not strive so hard to work?" When I thought it over carefully, I realized that in the past, the revolution aimed to eliminate those who carried guns, and one could face bloodshed and sacrifice without fear. We have already achieved victory now, and during the struggle to achieve this victory, I have also contributed my part. Today, it's about peace and development, with numerous individuals possessing higher capabilities in culture and work. Why should I engage in tasks that are clearly beyond my abilities? Moreover, rural work is complicated, involving intricate tasks and thoughts. If one isn't careful, losses can be incurred. When I thought about these matters, my enthusiasm for working in the name of the revolution waned, and aside from the regular meetings and the assignment of unavoidable tasks, I would be content." It is evident that Zhu Yanfu also experienced periods of slackening motivation. His physically disabled body frequently posed challenges in his work, and he found himself struggling to adapt. "Since I've taken on a cadre position, I've always had an unspeakable burden that I can't resolve. 'Cadres must participate in physical labor.' I understand that this is Chairman Mao's requirement and guidance for the broader revolutionary cadres. But I'm also a cadre; how can I engage in physical labor? If I can't perform actual tasks and share hardships with the people, doesn't that mean I'm detached from the masses? Sometimes when I visit to inspect the production and living conditions, people usually say these few things: 'Come and take a look.' 'Come and have some fun.' Or 'Do you think my approach to work is effective?' To ordinary people, these statements might seem normal, but I
found them grating and difficult to respond to. I thought, 'A disabled person cannot work alongside everyone, so I cannot perform well as a cadre.' Every time I heard these comments, my face would feel flushed, and I would feel embarrassed, resulting in fewer outings." It is clear that Zhu Yanfu's internal conflicts were remarkably intricate. His physical disability, despite being in some aspects a cause for receiving care from others, was incongruent with his original intention to alter the face of his hometown. Even though his choice to return to his hometown was resolute, it was not absolute. Faced with immediate challenges, he often found ample justifications for moments of inertia on his track record of past accomplishments.

In Zhu Yanfu's diaries, it is evident that he had a habit of reading and excerpting from the works of Mao Zedong. At the conclusion of most of his diaries, he would cite classic passages from Mao Zedong's writings to reflect upon himself. This practice became a significant means for him to seek guidance and spiritual support. Faced with a disabled body, he found his answer in Mao Zedong's article "Serve the People" when he read the words: "In times of difficulty, our comrades must be able to see the results, see the bright side, and raise our courage." From this passage, he realized that he had been focusing on his immediate challenges, thus losing the courage to fight. He said, "I have a mouth to speak, eyes to see, a prosthetic limb to move, and an arm to write with—these are the powerful weapons I can use to struggle against class enemies and work difficulties. Guided by Mao Zedong's ideology, I am determined to use these weapons to overcome all obstacles, work tirelessly, and contribute everything I have to the great communist cause!" When facing the dilemma of his incapacity and the sense of shame at not being able to participate in labor, he found answers in Chairman Mao's words: "A person may have varying levels of ability, but as long as they possess this spirit, they are noble, pure, ethical, free from base tastes, and beneficial to the people." It resolved his confusion about his inability to engage in physical labor and the sense of shame he felt.

Faced with the doubt about whether he could just relax on his laurels in peacetime construction, Mao Zedong's article "Carry on the Style of Hard Work" served as a wake-up call. Through repeated study of the "Three Old Articles" and "Combat Liberalism," Zhu Yanfu had a sudden realization: "The absolute and complete devotion to the people, the wholehearted dedication to the revolution that was once in my mind, gradually faded away. With the decline of my physical capabilities, my thoughts also became impaired. How perilous!" It is evident from Zhu Yanfu's repeated references to Mao Zedong's works in his diary that he often grappled with the choice between comfort and struggle, personal pleasure, and collective development. In times of confusion, he would rely on reading and introspection to correct his course.

In practice, Zhu Yanfu deeply grasped the remarkable guiding power of Mao Zedong's writings. He decided to "first learn and use it well" and was determined to overcome difficulties using the principles of Mao Zedong Thought. Furthermore, he intended to "share his application, experiences, and practical results" with others, enabling mutual learning and teaching, as well as deepening the understanding of the spirit of the articles through discussions. This approach facilitated the alignment of learning and application, making it more tightly integrated and effective. Zhu Yanfu's journey of repeatedly falling into despondency, doubt, and then regaining his spirit is a testament to the continual improvement of his party spirit. He combined practice with theoretical study, which not only demonstrated the immense strength of Mao Zedong's writings in guiding practice but also proved that practice is the best way to temper a party member's will and enhance their party spirit.

