



Book Review

My impressions after reading the book *Less Words but Earnestly Practice--My Father Chuangan Zhang*JZ Yin^{1,2,3} **Abstract**

Earlier in 2019, a non-fiction biography titled *Less Words but Earnestly Practice-My Father Chuangan Zhang* was published in Beijing, China. The subject of the biography is Professor Chuangan Zhang, an old-generation petroleum geologist in China. The author is Professor Zhang's youngest daughter, Mrs. Erping Zhang, a scholar who studies the history of Chinese geological sciences but has now retired. The book uses refined language to tell the story of Professor Zhang's life, especially his experience of studying and looking for oil in the northwest during the turbulent World War II. It also tells the fate of intellectuals before and after the change of power in China, as well as the patriotism and ambitions, personal ups and downs, and various opportunities and hardships of Chinese intellectuals in the great era.

Key words: Rare metal indium; primary associated deposit; genetic type; global temporal and spatial distribution; genesis

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I recently finished reading the book titled *Less Words but Earnestly Practice--My Father Chuangan Zhang* (Figure 1, hereafter referred to as *Less Words but Earnestly Practice*) written by Erping Zhang for her father, Professor Chuangan Zhang, a previous generation Chinese petroleum geologist.

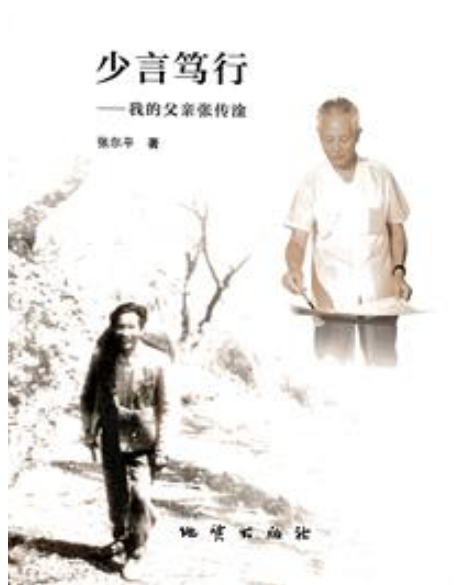


Figure 1. The front cover of the book *Less Words but Earnestly Practice*

As I read through the book without being able to put it down, I was greatly moved by the rusticity, simplicity, and purity of traditional Chinese intellectuals of that era, especially their great patriotic feelings for the country and the nation (Figure 2).



Figure 2. On April 27, 1947, Chuangan Zhang (right) was working in the field in Kongtong Mountain, Pingliang, Gansu, China

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At the same time, I am also saddened at the thought of not being alive during one of China's golden periods as described in the book.

The reason why the Republic of China is said to be one of the few “Golden Ages” in Chinese history is because Chinese intellectuals at the time could devote themselves to modern scientific research without worry for politics, severe criticism, prison, or potentially death. Despite the poor material and economic conditions, Chinese geologists were able to make the best of what they had (Figures 3 and 4). Field geological surveys could only rely on camels, donkeys, horses and ox carts for transportation, and more often than not, on manual labor. Comparatively speaking, geologists in western developed countries had already driven cars to conduct field geological surveys and research.



Figure 3. In May 1947 Chuangan Zhang took a photo during the petroleum geological survey in the Liuhu area of Pingliang, Gansu, China



Figure 4. On May 7, 1946, Sun, C.C., (first from left), director of the Geology Division of the Gansu Petroleum Mining Bureau, and Zhang Chuangan (second from left), were in the camp when they were conducting petroleum geological surveys in the western basin of Jiuquan, Gansu, China

Despite these hardships, the book shines in its portrayal of the strong friendships and bonds between people at that time, and creates a vivid and touching story for the reader (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. On January 5, 1946, the staff of the Geology Division of Yumen Oil Mine in Gansu of China took a group photo at the No. 50 oil well. The one on the left sitting on the tire is Chuangan Zhang, the middle is Sun, C.C.



