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OUTER EDGES OF THE  
MIDDLE KINGDOM

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Thesis

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By

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Outer Edges of the Middle Kingdom is a narrative by the author about his two years as a teacher in the People's Republic of China. Organized chronologically, the account begins in August, 1985, and ends in June, 1987. The narrator describes meeting students at Tianjin University, Tianjin, China, designing English classes for English majors, daily episodes in the classroom, and interaction with Chinese colleagues. The narrative alternates between life on a university campus and extensive trips the narrator made to various cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Kunming, Guilin, Harbin, Hohot, and Guangzhou. Also recounted are the narrator's reactions to the student demonstrations of December, 1986, and the resulting anti-bourgeois liberation campaign of January-April, 1987.

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We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign  
We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign--  
foreign from top to bottom--foreign from center to  
circumference--foreign inside out and all around--nothing  
anywhere to dilute its foreignness--nothing to remind us of  
any other people or any other land under the sea.

Innocents Abroad Mark Twain



## CHAPTER I

### "WARMLY WELCOME YOU CHINA"

I boarded a Thai Airlines 747 to Hong Kong at Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport on August 14, 1985, with Kurt Francis, a friend and fellow graduate student from North Texas State University. I had accepted a teaching job in a country I knew very little about, in a city I knew absolutely nothing about, at a university I had never heard of. I was going to China, "Red China" to most Texans, the land of Confucius and Communism, rickshaws and rice paddies, the Great Wall and the Great Helmsman.

The sensation that morning was both exhilarating and intimidating. I felt as if I were in some movie or play and had forgotten my lines--a feeling that stayed with me for a long time after I arrived in Tianjin, a feeling reenforced by the constant awareness that I am a source for curious and incredulous stares here, the Chinese seemingly unwilling or unable to suspend their disbelief. The Thai flight and the two-day layover were to be my last tastes of "bourgeois liberalization" for a whole year. The in-flight movie, A Passage to India, was somehow ironically fitting for what I was getting myself into. At the time, I made no connections.

I did make connections between Hong Kong and San Francisco's Chinatown; however, Hong Kong is not just a city of exotic restaurants, night clubs, and MacDonald's fast food joints. It is a kind of Oriental K-Mart--selling and buying are the primary activities there. In this electronic metropolis with Las Vegas neon, I slurped my way through my first bowl of shark's fin soup (I passed on the turtle penis); ate an Egg McMuffin while gazing meditatively on a paint-by-numbers replica of the beer-bellied Laughing Buddha; saw the fishermen who never leave their boats at Aberdeen Fishing Village but still manage to own Sonys and microwave ovens; visited a "night club" where hourly room rates were listed alongside the price of Singapore Slings; and went to the top of Victoria Peak in a blinding monsoon--all of this in 36 hours.

But this brief introduction to Hong Kong, an exciting, eclectic, exotic, efficient, and energetic city, was overshadowed by my desire to arrive in "the real China." I did not know at the time what significance Hong Kong would hold for me and other foreign teachers working in China. It would become our "decompression chamber" when we began to suffer from the mainland bends.

My plunge into the real China began on August 17 when I boarded a four-hour CAAC (China Aviation Administration Commission) flight to Tianjin. Boarding the plane, I saw no suits, no ties, no American Tourister Luggage, and no

leather attaches. Kurt and I were the only westerners on the plane, an aging 707 eventually jam-packed with noisy people carrying bundles, boxes, shoulder-poles, Hitachi televisions, Sanyo radio-cassette players, cartons of duty-free Marlboros, makeshift luggage, and net bags filled with steamed bread, cookies, oranges, bananas, and cooked chickens complete with heads and feet. This was more like a flying camping trip than a four-hour flight to a city with seven million people. I wondered if these people knew something I didn't. I didn't have so much as a pack of Lifesavers.

This wasn't your everyday flight, but a thoroughly Third-World undertaking brought to you by the People's Airlines: no cocktails or peanuts; no in-flight movie; no glitzy airline publications with Karl Malden and his American Express card staring at you from the seat-backs; no flight attendants sliding oxygen masks smoothly on and off their blown-dry heads. This was your buckle-up (if you wanted to or knew how)-and-go flight to Tianjin. It was boarded mostly by Chinese who by the grace of some CONNECTION had been to Hong Kong, and they were returning home loaded with gifts and purchases they would find impossible to get in the PRC. Some Hong Kong Chinese were also on board. They were the ones wearing Izod and Calvin Klein. Why they were going to Tianjin is still a mystery to me. But the center of attention was the two sweaty, tired,

manic-looking Texans going to Tianjin to teach English at the oldest university in China.

As we left Hong Kong, the plane circled out over the South China Sea, and I began my career as a rubber-necking foreigner by craning from an aisle seat to get my first glimpse of the mainland. Maybe I expected communist land to look different. The plane entered the clouds, however, which stayed below us the entire flight. I saw nothing of what lay below, neither the Yangtze nor Yellow Rivers, until we descended beneath the clouds about thirty minutes from Tianjin. I had expected terraced rice paddies, but what I saw was a very flat expanse, flatter than West Texas, of checkerboard wheat fields broken up by irrigation canals and ditches and narrow, tree-lined roads. This couldn't be the picturesque China of the Public Broadcasting Station or National Geographic. Where were the craggy, mist-shrouded mountains, pagodas, and temples? Was I on the right flight? I looked at the empty Coke can I held in my hand--made in Guangzhou, "The Real Thing!"

The pogo-stick landing at the Tianjin Airport was made even more frightening by the fact that I was not the only one to scream. Bouncing four times down the runway, the plane came to a welcome halt in front of a gigantic building, but size alone didn't dispel the feeling I that I was looking at a structure from the past. As we came to a stop, I had my first taste of how the Chinese get off

moving objects (or on for that matter): congregate at the exit, and push through like Moe, Larry, and Curly. Not yet experienced in these maneuvers, I was last off the plane. So much for "keep your seltbelt fastened until we come to complete stop at the terminal." In fact, there was no terminal. People had been lining up at the front door of the plane twenty minutes before we touched ground the first time. This made the landing doubly exciting. Crawling off the plane and down onto the runway, I was greeted by Houston-like heat and humidity, but not by a person from the university where I was to spend at least the next year of my life.

Kurt and I followed the other passengers into the hangar-sized building to get into a line (the tale of lines in China would be a book in itself) to encounter local officials from the Public Security Bureau (PSB) and Customs. I immediately noticed a healthy number of serious looking, uniformed men standing around with pistols and automatic weapons. I was soon shuffled through two checkpoints, getting my passport stamped and restamped. Next, I waited for my luggage, which I could see through a window was being off-loaded onto a horse-drawn. And still, no one seemed to be looking for two particularly easy to find foreigners--very large and very sweaty. Because I knew exactly two words in Mandarin--"hello" and "beer"--I could make no inquiries. I found a chair next to a monstrous fan. It was

blowing hot air, but moving air just the same. I sat down to drip and let my imagination work.

Finally, the baggage came; I claimed mine and lined up at one of the customs tables, expecting a vigorous search for decadent western music, Playboy and other "pornographic" materials, and radio transmitters. But the Custom's official, who spoke a little English, asked me if I were one of the new teachers arriving from America. I promptly answered yes, and, smiling, he said: "Warmly welcome you China." He didn't bother to look in any of my bags, not that I was carrying any of the above-mentioned unmentionables. He also told me that university officials were waiting outside. My panic was eased; I stopped thinking about return flights to Hong Kong.

Once outside the building, we were met by two teachers and two drivers and two cars--a Chinese jeep that reminded me of an olive-drab Volkswagen Thing and a new Nissan sedan with tinted black windows and dark velvet curtains in the back windows. One of the teachers, Ji Wei-wu, I had corresponded with, and he introduced himself as Deputy Director of the English For Science and Technology Unit of the Foreign Language Department. He also introduced the other teacher, a young man of 30 or so, as Mr. Yang. Yang had obviously spent many hours listening to conversation tapes by British speakers because he spoke with something of a British accent. I grinned when I heard him speak the

first time. The drivers remained nameless and silent.

Quickly loading our luggage into the jeep, Mr. Yang headed to the university. We were put into the Nissan's back seat, the driver protectively holding his hand over our heads as we got in as if our extreme height might cause us to give ourselves brain concussions as we got into the car. The air-conditioner immediately brought a large smile to my face and a sigh of relief from my soggy body. Mr. Ji had already commented on my soaked-through shirt. He appeared cool and fresh, dressed in walking shorts, a full-cut, white, short-sleeve shirt, and sandals--the summer uniform of many of the male teachers, professors, and workers at the university.

"Are you ill? he asked, looking at my wet shirt and hair.

"No, I'm fine. Just a bit tired," I said.

"Why are you sweating so much?" he continued.

"It's the humidity."

"I thought you might be ill or nervous perhaps."

I don't think he had ever seen anyone sweat so much. The Chinese don't perspire as much or, at least, not as quickly as we larger-pored gringos do. This was to be a perpetual source of curious stares and speculative comment by Chinese who would see me during the hot months--this and other things like my hairy face, my hairy arms, my hairy legs, my hairy chest, my six-foot-four-inch frame, and my

size thirteen feet.

On the way to the university, we chatted about our flight, the terrifying landing, sights seen in Hong Kong, and Ji told us something about himself. But I found it impossible to concentrate on the conversation because of what I was seeing through the dark, curtained windows of the car. I was getting my first glimpse of my new home, and my mind couldn't keep pace with my eyes. The highway from the airport into Tianjin flowed with more bicycles than I had ever seen in my life. I saw many animal-drawn carts and wagons, buses bulging with people like over-stuffed cotton bales, and countless pedestrians--some pulling or pushing heavily loaded two-wheel carts. I still find this everyday sight incredible even after witnessing it all over the country. I remember thinking it odd at the time that Ji had his attention focused on us and not the unbelievable kaleidoscope of humanity in motion outside the comfort of the quiet, smooth, new Japanese automobile.

I did manage to catch that Ji had studied applied linguistics for one year at the University of Sydney and would be our immediate supervisor. I quickly found him very personable and amusing; I believed I would have no trouble working with and for him. I have no idea what first impressions I made on him other than my size, beard, and hat (a Panama, which he mistook for a cowboy hat because he knew I was from Texas. He had seen John Wayne movies in



Australia). He even asked if I liked horses and posed other questions of the kind that people from New York ask Texans.

I did pay closer attention when the topic turned to teaching assignments. Kurt was to start teaching the following Monday, which stunned him because we had been told by Mr. Ji in a letter that classes would begin at the end of August or first of September and that we would have a couple of weeks to settle in. When I asked about my schedule, Ji casually said that it had not been decided yet.

"Do not be concerned. The beginning of a new term is always a little confusing," he told me. This proved to be an understatement. I was a bit disturbed that he couldn't tell me what I would be teaching and to whom, forgetting that such things routinely happen in U.S. universities. But I didn't really care that the situation appeared unorganized. I wanted to please and was willing to do, within reason, whatever the university requested. I was being treated as a guest. Why should I act like an employee? I was excited to be in China.

The driver was a master craftsman, weaving through the tapestry of traffic on the highways and city streets. I tried not to flinch every time the car came within inches of a cyclist or a horse's rump or a bus's back bumper. He stayed perpetually on the horn, seldom came to a complete stop despite the congestion, and nonchalantly chain-smoked the whole time. Again, I wondered how Ji could be so calm,

sitting first in harm's way while I reacted as if it were my first ride in an automobile--eyes bugging behind sunglasses, knuckles white from clutching the armrest, and foot pressing through the floor.

After a thirty-minute drive, we arrived at the Guest House for Foreign Experts where Mr. Yang was waiting with our luggage. A topic of much discussion and even more concern before leaving Texas was what the accommodations would be like. In a letter from the Foreign Affairs Office, I had been informed that a room with a private bath would be provided to me at no cost. But the Guest House turned out to be much nicer than anything I expected. However aesthetically unpleasing this four-story building is, it is spacious, comfortable, and relatively well-kept and staffed.

My first official business with the Guest House was to register at the front desk. This was, of course, also my first introduction to Mrs. Dai, the matronly power-wielder of the Guest House. A short woman of about 50 with graying temples and bifocals, perpetually dressed in Mao suit blue, Mrs. Dai and her mechanical smile seemed to run the daily operations of the building which houses both long-term and overnight "guests." Sitting behind the check-in desk, gazing over her glasses like a desk-sergeant, she kept a watchful eye on the comings and goings of the place, striking occasional fear and trembling into the hearts of residents and their visitors as well.

Ji introduced us to her, and we exchanged "ni haos" (hellos). She gave us registration forms to fill out and asked for our passports, a required procedure at all Chinese hotels. She meticulously studied our passports, looking first at our pictures and then at us and finally back at our pictures. Satisfied that we were who we said we were, she turned to our Chinese visas and quickly noticed that they were valid for only three months. We had written on the forms, however, that we would be in China for one year. This caused a ten-minute flurry of animated dialogue between her and Mr. Ji. I thought my career in China had ended before it had ever begun. The result was that we had to fill out new forms. She wouldn't let us cross out the one year on the first and write three months. Predictably enough, at the end of the first three months, Mrs. Dai collared me one morning as I was leaving for class and made me fill out a new registration form only after she carefully examined my new visa.

After a half hour, we were finally given our keys. Ji and Yang led us upstairs, refusing to let us help carry our mammoth bags. Our rooms were actually apartments with two large rooms, a bedroom and a sitting room, a small utility room with sink and refrigerator, a bathroom with western-style toilet, a TV, a telephone, and much to my relief, a window-unit air-conditioner. Turning it on, Ji said that I would find the air-conditioner a welcome change from the

heat of the classroom buildings and that I wouldn't have to sweat in my apartment. I was very content with the arrangement and only later, after visiting real Chinese homes, would I realize I was living in the lap of Chinese luxury.

An air-conditioned apartment is almost as rare in Tianjin as are enchiladas and tacos. The space allotted me, somewhere around 600 square feet, might be used to house as many as eight people. A telephone is unheard of in individual apartments, and although most people now have the money to buy small refrigerators, sought-after imports like the Toshiba brand are difficult to find. The significance of the special treatment afforded foreigners was lost, however, in the exuberance of finding that my quarters would be more than adequate for comfortable living. It was only after students had visited a few times and had entered with wide-open mouths as they glanced around the apartment that I realized my "China experience" would not be that of an average Chinese college teacher. And only after visiting my Chinese counterparts' homes did I understand that my situation in Tianjin could not in any form or fashion be equated with theirs. I still don't know how I feel about that. As the months passed, my apartment became my sanctuary from the overwhelming crowds of the city; it became my haven to which I could race back after several weeks or even a few days of exhausting travel. It also,

however, became a kind of quarantine separating me from the real-life goings-on outside the closely monitored front door of the Guest House.

Because we had arrived just before seven in the evening, Ji quickly hustled us back downstairs to the dining room. Most restaurants and nearly all hotel dining rooms stop serving at seven, so the staff was waiting especially for us to eat before they left for the day. The meal was forgettable, and eventually I would make the suggestion, more than once, that the Guest House "chef" be sent to Inner Mongolia for reeducation. "Maybe that was the problem in the first place," one of the other teachers said in answer to my complaint about another plate of maturing bean sprouts and pork fat.

I slept unusually well my first night in Tianjin. In fact, I slept unusually well for the next few nights because, I suppose, the weeks leading up to my departure were hectic and anticipation can be more energy-sapping than the actuality itself. I had begun to look forward to my departure from Texas just to rest and escape the constant discussion among friends and family about the comparative advantages and disadvantages of my decision to move to China. When I told my great uncle I was going to China, he said, "Well, gosh darn boy, I'd rather own an oil well." I had also grown weary of the ubiquitous questions I encountered: "Know how to use chopsticks? Like rice? Know

how to walk with a stoop so you won't tower over those short little people? Is there a MacDonal'd's in Tianjin? Where is Tianjin? Learned any Chinese? Do you like Oriental women? How much are you getting paid? Do you think your room will be bugged? Are you really defecting? Would you send me a Great Wall t-shirt?" And always: "Why on earth are you going to China?"

I awoke early that first morning, dressed, and went out into the fourth-floor hallway to look out over the campus. I must have stood there for almost an hour mesmerized by what I was seeing.

To the west was a small lake about the size of two football fields side-by-side. It was Sunday, the weekend in China, so many men of all ages were fishing around the lake with long bamboo poles. Some were very old; many had their trousers rolled up to their knees and were wearing bamboo hats of a variety of shapes. Some were fathers with their tiny sons; the men were wearing shorts and tank-top undershirts, and the little boys had the split-seam pants that make Pampers obsolete here. I remember asking myself what Freud would have thought about those pants.

The narrow lane that passes in front of the Guest House overflowed with people on their bikes. Many had attached tiny seats for their children and still others had strange side-cars fastened to their bikes for their little ones. Occasionally, a horse-drawn wagon laden with basketball-

sized cabbages and baseball bat-sized leeks would pass by, the dozing driver perched on top of the load with a long, unused whip in his hand. Sometimes trucks came roaring down the lane, horns blasting, hauling dirt or coal. The trucks looked 1930's vintage but were actually quite new. Under the trees by a second lake in front of the Guest House, a street-sweeper was stirring the dirt. She wore a white surgeon's mask to keep the dust out of her mouth and nose. In the flower garden across the lane, nine or ten old women were doing their early morning taichi, and later they stopped to chat or fuss over their grandchildren who were playing in the flowers.

To the northwest, row after row of apartment buildings looked so symmetrical that they appeared unreal, like model buildings in an architectural display, exactly alike--all six-story walkups. And beyond them, more of the same under construction. I had seen these buildings the day before on the way from the airport and have seen them since in every city in China I have visited. They are colorless, somber edifices of monotony and efficiency that are replacing the traditional-style courtyard houses. But housing is a terrific problem, and the Chinese city planners are convinced that pragmatic concerns supersede any consideration for the aesthetic.

From the small balcony of my apartment looking south, I could see what looked like a tiny village encased by the

campus. The one-story duplex-like houses had small courtyards containing chickens, ducks, drying vegetables, a few flowers, and a cat or two. The tile roofs looked a hundred years old, and the narrow alley-ways between the rows of houses were in stark contrast to the scenes on the north side of the Guest House. It was if I were looking at two distinct time periods.

Beyond the tile-roofed houses, however, I could see the main building of Nankai University with its sterile tower dedicated to the late Premier Zhou En-lai. A dusty, rock-hard soccer field lies between the two campuses, and it was busy with students playing football and jogging around the dirt track. Some of the student dormitories border the south side of the field; laundry was hanging to dry from almost every window, adding color to an otherwise colorless scene.

At seven, I went downstairs for breakfast--two fried eggs, something like toast, and something else like coffee. I met two other teachers, a retired businessman from Oregon and a young man from British Columbia. George, the Oregonian, introduced himself as the one who didn't know why or how he was hired and departed from breakfast with what became his standard departing line: "If you see Mr. Ji, tell him I am looking for him." Colin, the Canadian, and I discussed a possible trip to Beijing since neither of us knew exactly what and when we would start teaching.



After breakfast, Liu De-fu and Xu Xin-fang (Susan) from the Foreign Affairs Office came to my apartment to welcome Kurt and me to the university. Mrs. Liu made a brief statement about Tianjin University, its history, and described the benefits we would receive as foreign guests. We were given our pay for August (in China you are paid in advance since you have no possibility of quitting or changing your job), a tourist map of Tianjin, and a map of the campus. Susan interpreted for Deputy Director Liu although I knew she spoke English. This was an official meeting and even if administrators speak English, they use interpreters to create an atmosphere of formality. The meeting was pleasant and to the point, but it ended abruptly by western standards--no lingering around lest unplanned topics enter into the discussion.

One request Susan made at our first meeting was for four photos of us to be used in various identification cards and permits. As foreigners, we would need an identification card, the white card, from the Bank of China allowing us to use Renminbi yuan (RMB). Foreigners must use a different currency called Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC) which is convertible to other currencies. RMB is good only in China and cannot be changed into other currencies. Without the white card, our RMB would be useless. We were also to be issued an alien's resident card, the green card, by the Public Security Bureau, China's national police force. This

card served as proof that we were legally entitled by the PSB to reside in China. Finally, the university gave us our work unit card, the red card, that identified where we worked and for how long we would be employed. Everyone in China has a work unit card.

We needed all these cards to purchase things like train tickets, to book hotel rooms, or to spend RMB. The association of the colors white, green, and red have been eternally altered in my mind. I will never again think of these colors without considering the pain these particular documents caused me on occasion, particularly the use of the white card, and the impossibility of functioning without them.

Both of us were very pleased to find out that we would be paid 600RMB each month instead of the 500 we had anticipated (at the time one dollar equalled 3.2RMB). Susan also made arrangements to reimburse us for the cost of our flight from Hong Kong to Tianjin. We paid our way to Hong Kong, a fairly standard arrangement between teachers and universities in China. Other benefits included free medical care (except for the "lifting of faces and the cleaning of teeches"), a vacation allowance of 600RMB, and a return ticket home at the end of the school year.

All of this adds up to an extraordinary employment package by Chinese standards. Most Chinese teachers and professors at Tianjin University earn no more than 150RMB

per month. Even though they only pay 5 to 10RMB per month for housing, are covered by the national medical program, and receive grain, cooking oil, and coal subsidies, they still make roughly one-sixth of my monthly salary. I must admit that for two years I did not have to worry about money, rent, utilities, credit cards, car payments, and health insurance, but none of this translates into savings you can bring home with you. RMB, "the people's money," is a non-convertible currency commonly referred to by foreigners who are paid in it as "monopoly money," good only while you are playing the "game" in China. The largest denomination at that time was the ten yuan bill. When I would draw my pay on the fifth of each month, I received a enormous wad of cash.

The Chinese standing in the business office when I received my salary always made me feel guilty, though not intentionally, of course. Salaries in China are not private matters. Everyone knows what everyone else makes. It was just that when I would go into the business office, the cashier would drag me out of the usual line, hand me my pay, and insist that I count every yuan of it before signing the payroll sheet--this while everyone watched. At first, I faithfully counted as instructed; later I would hurriedly feign a tally, sign, and leave as quickly as possible. I never got used to the idea that everyone in the university knew how much I made, when I got paid, and whether or not I

was going to get a raise before I did.

I, a border-line claustrophobic, never got used to Chinese buses either. But that first Sunday, after the meeting with Madame Liu and Susan, I boarded a number eight bus and headed downtown to the Heping District with Kurt and Colin, the Canadian. Because we had no white cards, we all needed to change a few dollars into Foreign Exchange Certificates so we would have some pocket money. We planned to find Tianjin Hotel Number Two, called the Astor before 1949, change money, and have some lunch in the hotel.

Riding the bus in China is an exercise in Buddhistic asceticism, an act of total self-negation. Even before the bus comes to a stop and the three doors spring open, you must fling yourself toward the position where the doors will likely open. You do this without regard for your body or the bodies of others. Then you begin the perilous ascent, pushing the person in front of you who is pushing the person in front of him. Frequently, no progress is made because just as many people are trying to push their way off the bus--a momentary stalemate. And sometimes, someone is tugging on you from behind, trying to pull you off so he can get on.

Once on, you are like college freshmen crammed in a phone booth. This is the point where the sense of self is finally and totally obliterated, where pride and vanity cease to exist, where the selfless intimacy of a Chinese bus

really begins, for you have no ability to distinguish which arms belong with what legs, which heads belong with what feet, or whose elbow is digging a hole through your back. You have become a part of a moving collage of body pieces chaotically mashed together and held in precarious balance by the few hands that can reach the safety bars--if one hand gives way, all bodies are doomed--until the bus squeals to a halt at the next stop where random rearrangement takes place.

You don't so much as get off the bus as you, like Jonah, are belched out of the bus's mouth. Overjoyed to be in one piece and out of the churning bowels of the bus, you immediately forget the harrowing feeling of the loss of self and walk on down the street gulping in fresh air.

I know now that the bus that morning wasn't crowded at all because all three of us made it off at the same time bus-stop. Other times, I have bulled my way off while my less aggressive companion was stuck somewhere between the middle and back doors. This is a strange sensation: standing on the street as you watch pieces of your friend hauled away. Chinese buses have no capacity limits. It was three or four months before I was ever lucky enough to get a seat, so I never saw anything of the city while riding the bus--my height only allowed me to see the tops of heads and hats. Of course, the first time I sat down on a bus, a young mother with a baby struggled on after me; I felt

compelled to insist that she take my seat.

Then there were the stares. Looking down the aisle, all eyes were focused on me--the foreigner. That first day, three of us went downtown, causing three times as much excitement. I'm certain some people missed their stops or decided to follow us to ours. I felt undressed and dissected, scrutinized and sized-up. And because of the August-induced feeling that I was wearing a woolen sweater over a wet-suit, the sweat gushed from me. The Chinese looked at me as if I had brought typhoid or cholera into their midst. But all I had to do was break into a big grin and even the most inscrutable looking sorts returned grins of their own.

After we arrived at the Hai River downtown, we got out the tourist map to get our bearings. Within five minutes, at least fifty people had surrounded us. None of us spoke Chinese; none of them spoke English. Our map was in English, so no one could pinpoint our position or destination. Within ten minutes the crowd had mushroomed to three hundred. I saw people running from across the wide boulevard that borders the river to see why the crowd had gathered. Finally, we struck off in what we hoped was the right direction just to get some breathing room. We walked for forty-five minutes on people-packed streets. People stopped to watch us pass by. I kept checking to make sure my pants were zipped up. Each time we paused to study the

map, people encircled us. Everyone was very friendly, but the stares and snickers made me feel like a freak in a sideshow. Eventually, we found the old Astor Hotel, changed money and lunched on a very tasty chicken curry.

Next, we located Heping Lu (Peace Street), the main street downtown, where the Tianjin Number One Department Store is located. The idea was to see just what commodities were going to be available to us, what we were going to have to do without, substitute, and send home for. The department store was so mobbed that I could not see the floor. At counters, frantic looking shoppers, five and six deep, were trying to flag down indifferent clerks. There seemed to be no available air to breath, and the temperature inside the store must have been close to a hundred.

I did not make it too far past the front door. Never being an overly enthusiastic shopper anyway, I decided Sundays were no the days to make incidental purchases. People work six days a week, and most of Tianjin's eight million people, it seemed, were in this department store on this Sunday in August buying, of all things, winter coats, hats, scarfs, gloves, and long underwear. By October, the selection of winter-wear available would be essentially depleted.

So I walked into the store, looked around, panicked, and walked out. After some four hours of buses, stares, and heat, I was ready for a cab back to the Guest House, telling

myself I would explore Tianjin's retail world some other day. "I'm not ready for these urban realities," thought this Texas boy. "I'm from a small town of six thousand who view Lubbock as a densely populated traffic jam." No cab was to be found, so it was back onto bus number eight and back to the apartment with the air-conditioner.