Through these processes, Zhu Yanfu found the value of his existence. He aimed not just to survive but to have a higher purpose in life. Zhu Yanfu utilized his tenacious willpower honed on the battlefield and the qualities of loyalty to the Party and wholehearted service to the people, becoming a leader and pioneer in various projects such as reforestation, water management, land cultivation, and electrification in his village. He transformed the impoverished Zhangjiaquan Village into a renowned model village over 25 years from 1957 to 1983. Remarkably, he carried the steel-like spirit into the era of reform and opening up, which was his precious spiritual legacy from war and poverty-stricken times, and an essential aspect of the spirit that Party members and cadres needed to overcome development challenges during the post-reform and opening up period. Zhu Yanfu was characterized by his unwavering fighting spirit, his selfless dedication to serving the people, and his loyalty to the Party. These core elements constitute the essence of his spiritual legacy.

4. The Mechanism of Zhu Yanfu's Character Development

The formation of Zhu Yanfu's moral character underwent an extended process of refinement, during which several factors prompted him to continually hone his party character and elevate his moral qualities. These factors primarily encompass the following aspects:

one) Cultivating Strong Willpower Through Revolutionary Warfare

During his youth, Zhu Yanfu participated in over a hundred battles and was wounded ten times. Especially during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, he fought fiercely against the U.S. forces for three days and nights in subzero temperatures, where he was the sole survivor. With his legs blown off, his abdomen ruptured, and his eyeball ejected, driven by an intense will to survive, he crawled endlessly through the snow until he was fortunately rescued by his comrades. The brutal wartime environment served as the best way to forge a soldier's willpower. Zhu Yanfu's combat achievements bear witness to his unwavering determination already developed during his military service, which later provided the spiritual support to overcome his physical disabilities and the harsh natural conditions in Zhangjiaquan Village. The persistence and courage to fight in the face of adversity are some of the historical experiences of the Chinese Communist Party's century-long struggle. According to the "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party's Century-Long Struggle," the Party, born in a time of internal and external threats, has grown through tribulations and expanded by overcoming challenges, for the people, the nation, and its ideals and beliefs. No matter how powerful the enemy, how arduous the path, or how severe the challenges, the Party has always been unafraid, unwavering, unafraid of sacrifices, and resolute. This unwavering determination has long been an inherent spiritual quality of the Chinese Communist Party, and on the journey towards the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, there will be more
difficulties and challenges. Therefore, it requires a spirit of tenacity among party members to bravely confront the "Lou Shan Pass" and "La Zi Kou" on the road ahead in adversity.

(Two) Nurturing a Sense of Service to the People during the Collectivization Era

In 1951, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued directives aimed at strengthening the dominant role of Marxist ideology. These directives emphasized the need for the party to consistently propagate the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought to the 475 million people it led. The work to enhance the status of Marxist ideology began. Collectivism was identified as the core of socialist ethics. During the socialist revolution and development period, the Chinese Communist Party attached great importance to nurturing a sense of collectivism, forming a strong spiritual outlook. Deng Xiaoping once remarked about the spiritual atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s, stating, "People were highly disciplined, mindful of the larger picture, and willing to place personal interests within the framework of collective interests, national interests, and social interests. They consciously overcame difficulties together with the nation." During this period, movements like "Learn from Dazhai in agriculture" and the "Learn from Lei Feng" campaign embodied the collective spirit of self-sacrifice, selflessness, and service to the people. In Zhu Yanfu's diaries, you can see that he often cited Lei Feng, Wang Jie, and others as role models, expressing his willingness to "contribute his limited life to the unlimited lives of serving the people." He not only focused on improving his own sense of collectivism but also emphasized ideological work within the village brigade. In 1965, when facing problems with the uneven distribution of fertilizer within the commune, tensions arose among brigade members, leading to a decline in the quality of agricultural work. Zhu Yanfu took the initiative to conduct ideological work among brigade members. Addressing the viewpoint held by some that "working hard on the land is pointless; without fertilizer from higher authorities, we cannot catch up with others in terms of yield," he worked diligently on ideological work and eventually fostered a consensus that "the commune's withholding of fertilizer is a bad thing. However, this test our revolutionary spirit and motivates us to become self-reliant, to figure out how to mine more natural fertilizer from the soil, which is a good thing. Giving the fertilizer saved to sister teams, while seemingly a loss from an immediate perspective, is, from a broader perspective, aiding sister teams in producing more grain, supporting national construction, and, indirectly, helping sister teams and contributing to national construction."