Figure 6. On April 9, 1948, Chuangan Zhang (right) and Tian Zaiyi (left) were in Yantan, Pingliang, Gansu, China

The author conveys the understanding that these friendships do not just last for a moment, but carry on for the lifetimes of these individuals (Figure 7).



Figure 7. On January 10, 2009, Zhang Chuangan (middle in the front row) took a group photo in Beijing on his 90th birthday

If pioneers such as Xie Jiarong (Hsieh, C.Y., 1897-1966) and Sun Jianchu (Sun, C.C., 1897-1952), who started petroleum geology research in the 1920s and 1930s, were the first generation of petroleum geologists in China, then in the 1940s, Zhang Chuangan and other people who joined the ranks can be regarded as the second generation of Chinese petroleum geologists. Even in the turbulent and chaotic backdrop of World War II, these two generations of petroleum geologists who were fighting on the front lines still discovered many "oil seedlings", resulting in great breakthroughs in oil discovery and development in China after 1949 (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Taken in Yumen, Gansu, China around October 1945. From left: Weng Wenbo, Li Desheng, Zhang Chuangan, Bian Meinian, and Tian Zaiyi

The so-called "Golden Age" in this article refers to the Republic of China period before 1949. The term "Golden Age" is not my own invention, but the common view of many senior Chinese intellectuals and much of the modern scientific community. Notably, several Chinese artists once made a film about the literati of that period, similarly titled "Golden Age". One of the protagonists of the film is Xiao Hong, a great female writer who both was born and died at a young age during the Republic of China.

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After the tides turned in 1949, these petroleum geologists and contemporary intellectuals experienced fear and torture as a result of various political movements, and experienced countless hardships such as hunger and extreme mental distress. Some even needlessly took their own lives. For example, Xie Jiarong, one of the important founders of China's geological undertakings, and his wife both committed suicide. The book also describes Mr. Zhang's college classmate Mr. Wang Jianzhi, chief geologist of Yumen Petroleum Administration Bureau, who was hanged and beaten to death during the Cultural Revolution of China in 1960s.

Nevertheless, the Chinese intellectuals represented by Mr. Zhang still have no complaints and no regrets. They continue to uphold the spirit of selfless dedication of Chinese traditional intellectuals to the nation and the country, and have continued their diligent pursuit of minerals on this ancient land (Figure 9).



Figure 9. On June 7, 1982, Chuangan Zhang (sitting in the front row) and others carried out a field geological survey in the Tianshan Mountains, Xinjiang, China

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Chuangan Zhang (1920-2014), was born to a peasant family in Tai'an, an ancient city at the foot of Mount Tai in Shandong Province, China. He attended a rural private school that was very common in China at that time to learn to read and write. In 1928, he transferred to a new primary school and began a traditional Chinese education. In 1937, he was admitted to Shandong Jinan High School. On November 14 of the same year, because of the Japanese invasion of China, he moved westward with more than 100,000 students in exile. During this period, he was admitted to the Jining Military Academy. In 1938, it was incorporated into the National Hubei Middle School. The school has been renamed several times: first it was renamed National Mianyang Middle School, and then it was changed to National Sixth Middle School. This was also quite in line with the ever-changing world at that time (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Zhang Chuangan when he graduated from middle school in 1937

In 1941, Mr. Zhang was admitted to the Geology Department of Central University (Figure 11), which moved west to Chongqing at that time, and joined the Geological Society of China in 1944 during his studies.



Figure 11. Photo of Zhang Chuangan when he was admitted to China National Central University in 1941

After graduating in 1945, Mr. Zhang worked in the Geology Division of Yumen Oil Mine in Gansu Province, the first oil field in China. Since then, he has become associated with petroleum geology and has been engaged in various oil and gas explorations throughout Northwest China, including Lanzhou in Gansu, Nanjing in Jiangsu, Beijing, Tianjin, Xi'an in Shaanxi, and Yinchuan in Ningxia. During this period, Mr. Zhang successively followed Mr. Xie Jiarong, the pioneer of Chinese geology, and Mr. Sun Jianchu, the pioneer of China's petroleum geology, to engage in petroleum geological exploration (Figure 12).