I wanted to avoid the buses as much as possible; I had come to that conclusion after just one day. So I had no difficulty in deciding that a bicycle was a must, and that evening made arrangements to purchase one at the Friendship Store on Tuesday or Wednesday--as soon as I got my white, green, and red cards.

During the first week, two more memorable events took place--my first trip to Beijing and my first solo bike tour of Tianjin. I found out I wouldn't be teaching for one, perhaps, two weeks, so I decided to take the train to Beijing, a two-hour ride. Colin, enjoying similar circumstances, came with me. Although my first trip to Beijing was only for three days, I arrived in high gear. I managed to see Tian'an Men Square, the Forbidden City and Imperial Palace, the Temple of Heaven, and Yonghegong Lama Temple; to visit the American, British, and Canadian embassies; to eat Peking Duck and drink Maotai liquor; and to get my first taste of the type of hotels I would be able to afford on my future travels.



The Beijing train station and Tian'an Men Square had the greatest impact on me that first trip. Not that the other sights didn't impress me greatly, but sightseeing burn-out in Beijing is easily contracted.

As we arrived in Beijing, I could see the twin towers of the station, a gigantic building which is a combination of modern and traditional Chinese architecture. Because we were alone, we had no idea which direction to go once we got off the train. But we had no trouble finding our way from the platform, down through the tunnel that links the six platforms, and into the station. We were literally picked up by the tide of passengers arriving on our train and others, swept through the long, low-ceilinged tunnel, up through the turnstiles at the exit, and out into the muggy heat of a mid-August morning. 1,000,000 people pass through the station each day, arriving and departing for every corner of the country.

The large plaza in front of the station is the temporary home of in-transit travellers waiting to rush onto their trains when the numbers are announced in a desperate attempt to win a seat in one of the hard-seat carriages. There are no reserved seats; hence, boarding a train becomes a foot-race from the station to the platform. It is an incredible stampede to witness and a test of physical endurance to have to take part in unless you can book a reserved soft-seat in the first-class carriage, used only by

foreigners and officials.

The hard-seat carriages are filled beyond any reasonable capacity, much like the city buses. Many people don't get seats, and sometime they stand or sit on the floor in the aisle for two or three days. But I, a "foreign guest," had easy access to first-class tickets and more than enough money to afford them. If I had been forced, like 99% of all Chinese travellers, to use the hard-seat cars, I would not have logged over 30,000 kilometers on China's rail system.

Purchasing train tickets is a time-consuming ordeal for all but foreigners and overseas Chinese at the Beijing train station. The ticket booths are located in front of the main building, exposed year round to the weather, and lines are always long and unruly. Inside is a special waiting-room and ticket office for foreigners that most Chinese are not allowed to use, even if they know about it. It was, however fair or unfair, very convenient for me, and this is where I would go first as soon as I arrived in Beijing to book a return ticket to Tianjin. Round-trip tickets do not exist anywhere in the country.

But the most remarkable thing about the Beijing train station is not its gargantuan building or the number of trains arriving and departing everyday (over 120 passenger trains). It is the great mass of humanity that is always there--coming, going, waiting. I saw, that first trip, the

sun-baked faces of farmers with shoulder-poles bearing woven bamboo crates filled with trussed, cackling chickens; countless couples with one child; panicked peasants who obviously couldn't read; yellow-robed monks with shaved, shiny heads and missing fingers; squadrons of young soldiers playing cards or Chinese chess to kill the time--all fanning themselves, all trying to stay cool, all with a glazed look of fatigue or boredom that comes from travelling or waiting to travel on, or else with a look of quiet, throbbing, clock-watching impatience that comes from too little or too much travel. I reach for comparisons to the Beijing train station, but have none in my past experience.

From the train station, we took a bus to Tian'an Men Square. Like the station, Tian'an Men is incomparable to anything I have ever seen. I walked to the center of the square and stood there in awe for almost an hour. Looking for a long time at Mao's huge portrait hanging above the Gate to Heaven which leads into the Forbidden City, then turning to look at his mausoleum, I felt I was standing at the midpoint of recent megalomania. And to the east and west, the oppressive presence of the monolithic Museum of the History of the Communist Revolution and the Great Hall of the People reinforced my feelings. Everything about Tian'an Men Square is larger than life, the buildings too dense, as if they were carved out of solid granite and marble rather than built piece by piece. The people in the

square seemed out of place to me.

Often, when I would return to Beijing to shop, sightsee, or get slides processed, I made my way to the square if only for a few minutes, just to stand or squat in the middle of it--just to be there--to feel the layers of co-existing history flow up through my feet and into my gut. I was able to imagine hearing and seeing millions of people cheering Mao's every word coming over the hundreds of loud speakers in and around the square. I would watch the devout stream by the thousands through Mao's tomb or get their pictures taken with his giant picture in the background. Sometimes I would watch old men flying dragon kites in Beijing's perpetual northwest breeze.

The day after returning from Beijing to Tianjin, I purchased a bicycle--a brand new Flying Pigeon (I now refer to it as my Flying Squirrel). Armed with red, green, and white cards and 187RMB, I went to the Tianjin Friendship Store where I had been told by the Foreign Affairs Office that foreigners MUST purchase bikes.

Most large cities in China, and that is most Chinese cities, have Friendship Stores which were originally built to serve foreign "friends" to the exclusion of the Chinese. Foreigners could buy imported goods and Chinese products in short supply. This has changed somewhat, and although the Tianjin Friendship Store offers imported liquor, cigarettes, chocolates, and instant coffee, everything else in the

store, another four-story building, is made in China. On the day I went there to buy my bike, the store was filled with Chinese shoppers, but few Chinese spenders.

There is something like two million bikes on the streets of Tianjin each day, and the addition of mine would not have been at all noteworthy were it not for the fact that I was riding it. I was not a traffic hazard because of any two-wheeler ineptness on my part, but I was a traffic hazard just the same that afternoon when I rode my new bike back from the store to the university.

People risked life and limb as they rode along the streets to get a good, long look at the giant foreigner riding his seemingly undersized Flying Pigeon. A 6'4", my frame miniaturized the 22" frame of the bike, and because I left the store without raising the seat or the handlebars, which were in their lowest positions, I looked and felt like a circus bear riding a child's bike in a sideshow--elbows out, knees coming up to bang against the handlebars. People would actually stop in the middle of the street, regardless of oncoming traffic, to watch me churning and puffing by. Some laughed out loud. I could only smile at them and keep on pedalling.

Another mistake I made was not checking to make sure all bolts, nuts, screws, clamps, and other attachables were securely tightened, screwed, fastened, and attached. My factory-fresh Flying Pigeon had never flown before. The end

result was that I arrived back at the Guest House pushing my bike, with one pedal in my back pocket, the seat tilted down at a 75 degree angle, two bolts and nuts missing from the chain guard, and a brake-pad banging against the front-wheel spokes.

George, the Oregonian, who had been in Tianjin for three weeks and was a foreign expert in these mechanical matters, sent me the next morning to the bike repairman across from the front gate to the university to get my disassembled bike reassembled. Perhaps fifty-five, stocky, with burred grey hair and greasy fingernails, this chain-smoking bike mechanic became one of my favorite people in Tianjin.

As I pushed my bike across the street and under the tree which serves as the roof to his "workshop," I could see him, squatting down on his haunches, smoking the last half-inch of a filter-less cigarette, shaking his head. As he stood up, I handed him the parts that had fallen off, pointed to the parts that were missing, and gestured that I needed the seat and handlebars raised. He looked at me disgustedly as if to say: "No shit! Everyone knows you must tighten every bolt, nut, and screw on a new bike. You can't just hop on and ride away, stupid."

He offered me a cigarette and motioned for me to squat and rest. I gave him one of my Hong Kong purchased Marlboros which he looked at with utter contempt, placing it

behind his left ear. Then he made quick work of my bike. When he finished he held up two fingers. I pulled out two yuan. Again he looked at me as if I were fresh from the countryside and pulled twenty cents, two jiao, out of my wad of bills.

Later on as my Chinese improved, I would occasionally stop by his tree and trade cigarettes with him, though I never saw him actually smoke one of mine. Sometimes I got a screw tightened or the chain adjusted or I would just say hello if he wasn't swamped with customers, which he usually was. I liked to watch him work. It was obvious that he was well-liked and respected by the students and the neighborhood residents.

He liked to chastise me ferociously for not taking better care of my bike, which began to rust two weeks after I bought it, and for riding without the right amount of air in my tires. He also complained about my foul-tasting and smelling western cigarettes; I returned the compliment for his 999's, Yunan Province's most famous brand.

That morning, after he had finished, I decided to cycle around to see something of the city besides the tops of people's heads from the inside of a bus. I had not planned this outing, so I did not have my map, phrasebook, or cards. But the day was mild, so the weather lured me into exploration. I had studied the city map and the local television station's broadcasting towers were directly

across from the university. With these landmarks to guide me, how could I get lost? I looked at my watch: 10 A.M. I had two hours to wander around before lunch.

I knew that if I rode north I would come to the part of Tianjin call Old Chinatown, the part of the city that was not controlled by foreign concessions before 1949. I had been told that Chinatown was the closest thing to pre-liberation Tianjin available--no apartment complexes, no high-rise office buildings, no wide, bus-filled avenues; only narrow alleyways, lanes, bazaars, and free-markets.

I found Old Chinatown easily enough. It was a thirty-minute bike ride away. I was ecstatic to get away from the monotonous architecture of the campus and to be out of the Guest House. Meandering through crowded cobblestone alleyways, peering nosily into people's houses, I saw old women beating their laundry with sticks, plucking chickens, cleaning vegetables, and staring back at me as if I were a Martian. Old men sat or squatted in the shady spots playing mahjonn, Chinese chess, and GO. Children were everywhere, some smiling back at me, some biting their quivering bottom lips to keep from breaking into tears, and some fleeing in terror, screaming "Mama, Baba!"

I heard one old grandfather tell his grandson that I was an old Russian. Perhaps that was the last foreigner the old man had seen. And many grandparents or parents would point me out to their children, saying loud enough for me to



hear, "lao wai" (old foreigner) or "waiguoren" (foreigner or, literally, outsider). I said hello to one little boy, and he bravely returned, "hello grandfather." Children here always called me grandfather or older uncle although I'm only 35 ... it's my beard. But everywhere, people smiled at me when I smiled at them.

I was having so much fun that lunch-time passed, so I decided to explore further. I rode up and down streets for two or three hours, trying to establish landmarks to get my bearings and trying to get north, south, east, and west set firmly in my mind. But while I was enjoying the exotic feeling of being outside myself, away from the familiar, the sky clouded over. As my bike and I twisted and turned through the city, I lost all sense of direction, and, without the sun, I became as lost as lost can be. I was in a section of the city where the likelihood of finding an English speaker was slim. I couldn't have felt any more helpless if I had been set down in the middle of the Gobi in a howling windstorm.

I continued to ride, thinking that any minute I would recognize a building or intersection, but everything began to look exactly the same. By five o'clock, I had begun to panic. I had left without my red card, so I couldn't even show a traffic cop my work unit card. I did not know the Guest House phone number. I pictured myself riding around the streets of Tianjin forever, looking for the twin TV

towers that had disappeared in the haze.

At the point when panic began to turn to terror, I came upon the Hai River, or at least what I hoped was the Hai River. I knew that if I followed it, I would eventually come to the stop for bus number eight that runs between the university and downtown. After a thirty-minute adrenaline-induced ride, I pulled up by the bus-stop for which I was frantically searching. Once again, I was wringing wet with sweat and felt the collective eyes of eight million Tianjinese staring at me.

I waited for a bus to arrive, and as it pulled away from the curb, I fell in behind it. There are about ten stops between downtown and the front gate of the university. The bus would stop; I would stop. The bus would move on; I would race to keep up with it so I wouldn't lose my way again. The people in the back of the bus noticed I was following them. Their mouths agape, fingers pointing, they thought that I was some crazy foreigner playing some crazy game. But finally, I think they caught on. They people began to wave me on and point in the direction of the next turn, and at last, we pulled onto the street in front of the university. As I turned into the gate, I could see the laughing passengers on bus number eight, cheering and applauding me. I stopped. All I could do was laugh and wave back at them.

I made it back to the Guest House in time for dinner

and found a note from the Foreign Language Department telling me that my classes would begin the following Monday, but it didn't specify when and where. I made plans to buy a compass, so I wouldn't get so lost again. I could not, as yet, make plans for any classes. Mr. Ji had told me not to worry, so I took him at his word.

## CHAPTER II

### "MR. NICK, WE THINK YOU MUST BE GENIUS"

On my first Monday morning of classes, Guo Fen-ming, an English teacher assigned to assist and advise me during the first term, came to my apartment at 7:45. He asked a few questions about my educational background and then accompanied me to room 313 in Building Number 15. We chatted as we walked across campus.

"Your first class is second-year English majors, our sophomores. We call them '84EST class (English for Science and Technology). Their reading comprehension is quite good I should say. They have studied English since junior middle school." I frowned. "Since the seventh grade," he explained. "But their listening and speaking skills are very low."

I found this statement ironic because he was escorting me to '84EST's reading class, not a listening or speaking class. The class was called "intensive reading." I also taught them "extensive reading," but I never figured out the difference.

Mr. Guo continued. "Because they are poor listeners, you must speak slowly--like the announcer on Voice of

America's special English programs." He nodded and narrowed his eyes. I noticed several old men doing taichi by the lake.

"How slowly?" I asked. "I have never heard a VOA program. VOA doesn't broadcast in the states." He looked at me in disbelief, finding this incredible.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Why doesn't VOA broadcast in the states?"

"Well, I suppose because we have so many other sources of news. Most Americans watch TV for news and listen to the radio for music."

"The students are very shy, but they will tell you if you speak too quickly, or they will complain to us."

"That is fine," I said. "I'll be able to tell, I think." The word complain momentarily bothered me.

After a short walk, we entered Building Number 15, a four-story concrete structure. Clusters of chattering students paused to watch us. I noticed spittoons lined up outside the doors of the shadowy first-floor hallway. I could also smell the bathrooms. Their aroma permeated the stairway as we climbed to the third floor. Many heads turned as we went up the crumbling, unlighted stairs.

"The electricity is off on Mondays," Mr. Guo said. "You call that a brown-out, don't you?" He smiled. This was more a statement than a question. Mr. Guo, my age and a member of the Cultural Revolution generation, was

justifiably proud of his English. "You must not schedule a movie or plan to use a tape-recorder or projector on Mondays. Also, the copy-center is closed." He went on to explain that brown-outs happened on specified days all over the city because of a power shortage and that many factory workers' days-off corresponded with the brown-outs in their districts.

"No problem," I replied, wondering what movies the department had that I could schedule in the future. The fact was that the department had none.

As we entered room 313, a chain reaction began, as first one, then a few, and finally all of the students noticed us, quickly stopped chattering, and slid behind their abused, geriatric-looking desks. After the 8:00 bell rang, Mr. Guo marched to front of the class, adjusted the fountain pen in the pocket of his blue Mao coat, and began a short speech about me. It was flattering, a bit pretentious, well-intentioned.

I stood in the corner surveying the young, round faces of the students who were listening to Mr. Guo and stealing glances at me. '84EST class had eleven boys and nine girls. Most of the boys wore white, short-sleeve shirts, but one boy wore a Mickey and Minnie Mouse t-shirt with "Mickey Loves Minnie" written on it. Some of the boys had their jeans rolled up to their knees, and all of them had on sandals and no socks or sneakers. The girls wore skirts,

blouses, half-hose, and sandals. The ones with long hair had it tied back into pony-tails or pig-tails with yellow and red ribbons. The other girls had shorter hair with bangs cut straight across their foreheads. All of their faces gleamed as if they had been freshly polished.

The classroom itself would have been a dismal box of a room were it not for the life that the students breathed into it. I hardly noticed the bare, dusty, cement floor, bare humming fluorescent lights, and bare, grungy walls because of the strong, youthful presence of the students. I must have been paying no attention to Mr. Guo's introduction or his attempt to get my attention as he was finishing, but I did notice that the students had turned their full attention to me. I heard "Now class, you should warmly welcome your new foreign teacher Lilly," and watched a serious-looking Mr. Guo abruptly leave the room.

As I walked to the lectern, I was greeted by vigorous applause and bubbly giggles. I applauded and giggled in return.

"Good morning."

"Good morning," they responded with the unison of a well-rehearsed choir.

"What is funny?" I asked, amused by their continued laughter.

My question, like a cue-card, ended all sound in the room. I kept smiling and repeated my question. Finally,

the young man in the Mickey Mouse shirt stood up and answered, "Lilly is a girl's name. Why do you have a girl's name?" He sat down.

"My name is Nick Lilly," I said, writing my name on the chalky, scarred blackboard. The chalk screeched causing more giggles. "Lilly is my father's name. Nick is my first name. In Chinese, my name would be Lilly Nick because you put the father's name first. You can call me Mr. Lilly or Nick--whatever you like. I am used to American students calling me Nick. Mister makes me feel so old," I explained to twenty wide-eyed, fresh faces.

"What would you like to know about me?" I asked them. All forty eyes looked immediately down at their desks. In the quiet that followed I could hear a jack-hammer pounding away outside the building. "Well, let me tell you a little about myself. Then each of you can tell me a little about yourselves."

For about forty-five minutes, I talked about my family, Texas, the university where I had studied and taught, my visit to Hong Kong, and my first trip to Beijing. They reacted with laughter, a steady stream of applause, and a little embarrassment from my openness. They were very amused by my tortured attempts to say the Chinese names of the places I had visited the week before in Beijing. As I spoke, their eyes were riveted on me. I could tell they were concentrating with all their might on what I was



saying. Some were trying to translate what I was saying into Chinese and having difficulty in keeping up. At times, they whispered to each other in Chinese and heads would nod in understanding. If I used an unfamiliar word or expression, their faces flushed with the hue of confusion. I spoke in my best, unaccented, VOA Special English-speed voice, and still I could tell much of what I was saying was not being understood by some of them. I tried to relate my life in Reader's Digest vocabulary.

I tired of talking about myself and asked for questions because I was eager to hear them speak. Again, all eyes dropped to the desktops. No questions. Their alert facial expressions went blank, their wide, alive eyes glazed over, and the shabbiness of the room became more apparent to me. I noticed Chinese characters written in the thick, collected dust on the windowsills and the broken windowpanes covered with faded newspapers.

As I started to answer my own questions, a habit I have in a deadly silent classroom which I have tried to break, I was rescued by the 8:50 bell, signalling the first break. For the next five minutes, the personality of the class shifted about 180 degrees. It was as if I had disappeared into one of the grimy, plaster walls. Two boys began to arm-wrestle on a desktop. Two other boys grabbed badminton racquets and went into the hall to bat a shuttlecock precariously over the heads of other students who had

congregated to watch a boy show off his martial art skills. The girls crowded around one desk to look at a movie magazine and giggle. Girls held hands with each other, as did the boys in a show of friendly, innocent intimacy. For five minutes, utter anarchy reigned--loud chatter, laughter, teasing, and old-fashioned grab-assing. Then the loud, long bell rang, bringing an immediate end to the frenzy and a return to normalcy, rigidity, and discipline. Students scrambled back behind their desks and assumed silent, deadpan faces with wide eyes focused on me. I had to laugh, but couldn't think of a way to tell them why when one of the boys stood up and blurted out, "What is funny, Teacher Nick?"

"I am laughing at what happens during the break," I answered.

"But what is funny?" he asked again, my answer either unsuitable or misunderstood.

"Well, I am laughing because one minute all of you looked as if I were about to execute you (I drew my finger across my throat), and the next you were all having a great time."

The boy smiled at me. "Don't American students have a rest time?"

"Yes, but often students have classes in different buildings, so they must hurry from one class to another," I told him.

"Oh, terrible!" he replied. Then he asked another question. "How much money do you make?" I could feel my ears turning red. I had never had a student ask me that question before, at least not so bluntly.

"I'm paid quite well by the university here. I'm quite satisfied.

"But how much is that? I think you must be rich."

I asked him his name, and he told me he had chosen the name of Mark. "Mark, are Chinese teachers rich?"

"Certainly not--they are poorer than everyone."

"Well, Mark, that is the case for most teachers everywhere in the world, including me."

Mark continued to stand. "Why do you choose to teach?"

"I teach because it is something I like to do. How many of you want to become teachers?" Their eyes jack-knifed to the desktops; no one responded. "You are like American students. Few of them want to become teachers."

Mark was not finished. "Do you like girls or boys?" My ears turned a fiery crimson I'm sure. I thought to myself, "Brother, where did they get this kid from?"

"I don't understand your question, Mark."

"I mean do you like girls babies or boy babies," he said with a sheepish grin on his face.

"I don't have any children, but if I ever do, as long as the child was healthy and normal, I'd be very happy with a girl or boy. I suppose I would like a daughter." I wiped

the sweat from my forehead with the back of my hand. The stuffy classroom had suddenly grown more confining. Mark sat down, shaking his head, obviously displeased with my answer which puzzled the boys and pleased some of the girls. He was especially annoyed with my reaction because he is from a rural area near Nanjing, and great importance is still placed on producing male offspring in the countryside.

"Any more questions?" I asked, looking at the tops of twenty heads.

Finally, a gangly boy in thick, horn-rimmed glasses stood and asked, "Mr Nick, why are you wetting?"

I stumbled momentarily. "Uh, uh, do you mean why am I sweating?" I asked, writing the word on the blackboard. "I'm sweating because it is hot and humid. I don't like the humidity." The boy frowned, and I explained the term. Eventually, one of the girls said the Chinese word for humidity, and everyone nodded their heads.

"Any more questions?" I repeated. No questions followed, so for the rest of the period I tried to pry some information out of them. "Introduce yourselves to me," I requested. "I'm here to learn from you also." This pronouncement caused them to giggle as if they thought the notion of a teacher learning from his students patently absurd.

"What do you want us to say?" replied one of the boys with his head tilted to the side.

"Anything you feel like saying. You can tell me your English names, where you are from, what your interests are, anything at all."

Mark stood up. "My name is Mark." Everyone laughed. "I am from Nanjing in Jiangsu Province; I am interested in everything." Mark sat down, looking from side to side, very pleased with his introduction.

The next student stood. "My name is Charles. I am from Shandong Province. I am interested in nothing." He sat down, looking like a new father.

"My name is David. I am from Tianjin. I am also interested in nothing." I laughed, but didn't say anything, wondering how far they would go with this.

"My name is William from Yantai. I am not interested in nothing more than Charles or David." Everyone, including me, laughed. William, who had asked me why I was "wetting," sat down, laughing so hard his glasses fell off.

"William from Yantai," I said, "you're a smart looking young man. How is it that you are not interested in anything?"

William thought a minute. "I said I was not interested in nothing which means I am interested in everything!"

"William, you are confusing me. Don't you have any hobbies? What do you like to do in your free time?" I asked, trying to restore a hint of order even though I was having a great time.

William grinned from the neck up. "OK. I am interested in you. How did you grow so robust?" Everyone laughed because I couldn't keep from it.

"Because I am very interested in eating."

The class exploded into laughter and applause. They roared with delight when I converted my height into meters and my weight into kilograms. They shook their heads in disbelief when I told them my brothers were even larger than I. The introductions continued.

"I am Belinda from Tianjin. I am interested in stamp collecting." Belinda was a cute girl with the ugliest pair of glasses I had ever seen.

"My name is Anne. I am from Beijing. I am interested in foreign literature." I nodded and recommended she say world literature.

Each time a student spoke, he or she would pop up from their chair like a piece of toast, stiff and severe, speak to the floor in barely audible voices that were lost in the giggles of their classmates, and quickly sit back down again. All this standing and sitting wore me out. Finally, I told them they didn't have to stand at attention when they spoke in class, that it was too formal for me and too distracting. But distracting was a new word for them. By the time I had finished explaining what it meant, the period was over, so I used my definition of distracting as a good example of a distraction because not all of the students got

to speak. They thought this very clever. Mark popped up and impishly said, "Mr. Nick, we think you must be genius!" As he sat back down, I rolled my eyes, which made them laugh, and dismissed class, my heart captured by '84EST.

The next day, I met with the seniors--'82EST, a larger class with better overall skills in English than '84EST. These students were not as shy, did not stand when they spoke, but the giggle-factor was no less. I was assigned to teach them what Mr. Ji called "Introduction to British and American Culture."

"What do you want me to focus on?" I asked him.

"Whatever you want," he quickly answered. "We chose you for this class because you have minors in history and philosophy."

"Is there a textbook for this class?" I inquired.

"Not yet, but we are looking for one. Didn't you bring something?"

"How could I bring something when I only found out what I would be teaching yesterday?" I thought to myself, but said to Ji, "Yes, I have a book for the United States, but nothing suitable for British culture."

"You should go to the British Embassy in Beijing to borrow books," he suggested. "If you give me the American book, I will make copies for the students. Chinese students do not like classes without books. They will complain about you if you give them no books. Books are very important."

The word "complain" kept cropping up, but I asked him, "How long will it take to copy the book?" I skipped over the complain part and said nothing about copyright laws.

"Very hard to say. It must be typed and copied on the roller machine."

"Why can't we photo-copy it? Mr. Guo said you have a copy-center."

"Impossible! Much too expensive!"

"What if I pay for it?" I offered. The Foreign Affairs Office had just reimbursed me for my flight from Hong Kong to Tianjin, so I had lots of RMB.

"Impossible! We have a typist for this work," he reiterated, thinking I would eventually want to be paid for the copies. "But she doesn't speak English, and sometimes she is busy with contracted work that makes the university money. So you see, I cannot tell you how long this will take."

"Can you give me an estimation."

"I will make inquiries. Give me the book, and everything will be taken care of. I advise you to go to Beijing to the British Embassy. They loan books to any foreigner." Ji assured me that he would get the book and copies back to me as soon as possible. This was the last week in August. In mid-November, I got copies of the first three chapters which I found out later that Deputy Director Ji had typed and mimeographed himself. I never received the



rest and did not get my book back until the middle of March. The students complained continually about the lack of a text for the class.

Once again, Mr. Guo introduced me to my new class, '82EST, I briefly told them something about myself, and asked them what they would be interested in discussing during the term in the general area of British and American culture. They bombarded me with a wide range of questions, such as "How do you properly use a fork, knife, and spoon; What is the position of women in American society; Are you a Christian; What is the role of the Communist Party in the USA?" I could tell from their questions, however, that their major interest was study abroad.

"How do you win scholarships to American universities?"

"How can you score more than 600 on TOEFL?" (TOEFL is the Test of English as a Foreign Language that all international students must take before they are admitted to U.S. universities. Most universities require a score of 500 to 550 out of a possible 660. Chinese students believe a score of over 600 will win them serious consideration for scholarships, assistantships, fellowships, or other financial aid.)