One of the significant achievements of the political movements in the 1950s and 1960s was the establishment of a sense of collectivism. In rural grassroots communities, farmers gradually transitioned towards collective farming. They no longer operated individual household economies but engaged in socialist collective economic activities. In this new production organizational model, farmers were not only formally organized but also closely tied to the interests of their production teams. Under the influence of the prevailing national ideology, choices that prioritized personal gain over the collective interest were criticized, while actions that selflessly contributed to the collective and national interests were promoted and celebrated. People like Lei Feng, Wang Jie, Wang Jinxi, and Jiao Yulu, who prioritized collective and national interests, became exemplars. Villages like Dazhai and Xigou, which experienced profound transformations through collective effort, are evidence that these individuals and their achievements were not just about inculcating collectivist values in the population. The collective spirit laid the foundation for the consolidation of national strength, the promotion of the superiority of socialism, and the concentration of resources on major undertakings in the face of a China that was impoverished and in dire straits. This distinct socialist value orientation became the prevalent ethos of the time. It was within this societal context that Zhu Yanfu developed a spirit of self-sacrifice and selfless dedication to the people. While the collectivization era has passed, the spirit of collectivism remains a prevailing set of values in contemporary society. It is evident in events like disaster relief, epidemic control, and more, where the values of collectivism continue to be showcased.

(Three) Pioneer Exemplar Under Party Organization Education

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, with a rapid increase in the number of party members, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party recognized the need to educate party members and improve their conduct to maintain a pure party. In 1951, the Central Committee issued the first comprehensive document regarding party member education management since the establishment of the People's Republic. In 1961, the Central Committee approved and forwarded a report by the Central Organization Department on strengthening education management for party members. The report urged that every party member understands: "What is the Communist Party? What is communism and socialism? What are the excellent traditions of the party? How to be a Communist Party member." For party branch secretaries, they should also understand how to be a branch secretary. After the onset of economic reform and opening-up, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party continued to issue documents concerning the education of party members, demonstrating the importance placed on this aspect. Zhu Yanfu joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, and under the education provided by the party, he developed a steadfast faith, a dedication to the people, and maintained an upright and disciplined working style. His diaries clearly record, "The brigade's party branch members took a bath. The collective punishment was 18 lines, and the individual lines were as follows: Zhang Maozhan had 51 lines, Zhu Yanfu had 4 lines, Kou Liqun had 9 lines, Chi Qinghai had 12 lines, Fang Yuchun had 3 lines, and Miao Guibao had 3 lines, for a total of 102 lines." In Zhu Yanfu's mind, he kept meticulous records of every bit of collective property. The formation of Zhu Yanfu's party discipline and integrity was inseparable from the deep education provided by the party organization. Even today, conducting diverse educational activities for party members remains.

(Four) Seeking Spiritual Inspiration Through Reading

In addition to his habit of reading and excerpting Mao Zedong's works, Zhu Yanfu also had a wide-ranging reading habit, including literature and periodicals. The book "How the Steel Was Tempered" by Nikolai Ostrovsky resonated with him the most. The book's portrayal of Pavel Korchagin's steel-like willpower and brave, unyielding spirit became a source of inspiration for Zhu Yanfu. He and Nikolai Ostrovsky shared a common goal: to write about their own experiences and the heroic deeds of their comrades. To realize the dream he had nurtured since a young age, Zhu Yanfu, after retiring in 1982, took seven years to complete the writing of "The Life of Limits," despite facing physical challenges. The book went...
through seven revisions before being completed. It was inscribed with the phrase "With Iron Will, Upholding Righteousness; Writing a Tale of Valor" by Chai Haotian, who was a member of the Central Political Bureau, Deputy Secretary of the Central Military Commission, and Minister of National Defense at the time.

General Secretary Xi Jinping places high importance on the reading habits of party members. He has made significant statements about the importance of reading, such as "Leading cadres must love reading, read good books, and read well" and emphasized the need for cadres to "read some history." He has also emphasized the importance of studying classic Marxist works. These statements provide a systematic answer to questions about "why read," "what to read," and "how to read." In the case of Zhu Yanfu's experience of reading Mao Zedong's works, reading provided him with a clear direction and the motivation to move forward, and similar literary works, like "How the Steel Was Tempered," subtly provided him with spiritual support.

Why did Zhu Yanfu read? He read to unravel the difficult questions of "why live," "how to live," and "for what reason to live." What did Zhu Yanfu read? He read Mao Zedong's classic works and literary masterpieces that provided him with spiritual support. How did Zhu Yanfu read? He read while drawing from his own experiences and a profound sense of retribution, reading with a reflective perspective. It's clear that reading played a significant role in shaping Zhu Yanfu's spiritual character.

Zhu Yanfu, who had returned from the battlefield, went through an extensive exploration process concerning questions like whether to continue living, how to live, and why to live. His internal struggles and frustrations genuinely represent the process of improving the party discipline and integrity of an outstanding communist. This process provides a reliable reference for addressing the issue of establishing mechanisms for the development of contemporary communist party discipline and integrity. Analyzing Zhu Yanfu's emotional journey, especially revealing his moments of doubt and frustration, provides a vivid and valuable example for contemporary party members to learn from advanced role models.

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