Figure 12. In the spring of 1945, Zhang Chuangan (first from the right) and his colleagues took pictures during the interval of field geological survey in Kongtong Mountain, Pingliang, Gansu, China

In April 1949, Mr. Zhang married Ms. Qi Wu in Lanzhou, and they had three daughters after marriage. The second daughter among them is Ms. Erping Zhang, the author of this book (Figure 1).

After the "Cultural Revolution of China" ended in the autumn of 1979, Mr. Zhang's family officially settled in Beijing, and he himself continued to engage in petroleum geology research and trained five graduate students, two of whom later became academicians of the Chinese Academy of Engineering (Figures 13, 14, and 15).



Figure 13. In July 1983, Chuangan Zhang investigated petroleum geology in the Yousha (oil sand) mountain of the Qaidam Basin in Qinghai, China



Figure 14. Around 1964, Zhang Chuangan (right) and his colleague Zhao Qiming



Figure 15. On January 31, 1996, Zhang Chuangan (second from left) took a group photo with his classmates in Beijing



Figure 16. On December 27, 1995 in Beijing, a group photo was held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Professor Zhang Chuangan (second from left) engaged in petroleum geology

Mr. Zhang spent most of his life engaged in petroleum geological exploration in the Ordos Basin in Northwest China, namely the famous Changqing Oilfield and Tarim Basin after 1970. While he and his colleagues found areas with oil potential, they also accidentally explored the Jurassic coalfields on the Ordos Platform. The coalfield made a major breakthrough in the 1980s. Among them, the Shenfu-Dongsheng coalfield has reserves of 230 billion tons, ranking first among the eight largest coalfields in the world at the time and the largest coalfield in China.

Mr. Zhang is a free-thinking person, with an optimistic and humorous nature. As a result, he has excellent popularity among his peers and is widely respected by the broader community.

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The book *Less Words but Earnestly Practice* was published by Geological Publishing House in Beijing in early 2019. In addition to the concise preface, postscript and name index, the whole book is mainly composed of the following five chapters:

- **Chapter 1:** Family background and school experience
- **Chapter 2:** Entering Ordos for the first time
- **Chapter 3:** From Nanjing to Xi'an
- **Chapter 4:** Twenty-one years in Yinchuan
- **Chapter 5:** Returning and Settling in Beijing

The book has 190 pages and 200,000 Chinese characters.

It is worth mentioning that although this book is the biography of the author with her father as the theme, it deeply reflects the social outlook, political ecology, and sophistication of people in China from the 1920s through the turn of the millennium. The author of the book is an expert in the study of the history of geology in China, and has acquired countless first-hand materials through decades of her professional accumulation. However, in order to



complete the book with greater precision and make it stand the test of time, she specifically visited countless old relatives, friends, and colleagues of her father during his lifetime. In this sense, the book is not just a biography about Mr. Zhang himself, but a rare historical material of the initiation and development of petroleum geology in China.

The text is vivid and beautiful, and conveys the sense of chatting with relatives and friends, resulting in a book that is easy to read.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the author of this book, Zhang Erping, a senior engineer in geological history in China, is the second daughter of Mr. Zhang Chuangan.

Since 1972, she has successively engaged in field geological work, geological mapping and research on the history of geology of China. She has published more than 60 research articles on the history of Chinese geological institutions and geologists in various newspapers and magazines. After retiring, she served as the executive editor-in-chief of books such as "History of China Geological Library" and "History of China's Geological Survey in One Hundred Years". She is currently a member of the Geological History Committee of the International Union of Geological Sciences, and a vice-chairman of the Geological History Committee of the Geological Society of China.

All the pictures in this article are provided by the author of the book, Ms. Erping Zhang.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study is available from the author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Use of AI tools declaration

The author declares that he has not used Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the creation of this article.