"How difficult is graduate study in America?"

"How much does it cost to study in America?"

"What is GRE (Graduated Record Examination)?"

"Can you suggest the best schools to ask for

scholarships?"

I wrote down all their questions and promised to try to answer one or two of them each class period. I planned to include open discussion, what the students call "free talk," with a chronological presentation of the history of ideas in the west--a kind of Plato to Nato introduction to western culture. Mr. Ji told me that I could focus on anything I wanted to, so that is what I planned to do. At the time, I did not worry about being "politically correct." I had been asked to present western ideas, and my plan was to present the material as factually as I could without becoming either an apologist or a propagandist. I had high hopes for this class because I felt it would give me an opportunity to learn about Chinese culture from discussions with the students.

After class, one of the girls, Cathy, asked me if I had some free time. I said sure and invited her back to my apartment, which was also my office. As we walked from Building 15 to the Guest House, she told me that she planned to study abroad. "This is my great dream," she told me. She also told me that she would take the TOEFL exam in two months and needed my help. I told her I would do anything I could to assist her. Her goal was a Master's degree in Library Sciences.

When we entered the lobby of the Guest House, I headed towards the stairway, but Cathy walked straight to the front

desk. I retreated to see what she was doing. At the front desk is a sign-in book. Chinese visitors must sign the book each time they enter and leave the Guest House. They must also write down the time of day, their ages, and department or work unit. As Cathy was writing down the information, Mrs. Dai began what sounded to me like an interrogation.

"What is she saying?" I asked Cathy.

"She wants to see my red card. I left it in my dormitory. She wants me to go get it or she will not let me enter."

"Tell her you are my student, and I have invited you here," I instructed Cathy, smiling at Mrs. Dai. Mrs. Dai continued her questioning.

"Now what's she saying?" I asked.

"She says you are very busy and need your rest. She wants to know why I need to see you here," Cathy replied.

"Tell her it is none of her business."

"Oh no, not good. I told her I was here to borrow a book about English history," Cathy said.

Finally, Mrs. Dai waved us on. Cathy wasn't upset by this brief episode, but I was boiling. From that day on I referred to Mrs. Dai as our Madame Mao. I had been told by Mr. Ji that students were free to visit anytime they were invited. Because I had no office, my apartment was the only place to meet with students outside of class.

"What if I hadn't been with you? Would she have let

you in?" I asked Cathy.

"Maybe. Maybe not. She might have sent me to get my red card or told me you were out or ill. If it were too much trouble, I would try to see you another time," she said without consternation.

When we got to the apartment, I made two cups of tea and asked Cathy how I could help. She had gone straight to the bookcase and was surveying the books I had brought with me.

"So many books," she sighed, as her fingers went from title to title.

"Not really. You can borrow one anytime you like," I offered. "That is why I brought them."

She changed the topic. "Do you know anyone in Library Sciences in your university? Can you help me win a scholarship?"

"One of the professors in the English department is also on the Library Sciences faculty. I could write him for some information, but scholarships are given according to qualifications and scores. Financial aid is very difficult to get--even for qualified American students."

We talked about North Texas State University for about ten minutes, and then she abruptly said, "I'm going now; you are busy." As she rose, she pulled a large roll of RMB from her purse.

"You said you could help. I need \$25 U.S dollars for

TOEFL. I have 200RMB. Is that enough?" she asked.

I was astonished to see a student with that amount of money. I suppose I stammered a little. I had no idea that this was the kind of help she needed. "I--I think that is much too much. The exchange rate is 3.2 to 1." This was all I could think to say.

"Oh, 200RMB is just OK. I don't need it; I need U.S. dollars or I cannot sit for the examination. The RMB is no good to me. You can use it to travel in China."

She didn't give me the chance to decide if I wanted to part with my dollars for her "worthless" RMB, but there was no way I could have refused her. Without the dollars, she couldn't take the test, and without the test, she had no chance of gaining admission to a U.S. university. This is the first great barrier for Chinese students to hurdle if they want to study in the States--a \$25.00 high-hurdle. And surprisingly enough, it is not the price itself that is the problem; it is access to "real" money.

I did some mental multiplication and told her that 80RMB would be the right amount. She continued to insist that I take all 200RMB. I refused, telling her the only way she would get my dollars was to give me 80RMB. Eventually, she counted out 100RMB and pleaded with me to accept this amount. I felt uneasy, but agreed. She thanked me and left me standing at the door holding 100RMB. A few seconds later, she was back.

"I forgot. I need a book--any book is just OK."

My third group of students was a combined class of graduated students from Tianjin University and Nankai University, a "liberal arts college" next door to Tianjin University, working on their Master's degrees in English (the two schools often share foreign teachers). These students are called "post-graduate" students in China, a term borrowed from the Russians. I met with them for two different courses the first term, another version of "Introduction to British and American Culture," and post-graduate composition in English.

The first meeting was a repeated session of introductions and questions--"getting to know you," Part Three. At the second meeting, however, I assigned an in-class diagnostic essay. When I told them about the assignment, they groaned like brand new freshmen. I smiled and wrote the topics on the blackboard: Introducing Myself; My Hometown; The Worst Day of My Life; The Best Day of My Life.

As the students began to write, I took a seat in the back of the room. This gave me a chance to look this puzzling group of students over without them being aware of it. The class could be divided into two distinct groups. One was older, about 30 to 35; the other was obviously younger, 22 to 25. The older students were dressed very conservatively--blue polyester pants or skirts and white

cotton shirts or blouses. Those that wore glasses had the state health program issue frames. The younger students wore jeans, tennis shoes, and brightly colored shirts or blouses. The glasses they wore were stylish with light-sensitive lenses. The younger girls used a little make-up.

Later, when I read their first compositions, I found out the reason for the noticeable difference between these students. One of the older student's essays was entitled "Worker, Peasant, Soldier, Student." Another was entitled "The Day I Answered Chairman Mao's Call." Still another was entitled "The Day I Went to the Hell." Everyone in this group referred to themselves as "returned students," most chose to write about the worst day of their lives, and all mentioned the Cultural Revolution somewhere in their essays. On the other hand, the younger students made no mention of the "years of turmoil," choosing to write about their "wonderful" hometowns, the day they passed their entrance exams, or the earthquake that struck Tianjin in 1976.

Reading the returned students' essays, I had not expected such candor, nor had I expected to be overwhelmed by their stories. By comparison, the legitimate fifth-year group's writing was predictable, interesting to a point, and exhibited an unriskened innocence that was absent in the writing of the older group. In short, the younger students wrote about the kinds of things that most college students would write about for such an assignment. I read their

essays once, marking idiom blunders, spelling errors, and grammatical mistakes. I read and re-read the writing of the Cultural Revolution generation before I made any comments on their papers.

I learned that the returned students had all been "re-educated" in the countryside during the late sixties and early seventies. They called themselves returned students because their educations had been interrupted by the destruction of educational institutions from 1966 to 1976 and because they had returned from the countryside to the cities. This explained the age difference in the class. I read, with increasing horror, about the hardships they, their families and friends suffered during those years. Many of them were apologetic about their lack of quality education, their English skills, and their ages. I was also impressed and a bit bewildered by the apparent lack of bitterness and the ways in which they wrote about what had they had learned from their experiences in some of China's most remote and backward regions like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and northeast Heilongjiang Provinces.

One student, Wan Li, recounted his life as an eighteen year-old "barefoot" doctor in a county north of Hohot, Inner Mongolia. In 1969, he was forcibly sent to this desolate grassland area to work in a commune. For six years, he and his brother, who is now a medical doctor at a hospital in Tianjin, were barefoot doctors and teachers of Chinese even



though he had spent his high school years, 1966-1969, writing posters criticizing "capitalist elements," attending political meetings, and "fooling around." There were no classes during those years. As barefoot doctors, paramedics really, they performed everything from simple first aid to tooth extractions.

He described the harsh life: the frozen, Siberian wind-blown grassland; the dirt-floored, adobe shacks; the steady diet of cabbage and yams. But he also wrote about the kindness and generosity of the ignorant Mongolian peasants and the peace he found in the countryside away from the cities turned upside down by Red Guard purges. His account was reflective and analytical rather than overly emotional and melodramatic. In his conclusion, he wrote:

In hard circumstances, we evolved some special traits which make us different from other Chinese young people. It was in the hard environment that we new "farmers" learned how to live independently and developed the courage and fortitude to overcome difficulties and setbacks and we formed an optimistic view about life. Because we became aware of the practical usefulness of book knowledge, in practice we work much harder than other students when we are enrolled into university. We have been workers, peasants, and soldiers; now we want to be students.

During the course of the first term, I became convinced that what Wan Li had written was no exaggeration, but a very realistic assessment of most of the returned students. They were hard workers, overly serious at times, at times too reticent in class discussions, but not in their compositions. I learned much in their essays about their experiences during those chaotic, frightful, tragic years. I developed a tremendous respect for their "courage and fortitude," but I found it difficult to understand the absence of bitterness.

My initial reaction was "Where is the rage? Where is the anger?" It was in their compositions to a degree, but always expressed in terms of regrets for having missed out on a normal education and a normal young adulthood. It was never expressed in open discussion. Not even in my nightmares have I experienced anything as fantastic as what I read. As I learned more about them, I thought about our Vietnam veterans and the conscientious objectors who had left the States or gone to prison to avoid the draft--the displaced youth of my generation. And even though I had relatives, friends, and acquaintances in both these groups, I have never been able to relate totally to their experiences. I had been one of the lucky ones during that time, attending college, toying with rebellion--safe. For the returned students in my post-graduate class, there was no safety from 1966 to 1976.

I could relate to them more than my other students, however, because they were my age, "returned students," as I had been. They were not so rigid in their opinions as their younger classmates and didn't seem so steeped in political dogma. If anything, they struck me as very apolitical. They were a cautious group, trying to forge a place for themselves through an education they didn't take for granted.

The climax of my first week of teaching was a banquet given by the president of the university to welcome the new teachers to China and kick off the year. Typical of most university social functions I was to participate in, the banquet was announced on Thursday afternoon and took place on Friday evening at 6:00, but the occasion was not the impromptu affair I thought it was at the time. The Guest House "chefs" must have been given several days' notice in order to assemble the eighteen-course dinner that they served to us on Friday night. It was a marathon of a meal, a culinary mountain climb, a Chinese man-handling, belt-busting sit-down dinner.

In a small dining room set apart from the main dining hall, we were sequestered around a very large round table equipped with a Lazy-Susan. The university was represented by President Shi, Director of Foreign Affairs Yu, Assistant Deputy Directory of Foreign Affairs Liu, Foreign Affairs

worker Xu, Director of Foreign Languages Zhang, and Deputy Director of Foreign Languages Ji. George from Oregon, Colin from Canada, and Kurt and I were the honorees. Because George was the oldest, he was seated next to President Shi. I sat between George and Director Yu, who reminded me of a Chinese Alan Arkin. Kurt sat on the other side of the president. Director Zhang was next, followed by Colin.

President Shi formally began the banquet by raising a glass of white liquor, clearing his throat, and standing up. Everyone immediately stood, raised their glasses and waited for him to speak. I couldn't help but notice how George, a tall, lanky man--all arms and legs--towered over President Shi. In fact, the incongruity in sizes was a topic of discussion during the dinner when the "honored" guests could no longer eat one more bite. President Shi proposed a toast to the "cooperation between Tianjin University and foreign friends from the outside world," said cheers, and what followed was a strenuous minute of clanking glassware. All ten of us touched glasses; then Director Zhang said "ganbei"--bottoms up. The "honored" guests all chugged the white liquor in their glasses. Colin coughed. The university representatives merely touched their glasses to their lips, and we all sat down.

When Director Yu asked me how my first week of teaching had gone, I was still choking from the rocket-fuel in my toasting glass. As soon as I had put down my glass, much to

my dismay, a waitress appeared from somewhere and filled my glass to the top. I eventually told Director Yu that everything was fine when Director Zhang stood and said, "I propose a toast." We all immediately stood up and raised our glasses.

"I hope this year will be a happy and productive one for our new foreign teachers. Ganbei!"

Again all glasses were touched, and the new foreign teachers chugged two ounces of potential Molotov cocktail while this time the Chinese merely passed their glasses in the proximity of their mouths. We sat.

"Gosh," said George, "this liquor is pretty good. What is it?"

President Shi motioned to the waitress to bring the lethal bottle over from the service table and began to explain to us in heavily accented English about Chinese "baijiu" (white spirits). He apologized that he couldn't serve us MaoTai, "the most famous liquor in China," but said that the liquor we were drinking was made in Sichuan Province which is "very famous" for its distilled spirits.

While he was speaking, the first courses of the meal arrived--the cold dishes. He picked up his chopsticks, using them for pointers, and told us about the dishes as if we had never seen Chinese food before. "This is pickled bamboo. This is what you call meatloaf. Here is small shrimps, and here is a famous Chinese delicacy, 100 year-old

eggs. They are a favorite of Director Zhang."

Director Zhang adeptly picked up a section of an egg with his chopsticks, dipped it into red vinegar, and said, "the egg, of course, is not 100 years old. They are made in about six weeks, but I don't know how to translate the process." He popped the dark green, jelly-like egg-white and bright green yolk into his mouth.

Picking up his chopsticks, George said, "I'll give them a try." He struggled for a minute or two to pick up the slick egg, finally getting a tenuous grip on the portion. But the egg never made it to his mouth. It caromed off George's chin and into President Shi's lap.

"Oh, hell," George mumbled. President Shi laughed, gave George a chopstick lesson, and told us about his trips to Canada and United States. He was a humorous old gentleman who made us feel very at ease.

The food continued to arrive. Fried shrimps, prawns in sweet sauce, shredded cabbage and pork, sauteed mushrooms and fungus, baked whole chicken, and lychee fruit were served next. The Lazy-Susan spun like a roulette wheel, and Director Yu never stopped piling the food on my plate. I noticed the same thing going on around the table. President Shi kept George's plate supplied with portions from all the dishes as did Director Zhang for Kurt and Ji for Colin.

President Shi asked us all if this was our first trip to China. George had, in fact, been born in China and had

been in China during World War II in the army. Fumbling with his chopsticks, George said, "My dad was in the tobacco business in China when I was born, but we left when I was only two. I came back in 1942 to work for Chiang Kai-shek. Whoops! I guess I was on the wrong side then, huh?"

President Shi laughed out loud. "In 1942, the only wrong side was the Japanese side," he assured George. Then he proposed a toast: "To George for helping in the war against Japanese occupation. Ganbei!"

By this time, I had caught on to the safest way to "ganbei." I feigned a sip and returned my glass of lighter fluid to its place on the table.

More food followed: sliced beef, cubed chicken in chili sauce, breaded beef, pork meatballs, and sea cucumber. Placing a piece of black, rubbery sea cucumber on my plate, Director Yu said, "Do you like it? It is very famous and very expensive."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Sea cucumber," he replied. "It is very good for your health I think."

"Is it animal or vegetable?" I asked after chewing up a piece, trying to retain a pleasant expression on my face.

Mr. Ji spoke up. "It is giant sea slug--very famous and traditional dish." I noticed that the Chinese were heaping the black, spongy, musty tasting pieces of sea slug on our plates, but didn't seem to be partaking themselves.

I found the taste less disgusting than the texture and later asked Ji if he really liked "sea cucumber."

"It is very good for you--very famous."

"But do you like it?"

He grimaced a bit. "Well, actually, no, not very much." Then he smiled.

The last dishes served were fried pork, toffee-covered apples, and a large, whole fish in a sweet-and-sour sauce. Director Yu put a big piece on my plate. Without thinking, I gobbled up the fish only to discover it was like a pin cushion filled with pins.

"Do you like it?" Director Yu asked me.

"Mmm.....," I moaned, nodding my head. I had tiny, sharp bones stuck in my gums and the back of my throat, but I nodded and smiled at my hosts, waiting for an opportunity to spit out my mouthful of needles. I quietly tried to clear my throat. I felt like a dog with a chicken bone stuck in its windpipe. I glanced at Colin, who had noticed my somewhat protruding eyes. Finally, I turned my head from the table, stuck my fingers in my mouth to pull out the bones, and coughed a few times into my handkerchief. Colin laughed. Ever since, I have been hesitant to eat fish in China. It is usually bony carp that is more trouble than it is worth.

The meal ended with egg drop soup, rice, and watermelon. All ten of us sat around the table spitting



watermelon seeds into our plates, while the popularity of watermelons in both countries was discussed. President Shi explained that watermelon in Chinese literally means western fruit. Then, he stood and said, "I think this dinner is over. Goodnight everyone." The banquet had begun at 6:00. It ended after two solid hours of steady eating. We came to eat, we ate, and we left--no lingering over a last glass of wine or cigarette.

We were the honored guests at four more banquets during the first semester. The Tianjin Municipal Office of Foreign Affairs along with a vice-mayor, various Party officials, and local cadres hosted a banquet for all of the foreign "experts" living in Tianjin on September 30, the day before China's most important national holiday, or at least China's most important political holiday--National Liberation Day.

Held in another larger dining hall on the campus, the banquet was attended by about 200 people, about 175 of them foreigners working or teaching in Tianjin. The vice-mayor gave a speech which had to be given twice, once in Chinese, once in English. It was full of goodwill, high praises for the work accomplished in the previous year, and a call for comments, suggestions, and criticisms. The speech ended with a toast to China's economic reforms, the Four Modernizations, and the open policy--ganbei! A television film crew filmed the affair, and we all watched ourselves the next day on Tianjin TV.

I was very surprised to see how many foreigners lived in Tianjin. I met many Americans--most of them English teachers in one of the city's 25 universities, colleges, or institutes. I met Germans who were assisting in building or re-designing textile mills. I met Frenchmen who managed a joint-venture winery that produces Dynasty Wines. I met a visiting professor from Milan lecturing in electrical engineering and a visiting professor from New Zealand teaching hydraulic engineering. Several language teachers from Japan were teaching at Tianjin's Foreign Language Institute, and I was introduced to a Russian man, but never quite figured out what he was doing. There were English teachers from Canada, Australia, and England, as well.

You could tell the newcomers from the oldtimers; anyone who has been in China more than one year is an oldtimer. You could also tell the short-termers from the long-termers and the teachers from the businessmen. The oldtimers did not have to be asked twice to attack the buffet tables. In fact, most of them had started filling their plates while the vice-mayor praised international friendship. The newcomers, however, stood around in clusters with smiles plastered on their faces. They listened to the speeches and applauded at the appropriate intervals. The short-termers were overdressed for the occasion and soon began loosening their ties and shedding their coats in the hot hall. The business people all had recently styled hair cuts and had

obviously used blow dryers that evening back at their hotels. The long-termers hadn't been on the receiving end of a fancy haircut or a blow dryer for a very long time. I would see many of the same faces at future city-wide banquets or run into them at the Beijing Hotel or Friendship Store. It was interesting to watch the newcomers turn into oldtimers.

The next day, President Shi presided over another banquet at Tianjin University to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the school. Some 500 people attended this semi-formal affair, but the only foreigners invited were teachers working at Tianjin University--thirteen of us. The rest of the group was made up of university leaders, department leaders, and a large number of alumni, from all over China and abroad. Many men and women had come to Tianjin from all over the world for this grand reunion, even people who had left China before 1949.

This was by far the most festive banquet I attended during my stay in China. For one thing, the alumni did not pay much attention to us foreigners. They were interested in seeing old friends, restoring old friendships, and having a good time. The banquet was more like a big party than an official function, and I enjoyed watching so many old gentlemen and ladies smiling like children let loose in a toy store. I could see the fun they were having in their animated facial expressions and in their sparkling eyes.

There were many vigorous handshakes, hugs, and glad tears that evening. I felt like an intruder, sitting at one of the head tables with our own private waitress. The alumni served themselves. But the food was delicious, the atmosphere after the speeches infectious, and ganbeis echoed throughout the cavernous hall for over two hours. I couldn't help but join in on the fun. The whole thing was repeated the following night--more food, more baijiu, more ganbeis, and more enjoyment. I got to participate simply by being a "foreign guest."

On the morning of October 2, a made-to-order autumn day, officials, alumni, students, and foreigners gathered in the plaza in front of the administration building to listen to speeches from President Shi, Party leaders, and distinguished alumni, among them a physicist from Houston who had graduated from the university in 1937 and had left China in 1949. True to form, the foreigners were seated right under the rostrum at the very front of the crowd, but I slipped away to wander among the students, take pictures, and look around.

All 10,000 students were packed into the square, sitting in their class units on portable stools they had carried from their dorm rooms. None of them seemed to be listening to the speeches, but they were obviously enjoying the fine weather and a day off from classes.

In front of the students, the alumni were seated in

reserved seats, and I spent a long time watching more emotional reunions between old friends. Beyond the alumni were foreign teachers and guests facing a temporary rostrum built for the occasion. It was filled with more than one hundred dignitaries. Off to the side, the white uniformed marching band played marching tunes, but no one noticed or cared. I roamed around with my camera, taking pictures of my students when I ran into them, pausing occasionally to listen to a speaker even though I could not understand a single word. Finally, I climbed to the fourth floor of Building 19 on the other side of the plaza to get the total picture of the morning's celebration.

From my perch, the square looked like an organic abstract painting of blues, reds, and yellows. Student groups and classes had made red banners and flags and were waving them back and forth. The speeches echoed from the loud speakers and seemed to pulsate with the motion of the crowd. In between speakers, the band added to the cacophony coming from the 15,000 chattering, laughing people. The sound system continually squealed with feedback. And I could see my group of foreigners sitting at the head of it all, sticking out like cheeseburgers and hotdogs on a Chinese buffet table.

From the printed program given to me that day, I learned about the history of Tianjin University, the first university established in "modern" China in 1895.

Originally known as National Peiyang University, after merging with the other universities and institutes in 1951 and 1953, Peiyang was renamed Tianjin University. It has since been considered one of China's leading universities of science and technology.

In the past 35 years, Tianjin University has "trained" more than 40,000 graduates, about 500 "post-graduates" and more than 100 foreign students from Third World countries. The total number of teaching staff is about 2,500 including 560 professors and associate professors and 1,100 lecturers. The enrollment in the fall of 1985 was almost 10,000 students, of whom 750 were post-graduate and 25 were foreign.

Since its founding, Tianjin University has been mainly a college of technology and is now a university of science and technology with 19 departments and 47 specialties. The Department of Foreign Language section of English for Science and Technology offers the newest major at the university. Between 1949 and 1964, the only foreign language taught was Russian. In fact, many of the middle-aged English teachers today were educated in Russian in the fifties. The transition from them has not been an easy one. From 1966 to 1976, no foreign languages were taught, but in the last six years the Foreign Language Department has offered courses in English, Japanese, German, and French.

All university students receive instruction in English,

but none so extensively as the students in the English for Science and Technology section. Their curriculum is built on a broad introduction to sciences, maths, computer science, and Marxist economics and politics, but they take more English speaking, listening, reading, and writing courses than students in other specialties. They also get instruction from native speakers of English. In their third and fourth years, they are assigned projects in translation and interpretation.

Upon graduation, the EST students will become middle school English teachers in the university middle school, translators and interpreters for government agencies, factories, and businesses, or enter a post-graduate program if they choose to take the post-graduate entrance exams and pass. The post-graduate Master's degree graduates will become instructors of English at Tianjin University. Almost all of the undergraduates hope to work as translators and interpreters because the pay is better and they could get the chance to travel, but they have NO say in their futures. After graduation, those not accepted into graduate programs are given job assignments by the department. Very few refuse the assignments because to do so puts a person completely outside the system--no housing, no medical coverage, no food subsidies, and so on.

A few weeks after the anniversary celebration, I learned about this process from one of the senior students,

Steve, whom I had asked to my apartment for a conference. He had missed several classes, had fallen behind, and I wanted to find out why he was absent so much. I also wanted to give him fair warning that he was in danger of failing the class if he continued to miss it.

Steve was a very humorous, outspoken young man. His spoken English was good, and I didn't want him to fail a course I knew he was fully capable of passing. I had the mistaken notion that failing a course in a Chinese university bore grave consequences. I was much more concerned about this than he was, and during our meeting I found out why. The first question I asked him when he arrived was why he had missed so many classes.

Raising his eyebrows, he said, "Have I missed many classes?"

"Yes, the last four."

"I gave blood three weeks ago, and I have felt too weak to come to class," he quickly answered. I knew that the senior class had been volunteered to donate blood during a recent blood-drive.

"Have you gone to the clinic?"

"Of course. The doctors told me to rest. You know we Chinese students have poor diets. Giving blood is very difficult for us. I have had headaches and cannot concentrate on my lessons."

"Are you feeling better?" I continued. This was one of



the most imaginative excuses I had ever heard from a truant student.

He smiled, thought about the question a minute and responded, "Why are you so worried? I am not worried. What difference does it make if I pass or fail this course? I will not take post-graduate examinations. I will get the same job assignment in the spring whether I pass this class or not. You know about China's iron rice bowl?"

"But don't you want to make higher grades to get a better assignment?" I naively asked.

"It doesn't matter. Besides, I don't want to teach English, so if I don't make high grades, I will be assigned to work as a translator or interpreter in a factory. This is what I want."

I looked at him and must have had a frown on my face.

"I will explain it to you," he said. "Most students study hard before the university entrance examinations but become lax after they are admitted since their future jobs are guaranteed by the State regardless of their marks. This is the giant 'tie wan,' the iron rice bowl."

I was not prepared for this. It made me think of an article I had read in the China Daily, China's English newspaper, about two basketball teams in Zhejiang Province which had played for the provincial championship. Both teams had tried to lose the game because the winner would be moved into a higher, more competitive national league in the

next season where it would be less likely to be as successful as it had been in the provincial league. When I mentioned this "disgraceful" episode to my '84EST class, the students simply laughed. Not one of them berated the two teams. They all agreed that the motivation to lose was explainable. "Why should the teams want to win and risk becoming a losing team when they are at the top?" one of the students commented.

Then Steve made a very startling statement. "If I fail your examination, I will just take it again. This is the policy. No one fails here. Professors do not fail students. This is not the way in Chinese university. Even if I do poorly, I will get the same job assignment."

I made some half-hearted comments about pride and self-respect, but I didn't make any great impression on Steve's indifference. This obviously intelligent young man was dealing with the system in the way he thought best for himself. Like the two basketball teams, he was convinced that doing poorly in class would land him in a factory and not in front of high school students. This, to him, was not failure but a kind of clever manipulation.

Steve failed my exam twice in January. In February, he took a third version and passed with a score of 60--more a victory of attrition on my part than a genuinely passing score. The following Christmas, I received a card from him. He was working as a translator at a factory in Yantai,

Shandong Province. He wished me a Merry Christmas and thanked me for being "the best teacher" he'd ever had. It made me feel miserable.

I fought the feeling that my lectures to the seniors that first term were essentially inconsequential, that I was wasting my time and theirs. I felt like I was just a novelty or a kind of baby-sitter for them. This was not true of my other classes, but the seniors, like Steve, had more serious matters on their minds than "An Introduction to British and American Culture." A few spent almost all of their time preparing to take TOEFL; many of them were also preparing to take post-graduate entrance exams in January; all of them were concerned about work assignments in the spring; and everyone of them knew that no matter what their level of performance was in their last year of undergraduate study, they were assured of degrees and lifetime meal-tickets--the iron rice bowl. None of these young people had ever failed at anything; they hadn't been allowed to.

This was the most frustrating class I taught at Tianjin University, made even more so because I understood why these students spent most of our class-time looking out the windows, read TOEFL study guides on their laps under their desks while I lectured, or never bothered even to come to class. I ended up spending more time in open discussion with the seniors or I entertained them. At least they got a

chance to spend time with a native speaker and to express a few opinions and complaints. This class should have been called "An Introduction to Cultural Distraction."

In late November, one of the seniors, Neil, asked me to give a Thursday night lecture to the English club. Neil was president of this campus-wide organization of about 600 students and asked me to give three two-hour lectures.

"What do you want me to speak about?" I asked him.

"Anything you like," he answered in his soft-spoken manner. "What will the title of your first talk be? I need the title so I can make the advertisement."

"That's difficult, Neil. What is your group interested in?" I wanted some specific suggestions.

"How about American history or American university life or the future of humanity?" he suggested.

I thought about possible topics for a few minutes. That morning we had discussed an article in the China Daily about Rosa Parks. The students had asked good questions and seemed interested in what I had to say about growing up in a southern state.

"OK. I will speak about the Civil Rights Movement in the first lecture, but you must decide on specific topics for the second and third," I told him.

On Thursday evening, Neil came to the Guest House to take me to the West Lecture Hall. I asked him how many students would attend the lecture.

"More than 600. Some of the students have been sitting in West Hall since early this morning."

"Why?" I asked, finding this incredible.

"Because they want a good seat. '84EST went at noon so they could sit in front and make you feel welcome. Everyone has heard you are very humorous. For many students, this is their only chance to hear a foreigner. They are curious."

Sure enough, when we entered the large auditorium-like lecture hall, every seat was occupied, and standing students lined the walls and aisles. I had never spoken to a standing-room-only audience. My sophomores were sitting in front of the podium and broke into loud applause when I stepped onto the speaking platform.

Neil introduced me as "Professor Lilly from America," and I stepped up to the microphone. Squeaking out a "good evening," I looked over the laughing, clapping students. I returned their applause, took out a handkerchief to wipe the sweat off my forehead even though the hall was chilly, and apologized for being nervous and not being a professor.

The crowded hall settled into an intense silence. As I began my lecture, part of me did the speaking and another part of me studied the sea of faces focused on me. My legs felt like sponges; my heart was thumping so hard I'm sure the students in the front rows could see my chest throbbing, but after ten minutes I began to enjoy myself.

I began the lecture with the second paragraph of the

Declaration of Independence, moved to a brief historical sketch of slavery and the plantation system, talked about the Civil War, Jim Crow, the KKK, and then discussed the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, focusing on the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. In my conclusion, I read a large portion of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech and made a cautiously qualified statement on the improvements in civil rights during the past twenty years. Then I asked for questions which were written down on slips of paper and passed to the podium.

When I read the first question, "Would you marry a black girl?" the lecture hall burst into laughter.

The students' reaction to the question was very unsettling. One of the reasons I had chosen to speak on the topic of civil rights was the blatantly bigoted remarks I had heard some of the EST students make in class--the kinds of statements I had heard all of my life in Texas. I was totally surprised by their racist attitudes and even more shocked because these seemingly naive and innocent students didn't even know their attitudes were racist. Having little or no experience with other cultures or ethnic groups, they tended to view the rest of us in stereotypes.

I also found it ironic that many of the students had heard of the Ku Klux Klan and had voiced concerns about their own safety if they went to study or visit the States. An article about the Klan and Vietnamese fishermen in the

Gulf States had been circulating around the university. The students were afraid, but I had spent some class time responding to Klan-sounding beliefs that my students held like "negroes have a different kind of blood and muscle tissue; that is why they are good athletes," and "negroes are very emotional, lazy, and like to drink liquor."

These stereotypically racist comments stemmed partially from a cultural chauvinism that has existed in China for centuries, partially from simple ignorance, and partially from the ill-feelings that exist between Chinese students and the African students studying in Chinese universities. About 25 students from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Rwanda, the Congo, Kenya, and the Sudan are studying at Tianjin University through scholarships given by the Ministry of Education in Beijing. These students are housed in a separate dormitory and must eat in their own dining hall. If they have a dance or a party, Chinese students are usually forbidden by the administration to attend; hence, little real interaction takes place between the students.

My EST students had never talked to any of the African students, attended no classes with them, but still had some degrading things to say about them. Part of their hostility was understandable. The African students had better living conditions, lived two to a dorm instead of eight, ate better food, and received a much higher monthly stipend than the Chinese students. But then this situation was a product of

the Ministry of Education and existed on universities campuses all over the country. The poor Africans were caught in the middle--the objects of resentment and prejudice.

I began to answer the first question, and the room became very quiet. I tried to be as straightforward as I could. I told them that if I were in love with a woman be she black, white, yellow, red, or purple, and that if she loved me, then marriage was a possibility. I also told them, however, that interracial marriage took strong individuals who could overcome the prejudices of society. When I told them that my parents would likely react to a marriage with a black girl in the same way they would if I married a Chinese girl or an Indian girl or a Mexican girl, they shuffled uncomfortably in their seats.

A student rose. "Do you mean your family would disapprove if you married a Chinese girl?"

"Not disapprove, but be a little uncomfortable at first because they are a bit old-fashioned and come from a generation when interracial marriage was unacceptable. What would your parents say if you got engaged to an American girl?"

Everyone laughed and applauded, but I got no answer.

The next question was "Do you think America will ever have a black president?" I said that I didn't think a black man, a woman, or a member of any ethnic group in the States



would likely be elected in the near future, but that someday I hoped all Americans would judge other Americans by their capabilities and characters and not their skin colors or last names. Again, I equated Chinese Americans with Black Americans by saying that in my lifetime I doubted a Chinese American would be elected president. I heard more mutters.

This question was followed by a question I had been repeatedly asked in my EST classes. "Do you think blacks are better athletes than whites?" (The Chinese think of themselves as white.) I answered no and tried to explain that Black Americans excelled in sports because athletics were an avenue to higher economic status because so many other paths to better lives had been closed to them in the past. I don't think they were convinced.

Other questions were: "How much power does the KKK have in America? Are there racists in America today? Who is the most famous Black American today?" These questions were easier to answer.

"The KKK has no power today. Yes, there are still many racists in the States. Jesse Jackson, Bill Cosby, Magic Johnson, and Micheal Jackson are just a few of the famous Black Americans today."

Finally, after two and a half hours of speaking and fielding questions, I thought the evening was coming to a close when a student rose in the middle of the audience.

"What do you think of Ronald Reagan?"

"I voted for Walter Mondale," I said. Everyone giggled.

And then he said, "What do you think of the Communist Party USA?"

By this time, I had fallen into the pattern of giving candid replies just like I would anywhere and was relaxed. They seemed to have enjoyed my lecture and answers. When I heard this question, I laughed and blurted out, "The Communist Party in the United States is a joke!" The lecture hall became very quiet. "You've just made your first politically incorrect statement and you had to do it in front of 600 communists," I thought to myself.

My eyes focused on two older men in Mao suits sitting in the front row with stolid expressions on their faces. I swallowed and tried to extricate myself by telling them that in the United States all parties outside the Republican and Democratic were inconsequential, but I couldn't stop myself from saying, "What popular support the Communist Party had in the 1920's and 1930's was destroyed by Stalinism." I said this to 600 blank faces.

The student rose and asked me to explain. I told them that Americans consider Stalin as evil as Hitler and that since he was the most powerful communist leader in the early development of communism that they equated communism with Stalin. "That is why so many Americans hate the word communism." I think this was the first time anyone had ever

said anything negative about Uncle Joe to these students. Stalin is still a respected "revolutionary," at least according to Party dogma. I glanced over at Neil and signaled I had finished.

He stood and thanked me; the students stood and applauded until I left the speaking platform. So ended my first Thursday night lecture to 600 members of the English Club. I was totally drained, but had enjoyed every minute (well, almost every minute) of the experience.

After the lecture, Mr. Wang, a teacher from the EST section, came up to me outside the building and told me how much he had like my "talk," and he invited me to his home on Saturday afternoon for a "very modest" dinner. He even apologized for his small apartment and hoped that I wouldn't be "too uncomfortable in his poor home." This is the traditional way to invite a guest to your home in China.

On Saturday, Mr. Wang's wife came to the Guest House to fetch me. Li was a very gregarious and entertaining woman. Having spent two years at the University of Montreal, she spoke excellent English, and on the way to their apartment, located in the labyrinth-like complex northwest of the Guest House, she talked non-stop about her two years in Canada. Listening to her talk was like reading a stream-of-consciousness novel. In the opposite vein, Wang was reticent and shy.

The Wangs' apartment was on the fourth floor of

Building 23 of the "Four Seasons" complex for university faculty. The furnishings were a study in contradictions. The bare concrete floors of the two bedroom apartment were hidden by a maze of chairs, a sofa, bookcases, bureaus, and beds. Everything felt compressed; I felt too large. The combination sitting, dining, family room was also their study. I noticed that under the desk was a boxed-up Commodore personal computer that Li had purchased in Canada. There were also a portable Sony TV and a double-cassette player she had purchased in Canada. They were sitting on a portable table and partially hidden by red velvet dust-covers.

"Do you use the computer very much?" I asked Mr. Wang, who had come into the room from the tiny, closet-sized kitchen.

He giggled. "I have never used it."

"He is waiting to obtain a voltage stabilizer. Is that what you call them? So the electricity will not damage it," Li interjected. "The electricity is uneven. Sometimes too strong. Are you going to Hong Kong? You could buy one for us, you know," she unabashedly remarked.

They sat me down in the middle of the sofa, put a table in front of me, turned on the TV, and Mr. Wang disappeared. Two boys, about ten and fourteen, came into the room and stood patiently looking me over. "These are our two sons," Li said, without telling me their names. "They are shy

around foreigners, silly boys." The boys giggled at me and sat down to watch TV.

Li gave me a cup of tea and set a bottle of Chinese brandy, red wine, and a beer in front of me. "Please help yourself. I know you like to drink. All foreigners like to drink," she said as she poured herself a glass of orange soda. "Wang is preparing our food. He learned to cook during the Cultural Revolution. That was his job then. Terrible for him then, but good for me now," she exclaimed, laughing loudly.

Presently, a smiling Mr. Wang brought three plates of food from the kitchen. Li, the two boys, and I began to eat. Wang disappeared again. Li talked; I listened. The boys continued to watch TV.

"Shouldn't we wait for Mr. Wang?" I asked.

"Oh no. You are guest. We must eat food while it is good. He will join us when he has finished other dishes." The "modest" meal turned out to be a banquet, and Mr. Wang didn't join us for almost an hour. A Chinese kitchen has one wok for cooking, so only one dish can be prepared at a time. He kept piling plates on the table: chicken, pork, shrimp, tofu (bean curd), cabbage, dumplings, beef, a whole fish, and finally potato salad.

"I taught him how to make potato salad. All westerners like potato salad. I learned to make it in Canada," Li said as she put a huge serving on my plate.

At last Mr. Wang joined us. He immediately apologized for the "humble food." I laughed and told him such humble food would be considered a great feast in my home.

"Oh, he knows. It is really not an apology," Li explained. "It is just the Chinese way. I think it is a little absurd, don't you?" She laughed. "Mr. Wang is very traditional because he is from Sichuan Province and he has never travelled abroad even though he deserves such a trip," she added. Mr. Wang just giggled some more, putting a shrimp on my plate. The boys continued to watch the TV as if the rest of us weren't there. From time to time, Li would put some food on their plates which they ate without looking at.

We ate off and on for almost three hours, ending with rice and soup and fruit. The meal was the best I had eaten since my arrival in China, and I had no trouble gorging myself, especially on the hot, spicy Sichuan dishes that Wang had prepared along with the other dishes.

"You like Sichuan dishes?" he asked with a satisfied look on his face.

"My favorite Chinese food," I told him. He was very pleased to hear that Sichuan restaurants in the States are the most popular Chinese restaurants. When I told him he could open a restaurant with the kind of good food he cooked, he beamed with pride, but said, "Oh no. I don't think so. My skill is very low."

"That's Wang," Li remarked. "Too modest, don't you think." I nodded in agreement. "That is his problem. He works so hard in the department, but his modesty does him no good. He's never been abroad because of this, I think."

We chatted a few more minutes. Then Li said, "You should go home to rest now. Please come again for more of Mr. Wang's humble dishes." Again she laughed. Then she handed me a folder of papers. "This is a translation I'm working on. I know you won't mind editing it for me." She didn't wait for an answer. They walked me down the dark, bike-lined stairway, and Mr. Wang proposed to escort me to Guest House.

"I can find my way home. Please don't trouble yourself."

"Of course you can. But we Chinese people have our customs. Terrible," Li said, shaking her head at Mr. Wang. I shook both their hands and thanked them for the wonderful afternoon. As I walked through the apartment complex, I considered the small fortune they had spent on the "humble meal." Food like that at restaurant would have cost two hundred yuan RMB. I also couldn't get the picture of the two boys glued to the TV throughout the entire dinner out of my mind. "Is this one of China's modernizations?" I thought to myself with a snicker.

Like Wang and Li, other English teachers invited me to their homes during the first term. These encounters were

also fun, although sometimes uncomfortable. I felt as if I could never relax, being the fawned over, fed and burped guest. The extravagant food was always accompanied by continuous apologies. Most hosts spoke disparagingly of their homes and furnishings. They were always polite to the point of distraction. And I always sat, ate the immense amount of delicious food placed on my plate and then drank the beer or wine poured in my glass.

The family meals were really events. They were exciting and gave me privileged glimpses of a side of Chinese life I couldn't see sitting in the Guest House dining room eating with other foreigners. But after a few of them, I grew weary of the unnaturalness of it all. I tired of always being the guest, a barrier that prevented intimacy, a barrier I didn't know how to pull down. I never got "inside" because the overbearing burdens of formal politeness kept me "outside." Many times I left a dinner party feeling like I been on exhibit and hadn't taken part. Many times, I wanted to melt into the walls so I could unobtrusively observe, listen, and learn about how life goes on in a Chinese home. I never felt like I got past the front door and into the kitchen, so to speak. Kept in the "sitting room," I felt like the invited preacher who only sees the family at its Sunday best.

By Christmas, however, I had become very settled in with my '84EST class, and I think the students had become



comfortable with me. I simply felt like their teacher rather than their new foreign teacher. Unlike my distracted seniors and reticent post-graduates, these students had unhesitatingly warmed to a less formal class setting and enjoyed open discussions. We laughed a lot at each other and with each other--I at their occasionally hilarious pronunciations and attempts at idiomatic expressions, and they at my always tortured Chinese. We had a good time, and they progressed.

I began each class, no matter what the lesson, by asking, "What's in the news today?" Most of them were avid listeners of VOA and BBC, and the daily broadcasts usually instigated good discussions which were infinitely more interesting and educationally beneficial than the archaic textbook I had to use which was ironically entitled, "New Concept English." A major topic of discussion was Libya and terrorism in Europe. The students also complained about the Reagan administration's attitude toward China's population policy, a touchy subject for them because they believed that most Americans have little or no understanding of the realities of the situation in China. While none of them liked the one-child policy, all of them seemed genuinely to defend it against allegations of abuse they hold Reagan directly responsible for.

"He should not interfere in Chinese matters," Richard argued one day. "What we Chinese are doing in population

control is what we must do, not what we want to do. 'Our will is primary; the method secondary,'" he said, quoting a slogan. "The whole world will benefit from our sacrifice."

Harry added, "Maybe Mr. Reagan will not give money to the United Nations because he wants China's population to get so large. Then China will always be a poor and weak country. Never stronger than America."

'84EST also liked to talk about Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger--"the two greatest American friends to China." To them Watergate was a trivial concern, and they disliked my admittedly biased opinion about the greatness of former President Nixon. "I still think President Nixon was the best president," Sheri said after I had tried to explain why he resigned in dishonor. "He recognized the existence of our nation. That makes him a great man!"

The subject of Taiwan also had a way of working itself into our open discussions. The students frequently asked me why the United States continued to support Taipei's government while recognizing only the People's Republic of China. I could give them no satisfactory answers because, for them, no satisfactory answers exist. I usually pleaded ignorance in this matter, but pleased them greatly by saying one day I believed Taiwan would be reunified with the mainland. They wanted to hear an American say this.

In all these discussions, I found myself put in the position of American spokesman. The questions were hardly

ever "What do you think about ...?" They were almost always "What do Americans think about ...?" I always tried to emphasize that I was just one American and that my opinions were my own.

I also found that the students, at first, seldom disagreed with one another unless it was a matter of a statistic, date, or scientific fact. So if a debate occurred, it was usually me against them, and quite often I would argue a position simply for the sake of an argument. They considered this a bit strange, but as they became accustomed to my informal teaching style, the discussion became more and more natural. They were not used to a multi-perspective point of view. I don't think they had ever been confronted with anyone quite like me--someone who will argue one position one day and switch to the other side the next (although the Party had been doing it for years), just for the sake of an argument.

The day before New Year's Eve, Harry, the class monitor of '84EST, asked me if I had anything planned for the thirty-first.

"We want to give a party for you. I have no plans."

"Sure, I'll be glad to come. I have no plans."

"Good. We will show you how to make jiaozi and you will show us American disco. I will fetch you at 6:00."

The party was held in the boys' dormitory in Harry's,

William's, Francis's, Charles's, David's, Tom's, Chuck's, and Mark's room, a ten-by-twenty foot rectangle just big enough for four bunkbeds and four tiny writing desks. I had tried to arrange to have the party in my apartment, but the Guest House manager only allowed three students to visit me at one time.

The boys had pushed the desks together in the middle of the room, and we used the bottom bunks for seats. All 21 of us managed to sit around the "dinner table," and this is where we made jiaozi, meat-and-vegetable-filled dumplings that can be boiled, steamed, or deep-fried. From some source, they had acquired two gas burners, a bottle of natural gas, and two huge pots in which to boil the dumplings.

"You like jiaozi?" Chuck asked in his high, cracking voice.

"Very much, but I have never made them."

He showed me how to roll out the four-inch circles of dough, how much meat filling to put in one of the thin, dough wrappers, and how to fold it up.

"You must be very sure to fold carefully," he cautioned. "It is bad luck in the new year if jiaozi filling comes out of the wrapper in the boiling water. Your fortune is escaping." He was like an artist, shaping the dumplings into crescents with molded patterns along the edges that were both creative and durable.

"Chuck's father is head-cooker at a famous restaurant in Shanxi Province," Louise said, "so Chuck is very skillful at making very beautiful jiaozi."

Chuck grinned, cradling one of his creations in his hand. "You like it? You can do it easily." He showed me several times how to mold an intricate, overlapping design in the dough as he folded and shaped the dumpling. I tried his style, but could only manage to make crude wrappings with crushed edges.

"You are very skillful," Chuck noted.

"Oh, very beautiful. Very good," Diane added.

Mark looked at my jiaozi. "I don't think so. I have never seen such ugly jiaozi." I agreed with Mark.

"Maybe Mr. Lilly is making modern art jiaozi," Lucy said in her mouse-quiet voice, cupping her hand over her mouth to hide her big grin.

The girls prepared several side dishes earlier that afternoon, and after we had spent an hour making the dumplings, what seemed like a wagon load, David and Charles boiled them. Finally, we all crowded around the makeshift table and ate, drank, talked, and laughed. The noise level was deafening and the reaching and passing and feeding each other jiaozi continued for quite some time. Some of the boys played a riotous counting game, and the loser had to drink some wine or beer. The girls kept my bowl heaped with plump, garlicky, steaming-hot dumplings. I soon began to

worry that I would explode or turn into the Pillsbury Dough Boy. At last, when no one could eat another jiaozi, we moved to our larger room in Building 15 for a "dancing party."

Our classroom had undergone quite a transformation that afternoon. Susan, whose calligraphy was supposed to be the best in the class, had used colored chalk to write giant double happiness characters on the blackboard. She also added "Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men" and had drawn a Christmas tree with ornaments to "make me feel less homesick," she said. The girls had made chains from colored paper strips and had laced them across the ceiling from the light fixtures, and the boys had bought a strand of twinkling lights to go along with the paper chains. The desks were pushed aside to make a dance floor and on the desks were 21 piles of sunflower seeds, hard candies, peanuts, and cookies.

Harry was in charge of the "program." He called upon each of his classmates to sing a song, recite a poem, do a dance, or tell a joke. Each performer had to be coerced into the middle of the floor, but once there, I could tell they were used to this kind of party. If someone forgot the words to a song, someone else helped him along. The performances were delightful, and at the end of each one, everyone applauded as if they had just heard Pavarotti live and in person. When my turn came, I tried to beg out of it,

but my excuses fell on the deafest of ears, so I sang "The 12 Days of Christmas," which brought the house down.

After everyone had been called upon to add to our variety show, Harry announced that the dancing should begin and put a Hong Kong disco tape into the cassette-player. No one, however, began to dance. The boys sat on one side of the room; the girls on the other. They all seemed to be looking down at their feet. This went on until I couldn't stand it any longer, so I got up and asked Anne to dance. She was horrified, so I asked Anne, Sheri, and Susan to dance with me. They reluctantly rose from their chairs, and we started to dance. They did what they call "the twelve-step disco" and began to teach me. Richard jumped up to give me a few pointers; Mark criticized his instructions, adding his own. Soon, all of us were dancing in a circle, doing their disco step. But when the song ended, the boys headed north, and the girls headed south.

The next song was a tango. I couldn't believe my ears nor my eyes when Anne and Susan got up and danced the whole tango without missing a step. This was followed by a waltz, a fox-trot, and a rumba. Most of the students, dancing girl-girl and boy-boy, knew all of these dances. I was fascinated, having heard that dancing was considered decadent and bourgeois. I had been to a party given by the post-graduates. Few of them knew any dance steps.

I wanted to get the boys to dance with the girls, but

about the time I was going to insist that Harry tango with Anne, he invited her to dance the next song, a waltz. This broke the ice and the students paired off. I dance with William because he was the odd man out. When a tango came on, I tried to follow William's lead.

"You need to learn tango. Don't you tango in America?" William asked as we mostly fell over each other's feet.

"No, I never learned," I confessed.

"Obviously," he replied.

"I thought dancing was not encouraged," I said to William, stepping on his foot.

He laughed at my awkward maneuvers. "Oh no. The university has encouraged us to learn since last year."

I had brought a Micheal Jackson tape and after ballroom dancing for awhile, I asked them if they would like to hear it. As "Beat It" blared, I showed them how I disco-danced, but they were not impressed. They all watched my feet, shaking their heads. William asked, "What is the step? I cannot follow the pattern."

"There is no pattern. I just do what I feel."

I suppose they humored me for a few minutes. William finally sat down to eat sunflower seeds. I could tell they would rather do their own dances to their music, so I took "Thriller" off, and Harry put on more waltzes and fox-trots. This group obviously preferred violins and saxophones to guitars and synthesizers. The party ended at 11:00, but the



next day, they told me they stayed up all night playing cards, Chinese chess, GO, and finishing off the jiaozi. I told them that I honestly had never been to a better New Year's party, and I meant it.

From Christmas to January 26, the last day of the term, time plodded along like the horse-drawn wagons that passed the Guest House every morning bringing half-frozen cabbages to the markets. Since early November the lakes and the river had been frozen over and Tianjin had turned into an ugly, grey mass of concrete covered in coal dust. At times, Siberian winds made the temperatures in the classroom unbearable, and the climate became so dry my nose bled. The students wore so many layers of clothing that they appeared to be gaining weight as the thermometer went lower and lower. The long semester, culminating in two weeks of final examinations, did not seem to want to end itself. Everyone, except the seniors who would take graduate school entrance exams, was ready for the month long vacation to begin weeks before it actually did.

The free time meant family reunions for most of the students and teachers and travel for me. Suffering from the compression of Guest House life, made even more claustrophobic by the cold weather, I was eager to travel to southern China to a more hospitable climate. I did not want to see another plate of cabbage for at least a month. I also needed to give my face a rest because I had been

smiling non-stop since I had arrived. After twenty weeks of Mr. Happy Face, I was ready for Spring Festival to begin.

Spring Festival, or the Chinese Lunar New Year, is the most widely celebrated festival throughout the whole of China. It is like our Christmas and New Year's holidays combined into one long festival. Students go home to be with their parents and family. For them, the festival is a two or three week event. For the workers in the cities, there is a two-day holiday. In the countryside, farmers and peasants celebrate for almost an entire month.

Spring Festival is so important that the university schedules its entire year around the Lunar New Year Day which varies from year to year. The fall semester ends two weeks before the Lunar New Year begins, and the spring semester begins two weeks later. My first Spring Festival fell on February 9, the first day of the year of the tiger. Weeks before the vacation began, I had planned various trips. I spent hours thumbing through guidebooks and Nagel's China. I asked students to suggest places to visit and while they were eager to suggest many "beautiful and famous sceneries," few of them had actually been to the places they talked about. A better source was the "oldtimers" who had been in China one year and had travelled the previous Spring Festival and during the summer. I had asked them questions, found out how out-of-date my guidebooks were even though they were brand new, and looked

at their slides and photos. Each time I thought I had decided on an itinerary, someone would tell me about a different destination, throw in a picture or two, and I would start my plans all over again. As the time grew nearer to leave, I eventually decided to head first to Yunnan Province in southern China.

The entire fall term of 1985 was an undeniably pleasing experience for me. My time was consumed in getting acquainted with and becoming adjusted to my new surroundings. Every day was an adventure. Daily difficulties didn't trouble me much, and I was fairly successful in playing the role of the gracious "guest." Even after six months, I didn't feel like a resident, so I didn't have a resident's perspective. I was so involved with becoming accepted by my students and colleagues that I disregarded problems or conflicts that I wouldn't have had back home in Texas. I never had time to feel homesick or bored. My students kept me busy. And I knew I would get the chance to travel for a month in January and February. I looked forward to the vacation and the spring to follow and had already made up my mind to stay a second year in China. I believed I wanted more.

## CHAPTER III

### "SHANG CHE" (ALL ABOARD)

At 6:30 I was awakened by the first blasts of the hard-sleeper car's speaker system. Cold, stiff, and temporarily disoriented, I felt like pulling the scratchy, woolen blanket over my head and going back to sleep, but the volume from the speakers made that an impossibility. Someone, somewhere, had decided it was time for all of us to get up. I sat up, put my glasses on and looked out the window at the countryside flying past. We were somewhere in Henan Province, not far from the city of Zhengzhou. In the pre-dawn light, I could see terraced fields on the hillsides, small villages, and an occasional water buffalo or mule. A uniformed man and a young woman sat opposite me, slurping down an instant noodle breakfast and intently watching me.

About seven hours earlier, I had boarded train number 61--destination Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province--at the bitterly cold Beijing train station. Five days before, I had made a special trip from Tianjin to Kunming to purchase my hard-berth ticket to insure I would have a sleeper for the 2,000 mile, 62 hour journey.

The train had departed from Beijing at 11:59, and after

finding my berth, stowing my gear, and slugging down a couple of shots of Chinese brandy, I had crawled onto my shelf, abused the bagged excuse for a pillow, and waited for the lights to go out so I could get some sleep. I was cold and exhausted, having spent the whole day wandering around Beijing.

The hard-sleeper car I was in was filled to capacity--60 passengers. Each of the ten open sleeper compartments contains six sleeping platforms (two lower, two middle, and two upper), a small table in the middle, and one boiled-water thermos. The bottom berths are used during the day for sitting, playing cards, eating instant noodles if there is any hot water available, and looking out the grimy windows. At both ends of the car is a toilet and washroom with three sinks. The toilets are porcelain-covered holes in the floor that flush onto the tracks, and while we were still in the frigid north, they were very chilling experiences. Two workers are assigned to each car. They are supposed to keep the thermoses filled with boiled water, sweep the aisle where all the empty instant noodle packages, egg shells, and banana peels are thrown, and clean the toilets and washrooms. The workers have a small compartment to themselves, but no place to lie down to sleep.

The train left Beijing right on schedule, and as we pulled away from the station, my fellow passengers began a ritual that they would perform each night and each morning

we were on the train. First, everyone took off their street shoes, stowed them under the lower berths, and slipped on the flip-flops provided by the workers. My size thirteen feet remained in their Converse sneakers, causing all 59 passengers, except for a student from Ecuador studying Chinese at Beijing University, to look at me as if I were a barbarian when I climbed onto my bed with shoes still on. Many heads shook. At first I had no idea what I had done to merit such censure.

Next, everyone--except me--went to the washroom to brush their teeth, gargle, and wash their faces. When the Chinese brush their teeth, a kind of dental aerobics takes place. They foam up their mouths with all vigor and fanfare of an animated Crest commercial, punctuated by a final, gigantic gargle and spit.

Then, everyone fills up the sink with icy water, soaps up his "train towel," washes his face with total abandon, rinses out the towel, treating it like a prayer rug, and, at last, hangs it carefully in the proximity of his berth on a long rod that extends the length of the car just above the aisle window. It will remain there, when not in use, for the duration of the trip. The towel should be folded over twice so that it does not obstruct the view. If you don't fold your train towel in the conventional manner, you will be given instructions by one of the workers and, thereafter, severe but justified reprimands.

Finally, everyone climbs into their berths, and the snoring begins. You can only rarely escape the noises of humanity in China.

The first night, the radiator heater either did not work or was not turned on. People constantly trooped through the car, leaving the doors open to the sub-zero weather. My blanket was too short, so I eventually put on most of the clothes in my pack, something the wiser Chinese had already done, and pulled on two extra pairs of socks to protect my protruding feet. My teeth still chattered most of the night. Car number eight was cold.

The hard-sleeper berth, a wooden platform about six feet long and three feet wide, smaller than my western dimensions, was covered with a bamboo mat. It became increasingly harder as the night passed. Sheer exhaustion and the monotonous sounds of the clanking rails finally put me to sleep. But at 6:30, I was awakened by the loudest version of "Jingle Bells" I had ever heard, followed by more jolly wake-up music. Distorted Cassio synthesizers and sonar drums, an oriental Richard Simmons screaming out exercise routines, and the morning news insured that I would not linger in my bed.

My first great railway adventure came about fifteen minutes after I had been bombarded by the distortion. When the lines to the washroom thinned out, I grabbed my bag and went to brush the Chinese brandy off my teeth and put on my

contact lenses. I inserted my right lens without as hitch, but as I began to put in the left one, the car lurched to the right, and the lens caromed off my lower eyelid and onto the rusty, grungy, wet floor. The Chinese man at the sink next to mine had absolutely no idea what I was doing, squatted down, squinting at the floor with my right eye. I looked up at him, pointed at my eye, and smiled. He quickly left the washroom.

Other people began to crowd around the door to watch me. Finally, the worker pushed her way to the door and asked me what was wrong. Having no idea how to say contact lens in Chinese, I popped out my right lens to show her what I was looking for. Everyone was dumfounded. I put my right lens back in, pointed to my left eye and then to the floor, and she understood my problem. She casually looked over the dark, dank floor and shook her head.

I tried to ask her to keep people out of the washroom while I went to get the flashlight from my pack, but when I returned, there were three people standing in front of the sinks. I turned on my flashlight, shining it at the place where I had stood, but my lens was lost forever in the sludge on the washroom floor. I had spares and from then on, I put my lenses in sitting on my berth. This always drew an early morning audience and many comments. Once, a little boy stood watching me, and as I put a lens into my eye, he ran screaming to his mother to terror.



At 9:00, I crossed the Yellow River for the first time. Called "China's sorrow" because of annual floods, the river is actually higher than the countryside it flows through. Dikes built up in an attempt to control the river over the centuries cause this phenomenon. Everyone crowded at the windows to look at the wide, churning, mud yellow river. It really is a sickly mucous yellow, a coloration caused by the erosion of loess silt into the river from Inner Mongolia and Gansu Province. Wider than the Mississippi at Memphis, it was filled with sampans, junks, barges, and steamers, and along the banks, fishermen were raising and lowering fishing nets fixed to large, stationary, bamboo tripods.

During the first day on the train, I spent as much time as I could transfixed on the scenes outside the window. This was like watching TV--a documentary on the Chinese countryside without a narrator. I kept my map and timetable close at hand, so I could tell where we were. The first night, the train had passed through flat southern Hebei Province. Most of the first day was spent ambling through the brown hill country of Henan and Hubei Provinces.

Because it was late January, farming activity was minimal, but I saw a few farmers preparing paddies for spring planting--just them and their heavy-headed hoes. The countryside surrounding them consisted of rolling hills, a few mountains and many rivers, many irrigation canals, thousands of dry, stubble-filled rice paddies, and hundreds

of villages with adobe houses and unpaved streets.

From the train, the cities where we stopped all looked essentially the same--more like Newark than China. We made stops in Zhengzhou, Luoke, and Xinyang in Henan Province, small cities by Chinese standards--one to three million. Each city was a replica of the previous one: factory smokestacks, six-story walk-up flats, bus and bicycle filled streets. Even the train stations were the same--only the city signs differentiated one from the other.

Each time the train stopped, many passengers on train 61 crowded at the doors to get off for the five to ten minute pause to stretch their legs, buy cooked chickens and more packages of instant noodles, cartons of cigarettes, and an occasional bottle of liquor. I was constantly astounded by the great numbers of people at the train stations, even late at night, and they were equally amazed by me. I never wandered too far from car eight. I had a terrible fear of being left, so I always stayed close by where I could hear the worker shout, "shang che"--all aboard.

At 4:30, I crossed for the first time the Chang Jiang, "The Long River," or the Yangtze to foreigners, as the train entered Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province. Wider than the Yellow River and not as yellow, the Yangtze was even more congested with river traffic. As we crossed the long bridge into Wuhan, I could see docked passenger ships that carry tourists from Wuhan through the famous Three Gorges to

Chongqing (Chungking) in Sichuan Province and from Wuhan to Shanghai. I thought it is unbelievable to have crossed two of the world's great rivers in one day, but then my fascination with large bodies of water of any kind stems from having grown up in a place where a large body of water is a windmill-fed cow pond.

People watched me all day to see what I was watching. 1 Anytime I snapped a photo, they would all look to see if my subject was worthy of the film. But other times, they just seemed to look at what I was looking at, like when you stand on a street corner and look up at nothing just to see how many people will look up at nothing with you. For them, I was the center of attention. I suppose they could see the countryside another time.

The word spread that I was an English teacher, and by the end of the first day, I had been involved in several conversations with passengers eager to practice their English. The conversations were all essentially the same.

"Hello, welcome you China."

"Thank you. I am happy to be here."

"How long you been China?"

"I have been in China for six months."

"Where going?"

"I am going to Kunming."

"Kunming very famous, very beautiful. Always spring season."

"That sounds wonderful."

"Can you speak Chinese?" This question was always followed by a giggle or two.

"Very little."

"My English very poor."

"Your English is much better than my Chinese."

"Have you ever been China before?"

"No. This is my first time."

"Why you want to come China?"

"To teach and travel."

"My English very poor."

I shared my compartment with the student from Ecuador, a soldier and his sister, and two men. The Ecuadoran spoke fluent Mandarin and English, so he became our compartment's interpreter. Even though I had studied conversational Mandarin for five months, I was still light years away from being remotely conversational. My teacher, Teacher Chen, had worked with me for weeks on what she called "Survival Chinese," trying to help me prepare for my first vacation. I could buy train tickets, book a hotel room, ask where the toilet was, and tell someone I was lost. At first, the language was simply too foreign to learn. After each lesson, my lips felt bruised, my tongue swollen, and my head enlarged. For a long time, I had called the head of the Foreign Language Department, "Director Mosquito," using the wrong intonation for his name. A student finally corrected

me; Director Zhang was too polite.

The Ecuadoran student and I were the star attractions of car eight, he for his fluent Mandarin; me for my contact lenses, size, beard, and butchered Mandarin. When we weren't sleeping or reading, our compartment became the staging area for "international exchange." Any and all conversations were public domain, so by the time our moving city stopped in Kunming, all of its citizens knew where I lived, where I worked, how much money I made each month, how many brothers and sisters I had, how much I weighed, and what my mother and father did for a living. Everyone was very curious and very friendly.

I also got to ask my share of questions. The soldier, an enlistee in the People's Liberation Army, was travelling from Beijing to Kunming, his hometown, with his sister, a student from at Beijing Normal University. Their parents and his wife and child were to meet them at the station. He was 32, very handsome, and was understandably anxious to see his daughter for the first time. He mentioned a tour of duty on the Vietnamese border, but he would say nothing more about it. He had been in Beijing attending a training session for middle level cadres in the PLA. Like most soldiers I met in China, he was extremely friendly. We talked about "safe" topics--family, travel in China, food, life in the States. He was surprised that I had not served in the military during the Vietnam War.

His sister, a 21 year-old history major, understood some English, but said speaking it made her "most uncomfortable." She was accompanying her brother home to be with her family during Spring Festival. She wore jeans, a multitude of sweaters to keep warm, tennis shoes, and a trace of lipstick. I asked her if she had a boy friend; she only giggled and shook her head. Her favorite singer was John Denver, and she asked me to sing "The Country Road." I did my best, and everyone in car eight applauded.

Both of them insisted that I share the food they had brought. Almost no one eats in the dining car of any Chinese train. The rumor is that no one knows what is served because no one has survived a meal to tell about it. They had brought packages of instant noodles, canned meat, boiled eggs, sweet bread, and strawberry jam. They kept my tea mug full and would never let me fetch hot water. I had some cheese I had purchased at the Beijing Friendship Store, but only the Ecuadoran partook. The Chinese abhor cheese and rarely drink milk or use butter.

My other two compartment-mates said very little during the 62-hour journey. One of the men was around thirty, very fit, and reminded me of a sulky Robert DeNiro. He was a very somber individual, and unlike most Chinese, kept to himself, reading most of the time in his upper berth. I never found out where he was from or what he did. The other man was older, worked in a tractor factory in Hohot, Inner

Mongolia as a supervisor and cadre, was a Party Member, and was going to Kunming to be with his family for the holidays. His wife, an engineer in Kunming, had remained there to work and take care of their parents. He saw her only two or three times a year, but planned to return to Kunming when he retired.

We talked about many things, but mostly about me and the United States, especially when the others found out there was a Party member in our berth. Their opinions about the wealth of Americans were predictably inflated, but not if you look at them in relative terms. The cadre from Hohhot made about 200RMB per month (about \$70.00), but received bonuses for working in a "remote" area. The soldier made less than 100RMB. They also had the mistaken notion that most of us are self-employed. They asked me to compare American universities with Chinese universities. Each suggested a place I should visit, but the most persistent questions and comments involved my marital status, lack of children, and the family in the United States. The fact that I was 35, unmarried, and had no children worried them very much.

"Don't you like children?" the soldier asked me.

"Yes, I like children very much."

"Why don't you have children if you like them?"

I could hear the people in the car agreeing with the implications of his second question. I did not tell them

that I was divorced, so they were extremely concerned that at the ancient age of 35 I had not found a wife and started a family. In China, unmarried people over 35 are considered well past marriageable age, and they will likely remain unmarried. But these "unfortunates" are very rare.

The soldier's sister asked, "Who will take care of you when you are old?"

I explained that senior citizens in the United States usually prefer to take care of themselves, live away from their children, and lead their own lives. They all agreed this was shameful and showed much disrespect on the part of the children.

These impromptu bull sessions went on for two days as we rolled slowly but steadily south. The second night was calmer and not quite as cold as the first. Everyone had settled in. My berth, however, was still just as hard. I deadened myself with some more Chinese brandy and tried to sleep after the lights went out at 10:30. I found it impossible to get comfortable, not so much because of the board that I was sleeping on, but more because of the closeness of 59 other restless people. Our car was a rolling, compact barracks, filled with snores, coughs, gurgles, yawns, and moans. People regularly trekked back-and-forth to the toilets. I tried to concentrate on the interminable, hypnotic sound of the clanking tracks, but just about the time I began to doze off, the train would



lurch to a stop at some unknown station. Passengers shuffled on and off in the darkness, a long, loud bell would ring, and the train would begin again.

That night the train turned west at Changsha, Henan Province, and headed toward Guiyang in Guizhou Province. When I was awakened at 6:30 by a surrealistic version of "Auld Lang Synne," the train was snaking its way through mountains and tunnels. The whole day, I sat in front of the window, watching the rocky, barren mountains of south central China roll by. I could not get over the fact that I could never look out of the window without seeing people--NEVER. For two days, I had watched the countryside go by, changing from flat empty wheat fields to dry terraced paddies to the green and yellow fields of soybean and rapeseed blossoms, and always, everywhere, people--even if it were just a solitary peasant watching his water buffalo graze.

I did not look forward to a third sleepless night in my berth. I spent the evening reading what one of the other foreign teachers had described as "another ripped-out throat Ludlum novel." I had stretched my abilities as a Chinese speaker past my limits, and most of the novelty of my presence on the train had waned, so I had been left pretty much to my own devices. Before lights out I took a stroll through the train to the hard-seat cars. Any complaints I had about the summer camp conditions in car eight became

trite in light of what I witnessed as I walked from one carriage to the next.

These cars were packed with people and baggage. To get from car to car, I had to step over the unfortunate who were not lucky enough to have staked out a seat. The cigarette smoke was as thick as London fog, and the loud speakers seemed even more shrill and more garbled than in my carriage. As I walked, the people who were awake woke their comrades to have a look at me. I could not believe that people could travel this way for 62 hours--sleeping upright for three nights, standing for two days, but if the Chinese want to travel, no alternatives exist. After my "evening stroll," my lower berth in car eight seemed private and comfortable.

The next day we arrived in Kunming at 12:20 as scheduled. As early as 10:00 that morning, everyone started making preparations for arriving. Garbage went out the windows onto the tracks, "train towels" went back into bags, and street shoes went back onto feet, replacing the flip-flops. I was not the only person wanting off the train, some decent food, and most of all, a hot bath.

When we pulled into Kunming station, the platform was crowded with hundreds of greeters. Windows in each car were lowered, hands were touched, salutations were shouted, and bags were passed out to those waiting for our arrival. I was last off car eight, but as I got off, I located the

soldier and his sister with their family. He had his little girl in his arms, holding her like fragile china. His sister had her arms around her mother. All of them were laughing and crying. I started for the exit gate, but he motioned me over to show me his one-year old daughter. I told him, in my best Chinese, she was beautiful, nodded to his mother, father, and wife, and said goodbye. Similar scenes took place the length of the platform. Spring Festival permeated the atmosphere.

Once outside the station, I tried to locate a taxi. I had been warned that the first place you go after arriving in any city, especially during the holiday season, was to a hotel to secure a roof over your head. I found no taxi, but was eventually surrounded by drivers of small three-wheel motorscooters, all of them shouting "Kunming Hotel." These "cabs" looked like proletariat golfcarts with miniature campers on their backs. Without really being consulted or giving my approval, my luggage and I were inserted into the back of one of these olive drab deathtraps, and before I could catch my breath, the cabby zoomed out of the station. This was the first of many rides I would take in these "road warrior" vehicles, but it was either them, a city bus, or a long walk. I didn't know where to walk and would risk my life anytime to stay off a Chinese bus. On the way to the hotel, I couldn't see anything out of the sides of the shell that covered the perch I was sitting on. I did, however,

catch glimpses of large green trees, blooming azaleas, and other flowers out the back. The temperature was balmy and felt wonderful.

At the Kunming Hotel, I came face to face with the most sullen desk clerk I have ever met. I had arrived during "xiuxi," the Chinese siesta from 12:00 to 2:00. I asked for a dormitory bed. He glared at me as if I had asked for an unsecured loan. I repeated myself, trying to improve my Chinese. Finally he said in English, "You want dormitory bed? No dormitory bed!" He walked off, leaving me standing there with my phrasebook in hand.

I cleared my throat and shouted after him, "Do you have a room?"

"Standard room, 45 yuan FEC. How many nights?"

The Kunming Hotel was the only designated hotel for foreign tourists in the city that I knew about, so I accepted the room at the quoted price. I showed the clerk my red, white, and green cards and my passport. He surveyed them all as if they were crude forgeries, flung them back on the countertop, gave me the usual form to fill out, and told me to go to the fourth floor.

On the fourth floor, I showed the floor worker the piece of paper that the clerk had given me, and he directed me to my room. The room, though small and something out of a 1930's movie, looked wonderfully inviting after train 61. It had a TV, western bathroom, two single beds, and a hot

water thermos.

I asked him for my key. He didn't understand. Key and teacher sound almost the same in Chinese, so I guess he thought I was telling him I was a teacher. I got out my color-coded Berlitz phrasebook, which he found amusing, found the purple hotel section, and pointed to the Chinese characters for key.

"Mei you," he quickly answered, shaking his head. Then he went through a brief pantomime, indicating that he would let me in my room each time I needed in. I tried to convince him to give me the key, but was unsuccessful.

I was starved for some substantial food, nothing that came out of a can or you added hot water to. For three days I had eaten out of my pack, so I headed for the hotel dining room. Because it was almost 2:00, I was not warmly received. I was shown to a table where two other foreigners sat finishing their lunch and was told to sit with them. After 62 hours on the train and three days without a bath, the last thing I wanted to do was force my aromatic presence on innocent strangers.

Empty tables were all around us. In fact, the two tourists were the only ones eating in the dining room. The hostess, who must have been the clerk's sister, shook her head, pointing at the assigned seat. I quickly developed a dislike for the Kunming Hotel.

The two diners were Germans. They spoke no English; I

spoke no German, so we sat trying not to get in each other's way. The waitress came, threw down an English menu, and stood hovering over me like an SS interrogator. I quickly read the menu and pointed to a dish. "Mei you!" After three or four "mei you's," I asked her what she recommended. She pointed to two dishes, asked me if I wanted rice, and stomped away toward the kitchen.

Nurse Rachett immediately brought my food, along with the bill. I paid before I had eaten a bite (a standard practice in Chinese restaurants). The German man just looked at me and shrugged. The food, at least, was tasty. I devoured a pork and peppers dish, some rice, and a family-sized bowl of hot-and-sour soup and headed back to my room for a much needed and even more desired shower.

I got to the fourth floor, but the young man who had promised to let me in my room was no where to be found. After cruising the third, second, and first floors, I finally located him in the lobby asleep on a sofa.

Upon entering the room, I quickly peeled off my jeans, crusty socks, toxic t-shirt, and turned on the hot water to the shower. I waited expectantly for the water to get hot. I waited awhile longer. And I waited some more. Fifteen minutes later, I pulled my stiff jeans back on, went out into the hall, and tried to locate the young worker. Again, I found him in the lobby. The elevators at the Kunming were turned off during "xiuxi," just like the rest of the

country. After catching my breath, I asked him about hot water.

"Mei you."

I wanted to rip his heart out and fall onto the floor into a cataleptic fit.

"Hot water from six to seven each morning, twelve to one in the afternoon, and six to seven each evening," he said.

"But that's the same time that the dining room is open. That makes no sense," I heard myself saying to his back as he walked off. "Can't we talk about this? I haven't had a bath in three days!" I felt as if life had lost all meaning, that we indeed did live in a cruel and unjust universe, but I went back into my room, took a very cold shower and tried to wash as much of train 61 off me as possible. I have since decided that travel in China is like a cold shower--miserable while you're in the middle of it, but not so bad once you've finished.

That afternoon, I wandered through the alleyways and back streets of Kunming, and for the first time I saw something of what I had pictured China to be before I had come. Much of Kunming has not been "modernized" yet--fewer six story-walkups and monotonous concrete structures than in Tianjin and Beijing. Many of the narrow, cobblestone streets were lined with old two-story shops and houses made from wood. Of course, parts of Kunming looked like every

other city in China, but I avoided those sections and explored the exotic and novel.

I was astounded by the street markets vendors and the variety of produce and goods for sale. Coming from the frozen north, where for three months I had seen little but moldy cabbages, it was pleasing to see fresh cauliflower, broccoli, celery, leeks, string beans, eggplants, spinach, apples, oranges, bananas, and watermelons. Free markets lined the streets and were crowded with colorfully dressed people. You could even buy fresh-cut flowers, and it seemed that every window in Kunming sported a small flower box. Kunming was just what I needed after six months in the confines of conservative, colorless, industrial Tianjin.

The following day, I took an early bus to the Western Hills to climb up to Dragon Gate, an ancient Buddhist shrine that looks out over Lake Dian and the city. I arrived at the top, a climb along a winding pine-tree lined road of some 2,000 feet, before sunrise and before all of the day's tourists arrived. This was the first time since I had arrived in China, apart from the Guest House, that I had found myself absolutely alone. The view was spectacular; the morning crisp and clear. I watched the batten-sailed fishing boats move out onto the large shimmering lake, and I could see the tops of temples among the evergreens slowly illuminated by the rising sun. According to legend, if you jump off the mountain at Dragon Gate, you transcend the



cycle of reincarnation and go straight to nirvana. The face of the mountain down to Lake Dian would be a hang-glider's paradise.

By 9:00, the place was crawling with tourists who seemed to appear from the grottoes that dotted the mountain, and the rare solitude I found at Dragon's Gate was lost in the loud, high-pitched chatter of what sounded like thousands of students wired on methadrine. There's nothing like the sound of screamed Cantonese and Japanese to destroy the serenity of a placid soul. Vendors had opened their roadside shops, selling t-shirts, Fujicolor, costume jewelry, incense, boiled eggs, and foul, sugary orange soda. I made my way back down the mountain, visiting three Buddhist temples, and caught a public bus back into the city.

I spent five days in Kunming recovering from the train and getting lost in the narrow, twisting, pungent alleyways. I ate at sidewalk cafes. The hot-and-sour soup was fiery and tart--the best I had ever eaten. I visited the places listed in my guidebooks. But I enjoyed walking the streets most of all. The temperatures during the day climbed into the seventies and lower eighties, and the sky was an unpolluted baby blue. Flowers grew on every available spot.

One of the strangest sights I saw happened on Sunday afternoon, February 2. I had gone to the Vietnamese Coffee Shop and French Bakery for "brunch." This holdover from

pre-liberation days served espresso-like coffee and something very close to croissants. It was also the hang-out for the local black market money-changers. From the coffee shop, I walked up "Health and Sanitation Street" to the city center. Around the small square were about 200 blind masseurs in white smocks. Each had a small bench in front of him, and the benches were filled with patients. I watched them for a long time. A person would approach a masseur, tell him about his problem, and then the masseur would go to work. The charge was determined by the extent of the ache and how long the patient was treated. The masseurs used acupressure and other techniques, and not one of them went very long without a customer.

While I was watching, a young man sat down beside me.

"Do you want to try it?" he asked in English.

I smiled at him. "I don't know just yet."

He introduced himself as a student at Yunnan University and told me he was spending his holidays introducing himself to foreigners so he could practice his "poor English."

"Giving these cures is the traditional work for the blind. We believe they have special qualities," he explained. "What else can they do? They are taught very ancient and very famous methods. They are very effective."

"Have you tried it?" I asked.

"Of course. Many times. It costs very little. Even I can pay for it. If one has a headache or stomachache, the

blind doctors know the proper methods. They are very skillful. Do you have an illness? I will tell one of them your illness."

I wanted to try it. The train had destroyed by back, but as we talked, a crowd gathered to listen. He told them I was interested in the treatments. He also asked their questions and translated. Many of the people nodded and smiled when he told them I was interested in a treatment, giving me thumbs-up approvals of the blind masseurs. They continued when he told them I was an American teacher working at Tianjin University. As always, however, the crowd began to grow, and I started feeling claustrophobic. When the size of the throng approached more than two hundred curious folks, I got up, told them all goodbye, and walked on. If you want to do anything in China, you can't let the onlookers get in your way.

I found everything about Kunming very enjoyable, except the Kunming Hotel which was the worst hotel for the money I ever stayed in. Kunming was different from northern cities, more relaxed and less stuffy feeling. The city was less regimented for some reason. Maybe the climate had a lot to do with my impressions. Maybe being away from the Foreigner's Guest House and the sign-in book at the front desk were also factors. Southern China was more to my liking. How could you not like a place where the hot-and-sour soup is the best you will ever eat--and the cheapest.

On February 6 at 7:00AM, I left Kunming and headed for Dali, a small town some 250 miles west of Kunming, close to the Burmese border. The only way to get to Dali is by bus on the old Burma Road. The journey took eleven hours--a bone-crushing, twisting, turning, roller-coaster ride that I will never forget. The narrow, pothole-filled road was never level or straight for more than a half mile. We crossed several mountain ranges that varied in size, shape, and vegetation, but the valleys were all saturated with the brown of small villages and communes and the green of soybean and the brilliant yellow of rapeseed blossoms.

The bus passed into another time period when it left Kunming and crossed over the Western Hills. Of course, our Toyota mini-bus stuffed with 28 European, Australian, Japanese, and Hong Kong wayfarers with Walkman's, Fodor's, telephoto lenses, and ultra-light hiking boots was an encapsulated version of the information age speeding through hamlets and countryside that were of a much earlier age. As we bounced along the thrill-a-minute Burma Road, I saw men strapped to plows, women stomping brush in mud holes to mix adobe, old men and women coming down from the mountains carrying freshly cut bamboo, and children hauling water with shoulder-yokes and buckets up narrow footpaths to terraced fields carved out of the mountainsides far away from the streams and irrigation canals below.

The views from the switchbacks down into the valleys as

we crossed mountain after mountain were breathtaking. Each valley was dotted with villages that were surrounded by soybean fields that looked like manicured putting greens. The rapeseed yellow looked like brush strokes on the multi-shaded greens. The shadows of the clouds added contrast, and rising from the valleys, the arid, stark mountains looked lifeless and callous.

Too many times, I feared our bus would plunge over the edge and down into the plush, fertile fields below, but the driver was as skillful as a Pike's Peak racer, calmly passing belching, squeaking tired-out buses trying to make it up the steep inclines. The perpetual splendor of the panorama kept my mind off the nausea of constant motion and the outright terror I felt at times. Many of the passengers unsuccessfully fought motion sickness the whole day.

Each mountain range was different from the one before it. Some resemble the Great Smokies, tree-covered and mellow. Other looked like the parched foothills of the western Colorado Rockies. Still other reminded me of the desolate mountains of Utah and Nevada. But it was not until we neared Dali late that afternoon that the mountain became snow-capped and cloud-covered. I was sitting behind the driver, and when he pointed out the Cang Mountains and said, "Dali," I felt as good as I had felt when the train had pulled in Kunming and just as tired. Despite the magnificent vistas along the Burma Road, I never wanted off

a moving vehicle more in my entire life. I felt like a skillet of greasy, scrambled eggs.

The city's south gate was just wide enough for the bus to pass through onto the main street of Dali, a narrow, brick street lined with wooden and white-washed adobe two-story houses and open-front shops. Combustible engines were few, but I saw many horse-drawn wagons. The only sights that firmly planted Dali in the twentieth century were a row of electrical lines that ran down one side of the street, a window display of radios and cassette players, and a Fujicolor sign. Main street was called Liberation Street and was the only street in Dali wide enough for buses to squeeze through.

Our bus stopped in the middle of the small town. The distance from the south gate to the north gate couldn't have been more than a mile. The bus driver pointed up a narrow alleyway that seemed to end at the base of the mountain and said, "Hotel." Foreigner's Guest Hostel Number Two was very old, built around a courtyard, and Dali's only hotel for tourists. Some of the rooms were equipped with western-style bathrooms with solar heated water. I checked into a 20RMB per night room with no hassles. I deposited my gear in the tiny room and quickly went out to watch the sun go down behind the mountains that rise up on the western edge of Dali.

Dali is located on a narrow plain about two to three

miles wide between the Cang Mountains and Erhai Lake. The highest peak, directly west of the town, is about 16,000 feet in elevation. The Cang or "Azure" Mountains were snow-capped and cloud banks filtered down between the peaks like windblown cotton candy. Halfway up the mountain, I could see the wall and ruins of the capitol of the Nanzhao Kingdom, built in 1383. Dali, itself, is one of China's oldest cities, dating back to the second century B.C. At the foot of the mountain, north of the city, three giant white pagodas dating from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) rose up against the mountain face like three upside down wood screws, their points pastel pink in the setting sun, their bases obscured in the shadows. East of the city, the crescent-shaped lake was a deep Mediterranean blue, and batten-sailed fishing boats glided across the lake's surface. I heard no honking horns and saw no smokestacks belching day-glow fumes--the air was crisp and sweet smelling. No wonder Marco Polo had written such detailed descriptions of this 1,000-year old city.

The next day, I rented a bicycle from the Happy Bicycle Company. The owner, an outgoing, friendly young man, told me that his bikes and prices were the best in China. "Give free map, too," he said in broken English. My destinations were the three pagodas and Lake Erhai. I also wanted to explore the countryside between the lake and the mountain.

The pagodas and a tablet commemorating Kubla Khan's

conquest of Yunnan were all that remained of Chongsheng Temple, an ancient Tibetan lamasery. Although spectacular, the pagodas proved more interesting from afar in the context of a setting sun and the mountain backdrop than close up. The entrances were cemented over, and the bas-relief Buddhas and Bodhissatvas on the outside of the pagodas had been vandalized or destroyed by time and weather. The tallest pagoda was about 230 feet high; the other two were shorter and slanted toward the taller like two leaning Towers of Pisa.

From the pagodas, I rode north through soybean and rapeseed fields on a paved road used mostly by horses, wagons, bicycles, and a few mechanical contraptions that were a cross between a riding lawnmower and an old Harley hog. These strange machines pulled trailers crammed with brightly clothed peasants. I pedaled through the greens and yellows for a few miles and turned onto a dirt path that headed towards a small village by the lake. The fields were speckled with farmers tending their crops.

As I entered the tiny village, children began to race along behind me. I felt like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. I stopped, said hello, and the group that had gathered stepped back a few steps., clinging to each other, unsure about what it was I wanted. I kept smiling, and finally one of the little boys stepped forward. I asked him his name.

"My name is Little Li," he said in Mandarin I could



understand.

I squatted by my bike. "How old are you, Little Li?"

He came closer. "I am eleven."

"Have you ever met an American before?"

"Certainly, in Dali and Shapin."

My fantasy was destroyed by his quick answer, but he reached up and rubbed his hand against my beard. "Are you a grandfather?"

"No, I am 35. I am a teacher at Tianjin University."

"Where is that place?" he asked.

"It is in northern China, near Beijing."

He grinned, stepping back to consult with his three friends. I reached into my pack and took out some of the U.S.-China lapel pins I had brought with me. "Little Li, this is for you."

He came up to me, arm out-stretched, palm open. I gave him the pin, but he had no idea what to do with it. I took it back and attached it to the collar of his khaki shirt. He buried his chin into his chest to watch me, eyes wide. Two other boys stepped up. I pinned flags on their shirts. They beamed, but when I moved toward the fourth boy, he screamed and ran away. The others giggled, hands covering their mouths.

I parked my bike by a brick kiln and began wandering through the village. The boys followed behind me. Occasionally one of them would touch my arm or leg,

squealing in delight. They also liked to measure their heights against mine.

"You must be very strong," Little Li said.

I asked him to lead me to the lake, thrilled that I was having an understandable dialogue in Chinese. He ran ahead and motioned for me to follow. Soon, we came to a large concrete pad used for threshing rice and wheat. The pad, enclosed by an old wall, was once the courtyard or garden to a crumbling Buddhist temple now filled with bales of burlap bags. The lake lapped gently against the bottom of the east side of the building. The water was Perrier clear, and I could see carp and trout. As I stood looking at the lake and thinking about the building behind me, a young man appeared.

"I heard a foreigner is in our village. Are you American?" he asked in English.

"Yes, I am a teacher from the United States working in China," I replied, surprised to find someone who spoke English in this tiny lakeside fishing village.

"Do you think the Lake Dian is beautiful?"

"Yes, it is very beautiful. This is a beautiful place. What is your village called?"

"This is Northern Suburb Number Three. The people are fishermen and farmers. They are Bai people."

"Where did you learn to speak English?"

"My English is very poor. I am a second year student

in the Yunnan Minority University in Kunming. I have returned back for the Spring Festival," he explained.

"What did this building used to be?" I asked, looking back at the temple or whatever it was.

"I am not sure, but it is very old."

"Are most of the people here Bai people?"

"Oh yes, all of us in this village, but not everyone in Dali. Han people also live in Dali."

The Bai Minority Nationality is one of China's 55 ethnic groups. 95% of China's population is Han Chinese, but Yunnan Province is populated by several different minority nationalities. About 80% of the people in the Dali area are Bai or Miao peoples. They have their own language, customs, and historical heritage. Their skin color is darker than the Han Chinese, and they don't have classical Han facial features.

"Is there a restaurant or store in this village?" I asked the student, whose English name was David.

"Oh no, but I will give you food in my home," he excitedly offered. I could still kick myself for declining his offer, but I told him I had to return to Dali. I passed up a rare opportunity to meet the farmers and fishermen of this timeless village because, at the time, I felt too self-conscious and too unsure of what proper and polite.

A sizeable crowd of smiling faces had gathered while David and I talked. As we left the lakeside, David told his

neighbors about me, and this pleased them greatly. I asked him what they thought about me. He grinned.

"They think you must be the biggest man in the world."

I laughed and they applauded. As I was walking back to my bike, a wrinkled, sun-baked old grandmother with an infant strapped to her back approached me and said something to David in the Bai language. He told me she wanted a flag-pin for her grandson. I dug through my pack and handed her my last pin. She smiled a toothless grin and bowed several times.

"She is very pleased and grateful," David said.

Then, as I was unlocking my bike, Little Li came running up to me.

"Here. Take this. It is for you," he said, handing me three cat's eye marbles.

The whole group escorted me to the edge of the village and as I rode away, I turned to see them all waving goodbye.

"Welcome you back again!" David shouted.

That evening I dined at the Peace Cafe, Dali's answer to the International House of Pancakes. The English menu listed such Bai delicacies as "hamburger with meat; cheeseburger fried potato; ham, egg, and hatched brauns; beet stewed; pork chop of somek ind." Another small part of my fantasy was laid to rest in the pages of that menu. But the ice-cold beer, a luxury even in Beijing, tasted great.

I suppose the enterprising, bong-smoking owner/chef had taken correspondence courses from the Cornell School of Hotel and Restaurant Management because his diner was one of the friendliest, cleanest eating establishments I had eaten in on my trip. You could order fresh-brewed coffee, toast with butter, a ham sandwich, fried chicken--anything you could manage to tell him how to prepare.

Naturally, he offered good local dishes along with his partially successful attempts at western fare. These included snake, turtle, and monkey brains if you and the stomach and money for them. I ate there several times because the owner kept western restaurant hours, and I always felt better after I checked the kitchen to see if the monkey was alive and well. I never determined if the monkey was a pet or just inventory. The best of the local specialties was the fried cheese--tasty, chewy, and spicy. Unlike the Chinese, the Bais produce and like milk products and are heavy consumers. I ate fried cheese with every meal and sometimes in between.

The highlight of the next day was a trip to the Dali Bathhouse which opened only in the afternoons on sunny day. The water was heated in large solar panels on the roof of the old courtyard-style building. The men's bathhouse consisted of eight huge marble tubs and four cots for massages. A young man in a stained white tunic sat at the front door listening to Peking Opera on a small transistor

radio and smoking 999 Yunnan Cigarettes. He sold me a .50 yuan ticket for the bath and a .50 yuan ticket for the massage. He handed me a towel and showed me to a cot where I undressed. Then he swabbed out one of the tubs and began to fill it with water.

I had the place to myself, and because the tub was so large and the water so nice, I soaked my travel-weary carcass for almost an hour. Trains, buses, bikes, bamboo mats, camera bags, and backpacks had done a number on my back. After the bath, the young man worked on me for nearly thirty minutes, finishing with hot oil. The Dali Bathhouse was one of the best bargains I have ever found, and I left almost two hours later feeling like a refurbished Humpty Dumpty.

All that day, the last day of the last lunar month, I had seen the people of Dali purchasing massive quantities of firecrackers, bottle rockets, and Roman Candles. That evening, the artillery of Spring Festival began in earnest. As the sun sat behind the Azure Mountains, exploding rockets began to appear in the sky above the town. The intensity of the noise and bursting colors increased as the evening turned into night. I went up to the roof of the hostel to watch the show. By midnight, Dali sounded, looked, and smelled like a war-zone. The unpolluted atmosphere became hazy with lingering smoke of the fireworks which were set off all night. In fact, for 48 hours the noise never ended.

I got up very early on New Year's Day, February 9, to eat breakfast at the Peace Cafe. Small boys were already in the streets and alleyways lighting firecrackers with cigarettes. Some had bandaged fingers, but they were still fearlessly participating in the fun. They derived immense pleasure from lurking in the shadows of doorways and gates to throw firecrackers at the feet of unsuspecting, half-asleep passersby. I found this a bit unnerving, but not as much as a girl from Sweden who entered the cafe in tears. She was obviously not used to such festive madness.

By 9:00, Liberation Street was mobbed with people not only from Dali but also from the small villages around the lake. Whole families and entire clans arrived in wagons or in the backs of tractor-pulled trailers and the beds of trucks. The throng was so thick that I missed the first group of dragon dancers parading down the street, but each village or cooperative had its own dance troupe coming into town, and a little later, I pushed my way to the front of a crowd gathered at the door to a shop to watch a performance of young Bai dancers from one of the fishing villages.

The crowd had pushed up close to the store front, and the performers had no room to maneuver. At this point, a man pulled out a long stringer of firecrackers and lit one end, holding the other in his unprotected hand. He began walking in an increasingly larger circle with the exploding firecrackers, creating an adequate arena for the colorfully

costumed dancers and acrobats. The noise was deafening. The people, laughing and putting their fingers in their ears, loved this man's display of bravado.

This troupe of performers was comprised of mostly family members led by an octogenarian clad in a padded blue tunic, sandals, and a wide, umbrella-shaped bamboo hat. A long white goatee hung from his chin, and he tottered in the middle of the circle on an ornamented ebony cane, directing his clan. His son, second in command, wore Mao suit blue, a fox-fur hat and had a greying Fu-Manchu moustache. He passed out cigarettes to the men in the crowd by the handful. He gave me one, and I shuffled out a Dunhill which he stuck behind his ear. At the end of the day, I saw him in the park, and the cigarette was still there.

Two men wearing yellow lion costumes, two boys dressed as lion cubs, and a clown who tempted and taunted the lion dancers with a bright red ball symbolizing wealth began the performance. The young boys, about nine or ten, danced behind the lion, turning somersaults and cartwheels. The lion chased the clown around the circle, attempting to eat the red ball. The crowd oohed and ahed each time the lion grew close to the orb of wealth, the jewel of riches, and applauded with glee when the lion was finally allowed to eat it. During the entire ceremony, men threw firecrackers at the feet of the dancers who had stuffed cotton in their ears.



Next, ten young women danced and played wooden flutes. They moved around a girl carrying a crepe-paper fishing boat. All of these young Bai women were strikingly beautiful. Their dark, unblemished complexions were punctuated by rouged cheeks and lips and coal eyes and hair. They wore finally embroidered red velvet vests over white blouses and intricate headdresses of reds, pinks, and yellows--the garb of an unmarried Bai girl. When they arrived, they were all wearing sunglasses, but the old chief had told them to take them off. I could not hear the flutes because of the firecrackers even though I was standing at the front of the crowd which had started to clap to the music that they all knew and could hear in their minds.

The last performance was a dance by a beautiful young teenage girl who wore butterfly wings. Her facial features were beguiling, reminding me of an American Indian princess from a Hollywood adaptation of a James Fenimore Cooper story. Her lithe dancing commanded the concentrated attention of the entire crowd. She moved with the fluid motions of a professional, her lavender embroidered full skirt twisting and turning to the drum beat. The butterfly is a Bai symbol of good fortune, and her dance was the climax of the clan's performance. At one point, she saw me taking her picture, and the icy look she gave me convinced me to take no more pictures of her. Later I found out that Bai people don't like their pictures taken.

Her mystically exotic performance ended, and the troupe moved on to perform again in front of a restaurant down the street. I followed, watching the whole ceremony again three times. I was enchanted by the haunting beauty of the young Bai maidens. All of them had long, jet black hair, clear rich complexions, high cheekbones, and supple figures. When I showed their pictures to my Tianjin students, however, they did not think them beautiful at all because the girls lacked classic Han features.

"Their skin is too red, and their lips are too big," William said.

"William, obviously you have never kissed lips like those," I remarked to a semi-embarrassed class. "All of them could become models in the United States. Their beauty is unique, different." The class remained skeptical. When I told them I thought the Bai girls were some of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen, they all shook their heads and laughed at my apparent lack of taste in women.

Their last performance took me into a small park in the center of Dali. I remained there after the dancers moved on to listen to an "orchestra" playing folk music using traditional instruments. Although a few of the musicians were younger men, most of them were very old. The concert was like a jam session. Musicians came and went while I watched and listened, trying to tune out the ubiquitous explosions of firecrackers. No musical scores were used; no

one bothered to tune his instrument. The instruments included high-pitched horns played like clarinets, one and two string violins, lutes called pipas, a dulcimer, clappers, wood blocks, brass gongs, and cymbals. Each song ended to thunderous applause. The oldtimers, both the players and listeners, were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The park was filled with old people listening to the music, watching the performers that trooped through, and playing cards, Chinese chess, and GO. Some of them were telling their grandchildren about the music. Others were doling out firecrackers to the little ones, and didn't seem to mind the deafening noise at all. The old men and a few of the old women traded cigarettes. Many of them were just lounging in the beautiful weather watching the festivities. The atmosphere of the park was totally small town unpretentiousness. The center of attention was the old folks and the children.

By late afternoon, the main street of Dali was practically empty. Everyone had returned to their homes for family dinners and private celebrations. The fireworks displays began as soon as the sun went behind the mountains, and I returned to the roof of the hostel after supper at the Peace Cafe. The day was one of the most exciting I experienced in China. I was impressed by the overall spirit of community and family I witnessed in Dali that day and by the order maintained by the gigantic crowds that had

gathered in the town's streets. I saw a couple of policemen, but they seemed to be participating in the festivities rather than performing official duties. The day belonged to the young and the old. It was a special day for me as well.

My last day in the Dali area, a Monday, was an equally fascinating and exciting one. I hitched a ride to Shapin, a small village thirty miles north of Dali on the northern shore of Erhai Lake. Mondays in Shapin are market days for the whole area. People come from all around the lake to sell their vegetables, handmade clothing, animals, fishing nets, handicrafts, and cheese. It's like a giant flea market. The Bai women were all wearing brightly colored vests and headdresses. You could tell the unmarried women from the married by the style of clothing worn.

The market, set up on a dusty hillside, was a hive of activity. You could purchase or trade for anything from a piglet to a tape-recorder; you could get a tooth pulled or get an acupuncture treatment. Rainbow-colored halters were offered as were handwoven hats, baskets, and fishing nets. Whole leaf tobacco and large bamboo bongs were sold by weathered old men. Farmers arrived leading pigs, chickens, oxen, mules, and horses to trade or sell. Blacksmiths occupied a corner of the market where they repaired yokes, harnesses, and shod floppy-eared mules and sway-backed horses.

I strayed through the market for almost four hours because it was so large and so bizarre. The day seemed to be as much a social affair as a day for serious business. Groups of girls met, giggled, hugged each other and stood arm-in-arm talking. One section of the market was devoted to newspapers, magazines, and books and was swarming with readers. Whole families were eating at one of the many tarp-covered noodle shops. The families were large because the one-child policy does not apply to minority nationalities. Men gathered at the tobacconist stands to sample various grades of tobacco, either stuffing a rolled leaf into a bamboo bong or rolling it in papers provided by the merchant. Old women in blue vests and black bandannas introduced their daughters in bright red vests and embroidered headdresses to shy looking young men selling live chickens and ducks. I had never seen a market that offered such a plentiful supply of goods, especially vegetables and animals, anywhere in China.

I momentarily thought about the crowded, polluted cities of Tianjin and Beijing where purchasing food is a daily ordeal, the buses are like cattle-cars, and solitude is an impossibility. But as I walked back through the market to get a ride back to Dali, I stopped to watch a dentist working on an old woman. The drill was foot-powered, his chair in the open next to a hardware vendor. He used no anesthetic.

In the countryside, everything is done with human labor, even the power of the dentist's drill. I reconsidered my romantic view of rural China, but given the choice, I think I'd choose to live in the country rather than the city, especially if I could choose an area like Dali where the growing season is year round, where I could swim in the clear waters of Erhai Lake, where I could find solitude in the Cang Mountains, and where I could be away from the terrible congestion of the industrialized cities.

The next day, I left Dali to return to Kunming. I hated to leave for two reasons. First, Dali was one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen. Second, the bus ride back to Kunming would be a repeat of the eleven hour run-away roller-coaster ride that had brought me there. This time, however, I bought a ticket on the public bus, a standard-sized Greyhound-like vehicle that proved infinitely more comfortable and smooth than the cramped jostling of the mini-bus, and because the people in the countryside were still celebrating Spring Festival, the highway was almost empty. No wagons, water buffaloes, or plodding pedestrians to avoid.

Kunming for the foreign tourist in China means the Kunming Hotel, a perfect example of the apathy that state-ownership often produces. Because I could not get a train or flight to Guilin, my next destination, I had to spend three more nights in the most unfriendly hotel in China. I

had to beg for almost two hours for a dormitory bed. All of the rooms were booked, and I was told no dorm beds existed even though I ended up in a room with a dozen empty beds. The hotel staff hassled me every time I paid for a meal, a bar of soap, a soda or anything with RMB instead of Foreign Exchange Certificates. But after four trips to the CAAC ticket office, I managed to buy a plane ticket to Guilin for February 14. I had decided to take the one hour flight rather than the 32 hour train ride.

My flight to Guilin was delayed for five hours because of poor weather in Guilin, but the half-filled new Boeing 737 departed just after lunch, and the view as we approached Guilin was worth the wait and extra expense. Guilin, in Guangxi Autonomous Region, is about 500 miles northwest of Guangzhou (Canton) and is located in the midst of a large karst formation mountain range. It is one of the most popular stops on the tourist circuit because the image that most westerners have of a typical Chinese landscape is the landscape of Guilin and the Li River which winds through the limestone mountains and rice paddies of southern China down to the Pearl River ending at Guangzhou. Some Chinese maintain that the area is the most beautiful in China. Others argue that the most beautiful place is Huangshan--The Yellow Mountains. Neither compares with Dali as far as I am concerned.

Almost no tour package sold in the States excludes

Guilin and a one-day excursion down the Li River to Yangshuo, so it is not surprising that Guilin is more westernized than most Chinese cities, and something of a tourist trap. Tourism is its major industry. The shop clerks, street vendors, restaurant managers, and black market money-changers were the most aggressive I had seen in China. They actually competed for my business which is something I had not experienced in Tianjin or Beijing where you get the feeling that clerks and workers couldn't care less if you spend money. In fact, they seem more pleased if you don't. Then they don't have to bother with you. This was not the case in Guilin.

Restaurant operators tried to entice me into their culinary menageries with shouts of "English menus! Coffee! Coke! Cold Beer!" Dozens of women stalked the main business district encouraging foreigners to trade FEC for RMB at a much higher rate than the Bank of China or the hotels offered. This was done openly and sometimes so aggressively that I would shout them away with "Meiyou waiwei" (No FEC!).

I even got burned when I purchased a ticket for the Li River trip. A young man approached me not twenty minutes after I had checked into a hotel and had gone out for a stroll. He offered Li River tickets, train tickets, plane tickets, opera tickets, anything tickets. He wore a CITS (China International Travel Service) badge, so I bought my river ticket, paying him 60RMB, and we discussed my train



ticket to Beijing. I was promised a hardsleeper ticket for the eighteenth, but he never returned. Fortunately, my ticket for the Li River was honored, but I could have bought it for 30RBM myself. In any other country, I would have done just that, but CITS is the government-owned agency for all tourists.

I did, however, like Guilin. It was a lively city. The restaurants, many of them privately owned or leased from the government, offered good food and good service even if some of the operators were a little too enthusiastic to serve me an expensive dish of dog, snake, or pigeon, which you could choose yourself from the zoo at the restaurant's front door. I stuck to the basics.

People were happy to help me part with my cash. Stores opened later and closed later. The sidewalks weren't rolled up at sundown. Many people were involved in their own enterprises in the evening after finishing their regular jobs. Artists, craftsmen, and vendors set up sidewalk shops at night to entice you to buy painting of the Guilin mountains or Li River, bamboo handicrafts, limestone sculptures, and marble chops. Like Kunming, Guilin seemed less severe, less rigid, and less controlled than the conservative north, but the city gave me an eerie feeling because so much capitalism was going all around me. I was not used to this in China at all.

I spent three days in Guilin and one day on the Li

River, but the good weather I had enjoyed in Kunming and Dali turned into a cold, foggy, misty murk in Guilin. I felt as if I were in Seattle. The river was as scenic as the brochures advertised, but much of the view was obscured by dense fog and rain. The mountains, when visible, had an other-worldly quality, and at times, I lost myself in the unique beauty. Other times, I couldn't keep from noticing the ten or fifteen other tour boats churning down the river ahead of us, making the whole excursion too manufactured. A canoe would have been perfect. I was only one of hundreds of tourists who made the journey from Guilin to Yangshuo that day.

Yangshuo looked very interesting, but we were only given one hour to look around, were bombarded by fruit selling women who wouldn't take no for an answer, and hawkers boasting that Vice-President Bush had bought ancient coins and paintings from their shops. It is a beautiful area, but like all heavily toured places in the world, a little too crowded with big buses filled with blue-haired tourists directed by clock-watching guides with bullhorns in their hands.

The spring semester began on February 24, so on February 18, I began the 36 hour train ride from Guilin back to frozen, grey Tianjin. I wanted a couple of days to recover and to get back into my foreign teacher mode. It

was not until I got back to my apartment that I discovered how thoroughly exhausted my "vacation" had made me--not only physically but also mentally. Travel for the individual in China is like a partially rewarding job, like teaching really. You begin to find yourself wondering if the effort and energy is worth the sometimes begrudgingly granted rewards. Aside from the obvious problem of language, China is still not ready for the individual traveller concerned with expense. The current facilities and services offered are geared toward groups who flow in and out of the country bringing foreign currency and leaving with the preferred and sometimes choreographed impressions.

The individual must spend a great deal of time buying train or plane tickets, booking hotel rooms, must be prepared for delays, and have a flexible schedule. I waited for three days in Kunming for a flight to Guilin. In Guilin, I finally got a ticket to Beijing because I put my red and white cards and RMB back into my pack and pulled out FEC. In Guilin, I went to four hotels before I was finally able to book a room. This took up the better part of an entire day. Reservations are only made for groups. The potentiality for problems can make you paranoid, and this makes the vacation less than relaxing.

Still, my first long vacation in China was completely worth the effort it took me, a somewhat spoiled "Don't leave home without it" vacationer. I met wonderful people, saw

almost the entire span of the country from the window of the train, managed to get where I wanted to go on my own, and developed a sense of the magnitude and diversity that China has to offer the visitor.

Dali was the highpoint of the trip. It made me feel like I was six again and going to Disney Land for the first time. It is a place I would return to if given the chance. I suppose I felt as if I had made some kind of discovery by going there. I knew few other foreigners had ever visited this area, and I liked that thought. I enjoyed knowing I was seeing something special that not many other travellers had seen. But aside from my own ego-trip, the journey to Dali was special because of its inherent beauty and mystery.

Kunming and Guilin were refreshing contrasts to Beijing and Tianjin--more to do and see. I always judge a city by its restaurants, and both Kunming and Guilin were light-years ahead of their northern sisters. Overall, southern China was more to my liking than the stuffy north.

Although I arrived in Tianjin complaining about the inconveniences of travel in China (a chorus of exhausted teachers sang the same song), I was planning my next trip two or three weeks later. I felt like my next extended vacation would be less intimidating because I had learned firsthand about the hassles of travel in the Middle Kingdom. I had also progressed in my abilities to speak and understand Mandarin. My 4,500 mile journey did the trick,

however, because when I arrived back in Tianjin, I found myself ready to begin work again, at least until May, when I would travel again: this time Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou.

## CHAPTER IV

### "INCIDENTS AND ACCIDENTS"

My spring semester schedule was given to me by Mr. Guo on Sunday before classes started on Monday, February 24. I would still have '84EST as my primary group, and instead of teaching the post-grads "Cultural Introduction," I would begin a survey of British and American literature. The department had notified me about the "possibility" of this change three weeks before the fall term had ended. The problem was that I had planned the cultural introduction course as a two-semester class and was only half finished with the material.

"We may want you to change this class to a literature class next term," Mr. Ji told me one January afternoon.

"But I was told this course would last the entire year, and I'm right in the middle of it."

"That does not matter. Just finish it. You have three more weeks."

"What literature do you want me to present? Do you have a textbook?"

"We have no books. We leave that to you. You can teach anything you want," he said, patting me on the

shoulder and ending our meeting.

I was not pleased with this development. I had spent a semester in the cultural introduction class presenting background information about western ideas so that I could move onto contemporary topics in the spring. At the time, I had lectured on early British history, Catholicism and the Reformation, and the evolution of the English language. I hadn't even made it across the Atlantic yet, and Ji wanted me to finish in three weeks.

I also was not looking forward to the hassle of finding suitable material for the students to read. They had constantly complained to me and about me to the department because we had no text for the culture class even though I had given them numerous handouts with dates, terms, and outlines of my lectures. I had no access to a free copy-machine and any time I asked the department to duplicate material, it was swallowed up somewhere in Building 15 never to be seen again. The one anthology of British literature available in China was a collection of excerpts and Marxist criticism. A corresponding collection of American literature did not even exist. The post-grads had read some Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Ernest Hemingway (until recently, these were the only American authors who had been translated into Chinese or were available in pirated English editions), but mostly, they had read politically oriented reviews, summaries, and criticism about literature rather

than literature itself. I hoped to expose them to British and American literature in an apolitical context.

To do this, I spent two weeks on a cantankerous machine, typing nearly 200 pages of poetry, short stories, and essays on ditto-masters. I also convinced the department to reproduce enough copies of Shakespeare's Richard III and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness for the class. Mr. Guo was to assist me in putting the material together and making sure it was ready by February.

I arrived at class the first day with my copy of Richard III and the first volume of the material I had typed and dittoed. The Tianjin students had their copies. The Nankai students arrived empty-handed. When I inquired why, I was told that Tianjin University was charging the Nankai students 8RMB for the material, and they had refused to pay it.

I exploded. I was angry with Tianjin University for charging money for work that Mr. Guo and I had done. I was also angry with Nankai University for not buying the texts for its students. I had come to class with the mistaken notion that this semester I had solved the persistent problem of textbooks by addressing it myself. I wanted to begin class that day and make a reading assignment; that is, I wanted to start the term in a normal fashion.

Three weeks later, the Tianjin University and Nankai University English departments reached a compromise.



Tianjin University reduced the cost of the material to 4RMB, and Nankai University would give the students a 2RMB subsidy to purchase the copies. The Nankai students reluctantly agreed to pay the other 2RMB. Three class periods were wasted because half the class had no books. When I ran into Mr. Ji, I complained.

"Do not be angry," he said. "This is the way things work here."

"But I typed the copies. Mr. Guo and I did all the work, and the department agreed to pay for the copies of Shakespeare and Conrad ahead of time. How can you charge the students for them?"

"You belong to this work unit. You do work for the unit. We must charge the Nankai students because they are not in this unit. You cannot expect us to give them the materials."

"I do work for the students. I know nothing about work units."

I walked away. From then on, I never asked the department for any more help. If I needed copy work done, I did it myself or gave a copy to the class monitors. I found the students had connections in the copy centers at both universities. They could get their own copies made if they were just a page or two. Anytime the department became involved in anything very little, if anything, was accomplished.

I was also given two new groups to teach. One class arranged by the Foreign Language Department and Mr. Ji consisted of twenty-five, mostly middle-aged teachers of English who were assigned to meet with me four hours each week to hear lectures on teaching English as a second language. I argued with the department leaders that I was completely unqualified to teach a methodology course, but again Mr. Ji told me not to worry.

"Do not be concerned. This class is just called 'Teaching Methodology' so the older teachers will not be insulted. We want you to improve their spoken English and help them prepare their lessons. Most of them majored in Russian when they attended university. Then they spent many years in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Now they must teach English. There are no Russian classes now. They are still learning. It is very hard for them."

This class turned out to be very hard for me as well. Of the 25 teachers, 20 were men over 45, a few approaching retirement. They seemed to resent having to spend time in my class, and when they spoke, they either wanted to argue about some obscure grammar point or they wanted me to help them with a translation they were working on for extra money. The problem was that they did not have the oral English skills to put arguments into English I could understand. The class went in circles each session, and I soon began to dread Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. I

could sympathize with their attitudes. I can't imagine what it would be like to be a Russian teacher one day, sent to labor in rice paddies the next, and finally forced to teach English because Russian was no longer "politically necessary." But this did not make the class any easier for me. I could not find the right combination to make the class work. I rely upon humor and an informal manner when I teach. The men wore the look of hell-fire and brimstone preachers when they spoke of the past perfect tense. These anal retentive grammar monsters were not impressed with my style and "inability" to discuss the proper choice of infinitive or gerund with them.

The five women in the class, however, saved me. They soon discovered that they could use our class to prepare the next lesson for their own classes. They came with good questions, listened to my answers attentively, took notes, and soon began to tell the men to stop asking "most unimportant questions" such as "Why do you say use because instead of since or for if the dictionary says they all mean the same thing?" or "What is the difference between fairly large and rather large?" It wasn't that these weren't legitimate questions. I supplied answers, but the men already had their own and never listened to mine. The women put a halt to the grammar tests the men put me through each class.

The women also began to chastise the men for speaking

Chinese during class which, of course, totally defeated the purpose of the class. None of them ever followed this particular "rule." They were worse than my real students, but by the middle of the term many of the men had stopped attending. For them, I felt I had served no useful function, but I was left with a great group of interested and interesting ladies.

The other new class, arranged by the Foreign Affairs Office, was an English class for post-graduate "reliability engineering majors," the university's euphemism for business administration majors. Working on their Master's degrees, these students were scheduled to attend a series of lectures to be given by a group of visiting professors from Magill University in Montreal. I was asked to "sharpen" the students' English skills so that they would be prepared for the lectures that would begin later in the semester. The class would last for twelve weeks. The level of the 41 students ranged from good to very poor. I was given no textbook or course criteria. I was simply told to get them ready for the Canadians.

The experience of teaching the management students was almost as absurd as teaching the older teachers, but much more fun. Sophisticated, confident, and humorous, these students were the most convivial group I taught at Tianjin University. They were like American students in many ways. They did not hesitate to ask questions, to argue with me,

and were not afraid to joke around with me. I got the feeling that they saw me as a valuable commodity and that improving their English was particularly important to them. They were motivated, punctually did any amount of work I assigned them, and often asked for more.

The first day, I asked them to tell me their English names. Some of them had obviously thought about their selections well ahead of time. The first young man to stand, a short, long-haired boy whose face was all teeth and glasses, said, "My English name is Swindler." At first, I didn't understand what he had said.

"Would you please spell your name for me," I asked.

"S-W-I-N-D-L-E-R!"

"Are you sure about your name, Mr. Swindler?" I inquired in mock seriousness.

"Of course. I have chosen Swindler. I am learning business management. It is a good name for a businessman, don't you think?" He flashed a toothy grin and sat down, folding his arms across his chest.

"Some people might agree with you," I responded, and the class applauded.

Swindler was the apparent leader of the class and a very aggressive student--real Harvard MBA material. I liked him. He was intelligent, funny, outspoken, and hardworking. But Swindler wasn't the only humorist in the class. Others included George, Lucky George, Sleepy George, and George IV.

Iaccoca, Rockefeller, and Millhouse also introduced themselves. I even had a Reagan and a Kissinger. The girls were by no means outdone in the name department. Narcissus, Pearl, Crystal, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth II were equally delightful and outspoken.

Eventually, the class was issued a conversation book that began with "Hello, my name is ..." and ended with "The pharmacy is down the street two blocks on the left." I'm not sure where they got it, but it appeared one class meeting, and the monitor told me it was to be our text. I guess the department felt that mastering this book of conversational nonsense would enable the students to understand the Canadian professors' lectures on theories of management. I let the students find a way to get me away from the irrelevant lessons in the phrasebook and onto topics more pertinent and beneficial.

We spent several class periods looking at copies of articles from the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, and Time. The students were mesmerized by the articles. I tried to explain unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases. I also spent some time talking about my past experiences as a restaurant owner. But by the time I had worked out enough material like this, the class was mysteriously cancelled.

The class monitor, Sophie, came to my apartment one evening before class to tell me the news. The students always knew about changes before I did and were often used

as messengers. When I asked her why, she said she didn't know, but that the students were very upset. I found out later that the Foreign Language Department didn't know that the Foreign Affairs Office had arranged the class. The department leaders complained that I worked in the English for Science and Technology Section of the Foreign Language Department and that the Business Department would have to find its own foreign teacher.

When I confronted Director Zhang about the decision, he told me that he was afraid I was working too hard and that extra classes would detract from my "excellent" work in the EST unit. I told him I had plenty of time for extra work and that I was really enjoying teaching the management students. My request to continue the class was put under advisement and that was the last I heard about it. No more English for the reliability engineers, at least from me.

The cancellation of the class irritated me because I felt the time I was spending with the teachers had been wasted. The only interest that the men in the class showed came in late March when they found out that CCTV would broadcast a replay of the Superbowl game between Chicago and New England. A week before the telecast, some of the men asked me to explain American football to them. The broadcast of the game also corresponded with a lesson in one of the textbooks being used, so my "American Football Lecture" would serve two purposes.

The two class periods devoted to the sport were the only meetings in which the reticent men opened up. The whole affair turned into something of an event because the members of the class had told friends from other departments about the lectures. My class of 25 teachers mushroomed into a crowded room of some 60 sports enthusiasts. The Chinese are just as sports crazy as Americans are.

The pride of the nation is the women's volleyball team, winner of the Olympic gold medal in 1984 and four of the last five world championships. Lan Ping and Yang Xilan, the star spiker and setter, are celebrities of the magnitude of Walter Payton and Larry Bird. The team enjoys a respect that cuts across traditional male-female barriers in sports. The men are even more fanatical supporters than the women. Whenever the team plays, the games are shown on nation-wide TV, and the country comes to a virtual standstill. Victories are celebrated in the streets with riotous cheering and exploding fireworks.

The national ping-pong and badminton teams are just as famous and almost as popular. Their popularity, like that of the women's volleyball team, is based on years of success and expected victories. Like Li Ping, the Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics, the ping-pong and badminton teams deliver championship medals and trophies, bringing the nation much "face." The players are also the symbols of an unbelievable nationalistic spirit. In contrast, the men's



soccer team is the brunt of constant ridicule, especially after it lost a World Cup qualifying game to tiny Hong Kong in 1985.

The Chinese are awestruck by American football, which they don't understand and have only seen in brief bits on sports documentaries. The broadcast of the Superbowl would be the first time a game had been shown in its entirety in China, and many of the students and teachers were as interested to see the game as I was.

To explain American football to someone who knows nothing about it except that it is "much too violent" is more difficult than you might imagine. In almost no way does our sport correspond with what the Chinese and the rest of the world consider true football (what we alone refer to as soccer). I began my first lecture by describing the field, the ball, and the make-up of a team. No one had difficulty with that because I drew diagrams on the blackboard. I felt like John Madden at his worst.

The problems came when I started talking about offense, defense, first down, forward pass, and so on. Faces went blank, heads shook, and hands went up when I asked for questions. I answered the same questions several times and could see that I was getting nowhere. The only way I could see that I could make any of the game clear to them was for us to play a game. The second class meeting that week was moved outside.

I provided the football and wore my best gimme hat, rattiest Converse shoes, and a Dallas Cowboys t-shirt. In the end, I think our game proved more entertaining than the one telecast. It could be described as a defensive battle, and the score ended in good socialist fashion: a six to six tie. But I must also admit that neither I nor any of my teammates/comrades (I played quarterback for both sides) gained as much campus-wide notoriety as did Refrigerator Perry.

After the broadcast (an estimated 400 million viewers watched!), many people asked me why a football player was name Refrigerator. In China, many people in the cities have refrigerators, but the standard size is about half of a standard-sized ice box in the States. They are small because apartments are small and electricity is expensive. "Refrigerator" made no sense to them until I told them about the size of an average one back home. This nickname still seemed pretty stupid to them, so I told them that he could eat everything inside a large full refrigerator in one meal. They understood this very easily.

Other comments about the Superbowl centered on the "violent collisions" and "most terrible treatments." My students say they don't like violent sports. They detest boxing, and boxing has been banned in China for almost 30 years (although amateur boxing began again in 1987). Even though they love the martial arts, the displays are non-

contact and the competition is based largely upon choreographed routines. Also, American football to them seemed to lack the fluid movement and the continuity of play they enjoy in soccer. To them, the greatest football players in the world have names like Maradona and Platini, not Montana and Payton. American TV and the NFL will have to go a long way to foster the kind of love the Chinese have for World Cup Football. When China was knocked out of the 1986 World Cup Playoffs in Mexico City in 1985 by Hong Kong, the whole country lost face.

While it may be true that my students and Chinese colleagues do not like violent sports like American football and boxing, I know for a fact that they like the most violent kinds of movies that America makes. A few days after China's version of Super Sunday (the game was shown without commercials and half-time hoopla), William and Harry from '84EST came up to me after class with big grins on their faces--as usual.

"Have you seen the famous American film, The First Blood? Will you tell us something about it? It is now in Tianjin. We bought you a ticket and will take you to see it."

I had to think a minute before it dawned on me that the picture was Stallone's First Blood, a film I had intentionally missed at home when it was playing to sold-out audiences. I told them I would be happy to go with them.

Since they had been kind enough to buy me a ticket, I could not decline the invitation. Besides, I thought I might be fun to see Sylvester speaking Chinese.

First Blood was showing at five different theaters in Tianjin. We went to a theater near campus, and the first thing I noticed was the hoard of ticket scalpers outside the theater. They were doing a brisk business. The theater had seating capacity of about 1,000. It reminded me of the places I used to see movies when I was a kid--gigantic screen, balcony, and there was even a cartoon and a gruesome short about parasites in certain kinds of fish before the movie started. Chinese theaters sell only reserved seat tickets and even if the movie is a sell-out, people amble in just as the film begins, having purchased their tickets a day or two in advance.

Chinese audiences are noisy and boisterous. Even at operas and ballets, the crowd noise is so loud that you sometimes cannot hear the music or singing. But at the movies, the sound is turned up loud enough to compensate, so your ears ring when you leave. Hearing First Blood had about the same effect on my ear drums as a Rolling Stone Concert.

The movie had been dubbed into Chinese--the easiest job dubbers anywhere must have ever had since the dialogue isn't what you would call extensive. Within minutes, the audience was cheering Rambo and each time he gave it to one of the

"oppressors," the crowd clapped and laughed. It was a very strange experience. I felt as if I were my father, and my little sister had taken me to see Rocky Horror Picture Show dubbed into Latin.

One of the greatest feats of business management I have ever seen took place while I watched the movie. In between reels a rather lengthy break occurred. We were sitting in the balcony, and as soon as the break started, a young man dashed from the projector room carrying a film canister. As he ran down the stairs, another man passed him coming up carrying another canister. Towards the end of the movie, I figured out what was going on, but it wasn't until I got a newspaper that my suspicions were confirmed. Five theaters were showing First Blood in Tianjin, but none at the same times. The starts were staggered. The city Ministry of Culture had one copy of the picture, but had managed a way to show it in five theaters. When I asked William and Harry about this amazing maneuver, they said it was nothing unusual, especially when the theaters were showing very expensive foreign films like First Blood.

In the course of two or three weeks, I think everyone in Tianjin must have seen the movie. All of my students in all of my classes and all of the teachers I knew saw it. They thought it was a great film, and that Rambo was a great American hero. When they asked me what I thought about it, all I could do was tell them that I thought it was too

violent and that the acting was second-rate. But I had nothing to show them to illustrate what I believed to be good until I managed to get a video of Kramer vs. Kramer. The students, however, voted that First Blood was the better of the two, much to my chagrin. They did not like the brief nude scene in Kramer. "Is this movie pornography?" some of them asked me.

"Of course not. I would never show you pornography."

"Then why was the woman without clothing?"

They could not understand the ideas in Kramer. The conflict was a totally alien concept to them. The plot does not happen in Chinese society. They condemned the wife for leaving, condemned the husband for not making her stay, but agree with the judge that the boy's place was with his mother after all. First Blood, on the other hand, dealt with black-and-white issues as uncomplicated as falling off a horse. They were more comfortable with it--no grey areas where right and wrong answers don't exist.

I was taken to see two more imported jewels, both of which were even worse than First Blood, but just as popular in China. One was a movie about a group of over-the-hill mercenaries headed by Richard Burton, Richard Harris, and Robert Moore entitled The Wild Geese. The mindless violence in this story was not as sensational as First Blood because it's an older movie with antiquated special effects. This was pointed out by my students. The other movie, a

disgusting drive-in typed flick, was perhaps the grossest movie I had ever seen. Mr. No Legs starred a double amputee whose wheelchair was a rolling armory. He was a drug dealer, murderer, pervert, and a master in martial arts. He kung-fued from his stumps. I was mortified that the movie had been dubbed into Chinese and was being seen by literally hundreds of millions of people who are unsophisticated enough to believe that it is representative of American society. Maybe that is why the government allowed it into the theaters in the first place.

Fortunately, at least for my students, I was able to counter these examples of Hollywood's artistry with films like On Golden Pond, ET, Superman, The Grapes of Wrath, The Sound of Music, Tess, and others. But people in China, including my students, are anxiously awaiting the release of Rambo II. In this respect, our countries share a common bond.

Of course, our cultural fascination with violence can be traced much farther back in history than the advent of Hollywood films. I spent all of March and most of April teaching Shakespeare's Richard III to the post-grads. The experience was an enlightening one for me. As we worked our way through the play (we read the entire play in class), discussing the ingenious villainy of Richard of Gloucester, I began to understand something about the way in which literature, and art in general, is viewed in China. I had

great hopes that the class would be intrigued by the character of Richard, one of Shakespeare's best bad guys, and have fun with him. But the study of literature in China, be it Chinese, American, British, Russian, or Martian, is finally a political exercise in Marxist dogma.

The students begin with certain accepted givens and proceed to find examples or illustrations that support these beliefs. They use deduction exclusively in analyzing everything. For them, the purpose of all art is didactic and should illustrate Marxism's historical dialectic. They have never experienced an atmosphere where literature or art is allowed to speak for itself through them as individuals. A right interpretation exists, and to arrive at this politically correct interpretation, the student or scholar must begin with Marxist/Mao Ze-dong theories. Good art reflects these theories; bad art does not, is a waste of time, and is detrimental to the revolution. Aesthetics is not a concern.

When I asked the students to write a composition on the character of Richard, it was if they collectively wrote one paper. All of their essays expressed the same ideas. Richard's villainy was a product of the greed and lust that dominates the aristocratic classes that are doomed to extinction and, in effect, Shakespeare was only writing an apology for the Tudors, his patrons. They all faulted Shakespeare for not being "true" to history and lacking



"socialistic realism," a favorite phrase of critics in China. Of course, this interpretation may be a valid one, but it is only one of many, and that was what I was unable to persuade them to see. I was not able to get them to view the play outside its historical context, nor was I able to get them to believe that it is possible that Shakespeare was not a "lackey" for any particular class. When I advanced the idea that Shakespeare's characters speak for themselves and not for him, they immediately dismissed the idea.

Their responses to the literature were consistent no matter what I presented from any time period. Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard" was a condemnation of the English bourgeoisie. Melville's "Bartleby" described the degradation and dehumanization of the masses by exploitative capitalism. The evils of capitalistic imperialism were denounced in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. I expected such "precise" interpretations because that is all they had been taught, but I never expected such a uniformly dogmatic response. Their attitudes mirrored a speech I had read by the Minister of Culture in The China Daily.

The problems in literary circles include the advocacy of unchecked freedom, rejection of Party leadership, divorcing art from politics, denying the educational functions and social effects of art, advocacy of "literature for literature's sake," preference of the expression of the ego to

the aesthetics of common people, negating the revolutionary and national tradition of art.

I believed my students could pin a Marxist interpretation on The Wizard of Oz if I presented it to them, but I'm not faulting them for this. It was the only standard of judgment they knew. Their educations have been spooned into their minds in the factory-like cafeterias of China's educational system, a system that goes much further back than 1949. I expected too much because of my naivete.

At least we succeeded in reading the literature together. For all of them, it was the first time they had read a play by Shakespeare in its entirety. For all of them, it was the first time they had a teacher say that the function of art isn't necessarily political--sometimes it can be just fun, interesting, entertaining, sad, or pleasing. That is what I tried to show them. Maybe I was partially successful because several students came to my apartment from time to time to borrow books. They chose books such as Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Larry McMurtry's Lonesome Dove, Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and William Styron's Sophie's Choice. Afterwards, we talked about the stories and the characters they liked and disliked and how they related to them. But back in class and in their compositions, the Party line reigned supreme.

At the end of April, I managed to take a vacation. The

students got May 1 and 2 off, so we doubled up some classes the week before, stretching out my time to a full week. I put myself on the train in Beijing and headed to Shanghai on Friday night, April 25. The train ride was one of the most pleasant journeys during my stay in China. The train was brand new, the workers were extraordinarily polite, efficient, and helpful, and the journey was very fast because the train made only two stops between Beijing and Shanghai.

I arrived in Shanghai in the early afternoon on Saturday, April 26. I managed to hire a cab to take me from the station to the Pujiang Hotel located across Suzhou Creek from the Bund. The Pujiang, called the Astor before 1949, was an immense, run-down hotel that offered dormitory beds; hence, it was the most popular "flop" for economy-minded travellers. I had no difficulty obtaining a dorm bed for 10RMB in the dark, musty establishment, but because of its location and price, I was willing to sacrifice comfort and privacy for convenience and economy.

I spent three days walking the staggeringly crowded streets of China's most prosperous city. I enjoyed loitering on the Bund, now called Zhongshan Road, a wide boulevard that runs between the Huangpu River and the financial district of Shanghai. Between the Bund and the river, small parks and gardens were filled with morning exercisers and late-night lovers. The parks were also a

good place to watch the river traffic--large freighters, sampans, junks, and barges.

The western-style buildings that lined the other side of the Bund reminded me of Chicago's "Magic Mile." The only thing remotely Chinese about these structures that had housed international banks and trading companies prior to 1949 were the red stars over the entrances. One of the most massive buildings was the Peace Hotel built by the Sassoon family. It was filled with foreign businessmen and tour groups and still the hotel of preference and prestige in Shanghai.

Another well-known street in Shanghai is Nanjing Road. This tree-lined avenue is the city's busiest shopping area and a testimony to Shanghai's relative prosperity. Along the street, hundreds of shops, restaurants, and cinemas vie for the business of China's most trend-conscious citizens. I saw more abundance of goods on this three-mile long road than anywhere else in China, including Guangzhou (Canton). People from all over China speak of Shanghai's Nanjing Road as Americans do of New York's Fifth Avenue. The latest styles in clothing are available there as are the most popular brands of televisions, bicycles, washing machines, refrigerators, sewing machines, and so on. If you are shopping for a particular item, and it is not available on Nanjing Road, then it is not available in China.

I have never seen as many people on one street as I did

the day I spent on Nanjing Road. The sidewalks and shops were wall-to-wall humanity. The street itself was one huge traffic jam; walking or biking is the fastest way to get around in this area. Not even Manhattan during rush hour can compare with a normal day's activity in this district of the city. I survived the crunch of the frenetic crowds because of my size and height.

I was impressed by the fashionable dress that the shoppers on Nanjing Road wore. I saw many tailored suits and dresses. Mao suit-blue was the exception rather than the rule as it is Beijing and Tianjin. Leather shoes and high-heels were more common than the black cotton shoes so frequently seen in other cities. The appearance of the Shanghainese was a testimony to the industrial and commercial strength of their modern city.

As a tourist city, however, Shanghai doesn't have much to offer if you are interested in seeing relics and structures of the past. I visited Old Chinese Town, wandering through Yuyuan Garden and the Temple of the Town Gods. I also went to Yufo Si Monastery, also called the Jade Buddha Temple, where I saw an unbelievable sculpture of Sakyimani (Buddha) carved from milky white jade. I also had a few Heinekens in the stately old British Consulate, now the International Seaman's Club and Friendship Store.

But for the traveller who wants to see cosmopolitan, urban China at its best and worst, Shanghai is the place. I

walked the streets until my feet rebelled. A great walk took me along the banks of aromatic Suzhou Creek into residential Shanghai to the Jade Buddha Temple. Suzhou Creek was lined with docks and warehouses and filled with barges, one-oared sampans, and junks loaded with every kind of imaginable cargo. As I walked, I was bombarded by the sights, smells, and noises of the river life.

Crates of produce, bottles of cooking oil, soy sauce, beer, and bales of cotton were being loaded and unloaded off water-logged looking vessels. Huge mountains of coal and lumber had been stacked along the edges of the river. Everything was being moved by people-power, and people-power alone. I watched a bare-foot "longshoreman" loading a barge with crates of empty soy sauce bottles for a long time. He used a shoulder-yoke with two hooks to carry the crates, and the gangplank from the dock to the barge was a six-inch wide board of some 25 feet. When I returned to the hotel later in the day, he was still at it, doing his balancing act. He must have loaded ten thousand cases of bottles that day.

As interesting as Shanghai was to me, it also made me nervous and very claustrophobic. The people were literally living on top of one another. The prosperity of the city aside, I couldn't imagine that the quality of life was high. The housing problems in the city were obviously monumental, the pollution awful (at times the smells along Suzhou Creek

made me gag), and the transportation wretched. I was never able to get a cab, and the city buses were as absurd as a tag-team match on Big Time Wrestling. After three days of threading my way through 13 million people, I was ready to leave.

From Shanghai, I went to Hangzhou, capitol of Zhejiang Province, a three-hour train ride away. Hangzhou's West Lake is one of China's most famous places, and Hangzhou is reputed by Chinese to be one of China's most beautiful cities. Upon arrival, I began my search for hotel accommodations. I had been told that the Hangzhou Hotel had dormitory beds, and since China International Travel Service has its office there, I could also book a train ticket back to Tianjin. My source of information, however, was dated because the Hangzhou Hotel had been renamed the Shangrila Hotel, was managed by a French firm that had done some remodeling, done away with dormitory rooms, and had installed the price of 180RMB for a standard room, a price well beyond my budget.

While I was there, I decided to visit CITS and buy my train ticket. I planned to stay in Hangzhou two days and knew from previous dealing with CITS that I could get my ticket in advance, so I wouldn't have to waste time at the train station. The agent at CITS was very friendly until I pulled out my white card and started to pay for my ticket with RMB. Suddenly, the train I wanted was sold out. In

fact, all of the trains to Beijing and Tianjin were sold out. I argued with the man for about thirty minutes. I tried all of my routines to convince him to help me--calm persuasion, depression, panic, pouting, and tantrum-throwing. None was successful. He was a Rock of Gibraltar, and after an hour I left the office with no ticket.

From the Hangzhou Hotel, I walked along the shores of West Lake for almost an hour until I found the Overseas Chinese Hotel. I went in, asked for a dormitory bed, was refused, and asked for a room.

"Standard room 90RMB," the worker sternly told me.

"I am a teacher. I cannot afford that price. Don't you have any cheaper rooms?" I begged in Chinese.

"Nothing cheaper."

I sat down in the lobby to begin psychological warfare. I knew the price was too high and that the hotel had dorm beds. My battle was won when another teacher working in Changsha checked out of her room, and I noticed she paid 40RMB for one night.

"I want her room." I said, walking back up to the desk.

"That room is 60RMB," the worker said.

"Wait right here; I'll be right back." I ran out of the hotel and found the teacher waiting at the bus-stop in front of the hotel.

"What did you just pay for your room?" I asked her.



"Well, I paid 40RMB. I only got it because I waited in the lobby two hours yesterday. I guess they were waiting to see if someone else would arrive."

"Can I have your receipt?"

"Sure, let me find it." She dug through her pocketbook, finding the crumpled paper. Handing it to me, she said, "Good luck."

I returned to the desk of the hotel, presented the evidence to the worker, who finally agreed to give me a room for 40RMB. I had won my battle but not the war. My room turned out to be a converted broom closet with a bed in it--no lamps, no bathroom, no windows. When I returned to the desk, red-faced, the worker refused to give me another room, but lowered the price of my closet to 20RMB.

Because I had to be back in Tianjin before the following Monday to resume work, I went back to the train station to get a ticket. I had arrived in Hangzhou that morning at 9:30. It was now close to three o'clock in the afternoon. I couldn't find a taxi, so I bought a map and found the bus to the station.

At the station, I first tried to buy a ticket in the main office. I stood in line for almost an hour, only to be told that foreigners had to buy their tickets from CITS at the Hangzhou Hotel. My mental state at this point could only be described as eroding. I told the worker that CITS wouldn't sell me a ticket because I had to use RMB instead

of FEC. She directed me to a "special office."

The "special office" sold tickets to foreigners and officials. Standing in line again for thirty minutes, I believed I had reached the end of my quest. But when my turn came, the worker told me they only sold tickets one day in advance, and that I should come back tomorrow. I wanted to cry. I told her I only had two days to see her beautiful city and that because I was a teacher I had to be back in Tianjin on Sunday. My story, at last, found a sympathetic ear. The worker disappeared for a few minutes and returned with her supervisor. Recounting my tale of woe, I could only persuade the supervisor to give me a "reservation" for the train I needed which she wrote down on a scratch sheet of paper. She told me to come back to the office the next morning, present the paper, and I would be sold a ticket. The next morning, I returned and as promised, I got my ticket, but I had spent one entire day and part of another taking care of hotels and trains--an enormous waste of time, energy, and sanity.

The willow-lined shore of West Lake and the pastels of the blooming azaleas along the causeways that divide the lake into three parts helped repair my frazzled nerves and renew my interest in sightseeing after the fiasco of trains and hotels I first encountered. Because of the holidays, the lake was swarming with tourists from all over China. I noticed many honeymooners around the lake, strolling arm-in-

arm. Newlyweds are easy to spot because the women are always dressed in red, the bride's color in China. The lake was also dotted with rowboats, canoes, and paddle-boats. Picnicking and picture-taking were the primary activities.

Not far from West Lake is one of China's most sacred Buddhist's temples, Lin Yin Si. The temple compound, located among tree-covered hills and tea fields, was veiled in a cloud of incense smoke the afternoon I visited it. Pilgrims, praying to images of Buddhas Past, Present, and Future, shuffled from one temple to another in the lightly falling rain. I noticed many of the old people were teaching their grandchildren the proper way to kneel, pray, and chant. Young women were burning incense to carry their prayers for a son to heaven in front of the Laughing Buddha, the Buddha of fertility.

In the hills around Ling Yin Si, I viewed many Buddhas, Bodhisattivas, and Goddesses of Mercy carved into the mountainside. The smell of incense was everywhere, and the flowers growing in the gardens of the temple complex added to the sweet smell. I had never seen so many Buddhists in one place in China. The temples were filled with chanting vacationers, mostly very old or very young. The pathways through the hills by the carvings and statues were as congested as the streets of Shanghai, but there was an aura of serenity and relaxation in the air. Ling Yin Si and the surrounding area was one of the most beautiful places I had

seen in China.

I did not see much of Hangzhou outside of the West Lake area. For two days I lazed around the lake, watching early risers do their taichi and martial arts exercises in the misty morning or families posing for group photos in the afternoons. The hump-backed bridges of the causeways and the pavilions and pagodas on the hillside and islands in the lake were exquisite reminders of a China I had imagined before I had come. Hangzhou, at least the West Lake part of Hangzhou, lived up to its reputation as one of the most beautiful cities in China.

When I returned to Tianjin, my students were very pleased to hear that I had enjoyed Hangzhou. Although few of them had been to the city, all of them spoke of it in almost religious tones. "You have not seen China, if you have not seen Hangzhou," Anne told me. The only one to disagree was Mark. He argued that Nanjing and Suzhou were just as beautiful. When I asked him if he had been to either, he said, "Yes, I have been to see them in my mind. Some day I will go to see them with my eyes." This was the case with most of my students and Chinese friends. During my stay in China, I had the opportunity to see much more of the country than any of them had or possibly ever will have.

After my vacation to Shanghai and Hangzhou, I hoped to return to find out that my application for rehire for the

next year had been accepted. It had been submitted in January, and I waited patiently to find out final confirmation. The department had recommended that my "contract" be renewed, but the Foreign Affairs Office seemed reluctant to act on the recommendation. In late April, I told Director Yu that I had to know very soon about the upcoming year. He was noncommittal as usual. I even told him that I had a job offer back home, but this didn't spur any response. I had the feeling that I would be rehired, but without final word I couldn't make plans. This concern, which I related to the department and to the Foreign Affairs Office, made no impression. They all seemed to think that I had no worries, was financially independent, and whatever the decision, it was no skin off my teeth.

The result of this indecision on their part had begun to annoy me especially when I found out that applications I had sent to other universities had been subverted by Tianjin University. Schools that were interested in hiring me had contacted my department leaders who unabashedly told them that I would not be released from my present work unit; consequently, I had heard from none of them. I found this out when I applied in person at Nankai University. The chairman of the English department told me he wanted me to work there very badly, but that he couldn't offer me a job because I "belonged" to a Tianjin University work unit. Tianjin University was taking applications all along for the

following year. The Foreign Affairs Office was stringing me along. If someone applied with better qualifications, then it would release me. If not, then I would be rehired.

The problem for me was that the university was stringing me out to the very end when I would find it difficult to get a job elsewhere. This lesson in work unit politics hit me like a ton of bricks when I found out what was happening. It wasn't until after my trip to Shanghai that I was told that I had a job, and I was told this only after I camped out in the Foreign Affairs Office one afternoon for a lengthy stay.

The work unit lesson was nothing compared to some lessons I learned at the end of May. On Saturday evening, May 24, the teachers at the Guest House were invited to a party given by the foreign students to celebrate African Liberation Day. The celebration would be held in the foreign students' dining hall and attended by university officials and representatives of the student body. Several of us decided to attend. Nightlife in Tianjin was non-existent unless you created it yourself, and the foreign students always give lively parties--good music and cold beer. The celebration was university sanctioned, and the foreign students had permission to have a dance until midnight.

A post-graduate student from the Congo began the party with a welcoming speech. He was followed by two university

officials who praised the close ties between China and the Third World. Next, some of the African students, dressed in native clothing, gave individual performances. They danced, sang folk songs, and played instruments. The performances were interesting, colorful, and well-done. Finally, a brief period of conversation and mixing followed. The students had decorated the walls of the dining hall with flags from their countries and an exhibition of postage stamps. About 10:00, the university officials left, and the dance began.

Because of an "intestinal" ailment (we called it Mao's revenge), I left the party at 10:30 to return to my apartment and Pepto-bismel. The night was muggy and warm, and as I left I could see into the open windows of the dormitory halls that surround the foreign students's dining hall. Some Chinese students were playing cards, listening to music, walking with their girlfriends, or studying. When I got to my apartment, I downed some medicine and went to bed.

At 1:00 or so, I was abruptly awakened by loud knocking at my door. It startled me because I wasn't used to receiving visitors at that hour. The Guest House doors were locked at 10:00, and none of the other foreigners ever made such late night calls. I warily opened the door. The night watchman, Wushifu, sleepily told me I had a phone call at the front desk. My first reaction was that something was wrong at home, so I rushed downstairs to the telephone. I

immediately recognized Kurt's voice.

"Nick, I think you'd better contact our embassy. The dining hall is surrounded by Chinese students. They've been throwing bricks and bottles through the windows for almost an hour. They won't let us leave the building. We've called the police, but no one has come." As he spoke, I could hear glass shattering and voices screaming.

"Where are you right now?" I asked. "Why are you whispering? I can barely hear you. Is anyone hurt?"

"I'm in the dining hall office. There's a window, and I don't want the students outside to know I'm here. The rest of us are barricaded in the kitchen. There's no windows there. No one is hurt yet. I don't know why the Chinese are pissed off. Someone said it was the noise from the music or a fight or something."

"I'll call Director Yu, the president, and the embassy," I hurriedly assured him.

"Stay by the phone, OK?" he calmly continued. "I'll call every 15 minutes to let you know what's happening. Please call the embassy. There's some pretty scared people in here, and I don't think the police will help us. I'll call again soon."

I looked at Wushifu, who could tell something was wrong from the tone of the conversation with Kurt. I tried to tell him that a riot was in progress. He just stood there grinning at me. Finally, I managed to communicate that some



of the teachers were in trouble and I needed Director Yu's phone number. He put on his glasses, dug around in the desk drawer for the number, and made the call, telling Yu there was trouble. He handed me the phone.

I attempted to explain the situation to a very groggy sounding Yu. I asked him to contact the police, and to come to the Guest House so we could go together to the dining hall. He told me not to worry and to wait for him.

Next, I asked for the president's number. Wushifu fumbled through the drawer and eventually said, "Mei you." Then I gave him the phone number for the American Embassy in Beijing. He looked at me very strangely. I insisted that he book the call immediately and waited anxiously. Within a few minutes, he told me all lines to Beijing were occupied. I wanted to scream--it was approaching 2:00AM. When he hung up the phone, it rang. It was Kurt.

"We're still OK, but the crowd has grown. If they storm the building, someone is going to get hurt. But they may know now that there are foreign teachers inside. They've offered to let everyone out but the blacks. You should see the place. It's completely totalled. It's like a bomb went off in here. Everyone is still in the kitchen. Did you get through to the embassy?"

"No. They say the lines are busy. Can you believe they would tell us that? Director Yu should be here any minute. He said he'd contact the police."

"Fuck the police. They are here. I can see them standing around watching. Some officials are also outside, but they can't do anything with the students." About that time, Yu arrived on his bike.

"I see Yu. Call back in 15 minutes."

I ran out to Director Yu. He looked barely awake and unconcerned. I retold him what Kurt had told me and gave him the names of the five Guest House teachers trapped inside the dining hall. He told me to stay at the Guest House and instructed Wushifu to lock the doors and keep me in the lobby. As he rode away, he promised he would call me as soon as he could.

Wushifu and I went back inside. I ran upstairs to put in my contact lenses and get some shoes. When I returned to the lobby, Wushifu was stretched out on the sofa, snoring. I waited for an hour before the telephone rang again.

"Everyone is safe. The accident is over. Go back to bed," Director Yu told me.

"Where is everyone? When will they return to the Guest House?" I shouted.

"Everyone is safe. Do not leave the Guest House. You must rest." He hung up.

A few minutes later, Kurt called again. I asked him where he was and told him what Yu had reported.

"We're still here. The students are still outside, and Yu is full of shit. The bricks have slowed down. I think

they're running out of ammo. Maybe they're getting sleepy." I heard a thunderous crash.

"They've discovered the window to the office. I've got to get in the kitchen. I've got to go. The bricks are coming."

I couldn't endure waiting at the Guest House after Kurt's last call, so I slipped out and rode my bike to the administration building. A few lights were on in some of the offices. As I rode up, a group of people were coming out of the building. I assumed they must have known what was going on, but I tried to tell them about the riot. They looked at me as if I were a chainsaw murderer. One of them told me they were teachers going to a conference in Beijing. They got in a car and drove away. I was stunned. I think I really frightened those people.

I rode towards the dining hall. As I got close, I could hear chanting and shouts. Leaving my bike on the main street of the university, I leerily walked into the shadows of the dormitories. I felt totally isolated and very afraid. A few students milling around saw me but said nothing. As I approached the dining hall, I could hear one of the American teachers arguing with a large group of Chinese students. He was standing on the front steps. I kept quiet. I was not only afraid, but I also felt I could be of more use outside the dining hall, so I didn't yell out to Jon. I was also relieved that people were at least

talking--well shouting is more like it.

Standing behind a tree near the front door, I could see about 500 students gathered between the dormitories. The scene looked surrealistic in the glare of the outside lights shining on the crowd. Included in the laughing, almost hysterical mob were some of the '84EST boys. I couldn't see any girls at all. Occasionally, a student would lob a brick or bottle through the already broken-out windows of the dining hall which was a total wreck--windows, windowjams, curtains, blinds all destroyed. Broken glass was everywhere.

When I saw Mark, one of my students, approach the dining hall, heave a brick, and run back laughing into the applauding crowd, I wanted to vomit. I spotted Director Yu, President Wu, and other officials wandering through the students, trying to convince them to return to their rooms. The students mocked the powerless men. I continued watching until the crowd began to diminish in size and energy. About 4:30, I returned to the Guest House, hoping Kurt would call.

Sometime after 5:00, Kurt, two of the other teachers, and some foreign students, white foreign students from Nankai University, walked into the Guest House lobby. They were accompanied by a reporter from Reuter's who had coincidentally been invited to the party. Everyone's nerves were completely frazzled, and tempers weren't cool. The police had finally arrived at sunup and had hustled the

black students through a gauntlet of jeering Chinese students into police vans. Two Guest House teachers had chosen to go with them, but no one knew where they had been taken. I was also worried about two Chinese girls from '85EST who had gone to the party and had been trapped inside.

"Gail and Suzanna are OK," Kurt said, "but the other students saw them when the police led us out. They were called whores and bitches, but Director Zhang escorted them away. He assured me that they would be OK."

We waited for an hour, worried about our two colleagues and what was happening to the African students. Finally, the two teachers were brought back to the Guest House in a police van. Colin, the Canadian, was red-faced with rage, and Andrea, an American, was close to collapse. Both of them expressed outrage over the treatment of the Africans. The lobby of the Guest House was charged with an atmosphere of bewilderment, anger, concern, and an immediate desire to pin the blame on someone.

For almost two hours, we sat in the lobby arguing about a proper course of action. This was not a level-headed discussion. We were not level-headed people at this point. Everyone had been thoroughly terrified, and initially we all believed the university had taken no steps to protect our safety, nor the safety of the African students.

Some of the teachers called home; others talked about

leaving China as soon as possible. We did manage to put together a list of the African students, and Colin called the Sudanese Embassy to notify them of the riot and the apparent incarceration of the African students. We all seemed convinced that the university was blameworthy for fostering a policy of segregation and racism and had no control over its students. These were the reflex reactions of a tiny group of people in a foreign country who had temporarily feared for their lives and did not see, at the time, Tianjin University taking any measures to protect them.

These feelings were compounded by the fact that no one from the university came to the Guest House that morning to inquire about our well-being. We were left to ourselves, and no one spoke to us until six days later when we met with the president to hear the "official" report about the "accidental incident."

By 11:00 Sunday morning, most everyone had gone to their apartments to get some sleep. I was too wound up to sleep, however, so I took my camera and walked back to the dining hall to take some pictures. I had the stupid idea that they might come in handy, but when I arrived I could not believe my eyes.

The dining hall had been completely repaired--new window frames, new glass, new curtains, new blinds. Two of the cooks were sitting inside at a table smoking cigarettes

as if they were waiting for noontime diners. Chairs, tables with salt and pepper shakers and plastic flowers on them, and wall hangings were all back in place.

The only evidence of the riot was a dumpster filled with debris and a solitary broken beer bottle on the sidewalk in front of the dining hall entrance. This turn of events made me panic. I didn't know what to do. I felt a million miles from home--miserable. I stood staring at the building for a long time. Students passed by, and I wanted to scream at them, but I said nothing until I heard someone laugh.

I turned on him and screamed, "Did you have a good time last night. Are you proud of yourselves?" Of course, he couldn't understand what I yelled and walked away from me, laughing and shaking his head. I felt foolish and sad. I still couldn't believe these students, polite to me to a fault, very young and seemingly innocent, could have turned into a mob of brick-throwing racist slogan-chanting maniacs.

In anger, I stalked to Building 15 to see if any of my students were in the room studying. I wanted to hear some excuses for the "accident." When I walked into the room, the color drained from their faces. Mark's face became calamine-white. I asked them if they knew about the riot. Sheri and Belinda giggled in embarrassment, but Mark became indignant.

"We know what happened!" he said, with wide, glaring

eyes.

"I know what happened, too! I saw you throwing bricks."

"Yes, I threw bricks. My comrades were beaten by two negro students. I am proud to get revenge for them."

"My friends were inside. Did you know that, too?"

Mark sat back in his chair, wiping an uncharacteristic bead of sweat from his forehead. "We only wanted to defend our classmates. They are in hospital. I know this is true. I don't care what you say."

I took a step towards him. "Did you see any African students beat or injure Chinese students?" Mark said nothing. "Did you?" I asked, demanding an answer.

"No, but I heard it said from many students."

I know I glared at him, fighting the urge to keep from totally losing my temper. "Foreign teachers were inside. They swear no one at the party hurt any Chinese students."

"That is a lie!" Mark screamed.

I knew if I stayed and argued with Mark any longer I'd never be able to face these students again as their teacher. I told them that I would not be in class the next day and walked out before they could say anything. As I walked back to the Guest House, it seemed that I was seeing the campus for the first time and that all the students were watching me. I began to look at each student to see if I could recognize him as having taken part.



As the day progressed, a sense of righteous indignation developed among the teachers at the Guest House. I was caught up in it and did my share to ferment it. Perhaps, it was just as well that no university representatives came to see us because any meeting would have probably been counterproductive. This was born out when Mr. Ji came by my apartment about 6:30 that evening. He had just heard about the riot and had come to see if we were unharmed.

The teachers involved had congregated in my room to discuss a plan of action and to talk about what had happened. After telling them what my students had told me, we feared that the blame would be placed on the African students. Those inside were trying to remember if anyone had left the dance before the riot started. When I answered the door, Ji was surprised to see us all in my apartment.

"I just heard about the accident, he said to me. "Is everyone OK?"

I exploded, disregarding his inquiry. "Accident? How can you call it an accident when several hundred Chinese delinquents surround a building, half destroy it, and jeopardize the lives of 40 people?"

"Wait. I'm not clear about what happened. I just came to see that you are all OK."

"It is almost 7:00. The riot began just after midnight. You're the first person from the university to come here. Don't you think it's a bit late to ask us if

we're OK?" I sarcastically said.

To Mr. Ji's credit, he listened to our harangues for almost an hour. We unfairly unloaded on him, but he sat quietly, listening to six angry foreigners. He was sincerely concerned about us, but we reacted to him as a representative of the university, which he said he was not, and everyone was outraged with the university. The words racists and bigots were thrown about. When he finally told us the Chinese students' version of the story, the level of the voices in my apartment increased to the point no one could hear what anyone else was saying.

"The Chinese students say that seven of them came to the dining hall to ask the Africans to turn down the music. Two Africans attacked them with bottles and seriously injured them (the reason the lone broken bottle had been left on the sidewalk). They are in hospital. This caused the incident," he nervously told us.

The teachers inside the dining hall unanimously defended the Africans. We attacked Mr. Ji for defending the Chinese students and told him the Chinese students were bigots. Finally, I became ashamed of the way we were treating him, but without apologizing, I thanked him for seeing about us, and told him it would be better if he left. My friendship with Mr. Ji was essentially destroyed that evening through no fault of his. Later I went to see him and tried to explain my impolite behavior that evening. He

hadn't expected, nor had the university itself, such an explosion of anger or involvement. At the time, I believed he had been sent by the university to feel us out. The outcome of the "accident" changed many things for me in China.

I spent most of Monday in bed, recovering from a sleepless weekend and too much brandy the night before. Monday afternoon, however, we learned that the Africans were being held in protective custody in a hotel in the suburbs. Chinese students had accused two black students of starting the riot and had identified them by name. The teachers trapped inside all stated that both of the accused students had never left the building, but no one from the university or the Public Security Bureau was interested in their statements. The Chinese were as quick to point their fingers at the foreigners as we were to point our fingers at them.

By Tuesday, I had calmed down and was beginning to think we were over-reacting a little. On my way to class that morning I ran into Mr. Guo. He apologized for the unfortunate event and tried to dismiss my concern by telling me the situation wasn't my problem.

"The students are not angry with you foreign teachers. Do not worry. They have been told not to discuss this matter with you. They have also been severely criticized and warned not to make more trouble. Please conduct class

as usual. This is best. These are very young and inexperienced students."

Except for the brief encounter I had with my students on the previous Sunday afternoon, I never mentioned the riot again to them. Nothing I could say to them about it would have had positive results. I was also somewhat concerned about my future status as an employee. I felt I could be more beneficial in teaching them by example, offering ideas and facts, rather than confronting them head-on with my disappointment in them which could have resulted in my dismissal.

My feelings toward the university, however, did not subside as quickly as they did towards the young Chinese students. Seemingly, the university was bent on singling out two African students as the instigators of the whole affair. From Sunday, May 25, to the following Sunday, the Africans were kept sequestered at the hotel. The PSB tried to get the two accused students to confess to attacking the seven Chinese students. They refused and were supported by their classmates both from Africa and countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

On Friday, May 30, the university finally met with us to give us the results of their official investigation. President Wu, Director of Foreign Affairs Yu, and an interpreter presented the report to us and asked for comments. The meeting was laughable. Without questioning

any of us, the university put together a story which blamed the African students. They went so far as to show us a videotape of Chinese students being treated by doctors for cuts and bruises. One of the students filmed was receiving stitches in his foot. We were all so stunned by the production and by the apparent termination of the investigation that when President Wu asked nervously for questions or comments, we sat dumfounded. My adrenaline level was so high that I was afraid to open my mouth.

Finally, we began to make comments about the official statement given us. Those inside denied that the two accused African students had assaulted anyone. Another teacher who had stayed by the front door most of the evening told the president that no Chinese students had ever come to ask that the music be turned down. But clearly, whatever we said would make no difference. Our questions or comments were skillfully dodged by President Wu, who I think was deeply distressed by the episode. The meeting ended with a statement of thanks by the president for our "cooperation." We all left in utter disgust and disbelief.

The following day, the university's report appeared in The China Daily. The report was so far from the truth, as far as I was concerned, as to confirm my increasing awareness that I was not living in the "open" society advertised by the Party. The fact that I was living in a highly controlled and monitored situation had eluded me for

almost ten months. But that week, our phone calls were taped, our movements both on and off campus were watched, and students were told to stay away from us outside the classroom. My perspective of my existence in China shifted when I picked up The China Daily and read:

Student Clash 'Isolated Case'

The clash between Chinese and foreign students at Tianjin University was an isolated incident and will soon be resolved in a fair way in the interests of friendship between China and the countries concerned, an official of the State Education Commission said here [Beijing] on Saturday.

Yu Fuzeng, Deputy Head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the State Education Commission, told a press conference that the commission and university authorities are trying to persuade foreign students who came to Beijing to return to their studies. "So far, about ten have done so," Yu said. Yu described the event as follows:

On the evening of May 24, foreign students at Tianjin University gathered in the school dining hall to celebrate African Liberation Day. The school leaders and representatives of Chinese students attended the opening of the meeting to express their congratulations. At 11:30 p.m. the

foreign students began to hold a dancing party in the dining hall.

Some Chinese students who live nearby went to the dining hall and asked the foreign students to lower the volume of the music as they were to participate in a physics contest between Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai students the following day. An argument developed and some foreign students threw beer bottles at the Chinese students, hurting several. The dispute drew more Chinese students, some whom began to throw stones into the dining hall while the foreign students continued to throw bottles.

At about 12:30, the university authorities came to the dining hall and stopped the 30-minute conflict. Two Chinese students as well as three African students had been slightly injured.

The school authorities moved 16 students from Asian and African countries to a kitchen room for their protection. Early next morning, the local police moved these students to a safer place.

After the incident more than 500 Chinese students went to appeal to the Tianjin Municipal Government to punish the foreign students who had injured Chinese students, and some foreign students came to Beijing to seek redress.

China began to accept African students in 1959. Among the 3,500 foreign students now studying in China, Yu said, are 1,600 are from African countries. All of them are recipients of Chinese scholarships.

Generally speaking, he said, Chinese students and foreign students are on good terms. There have been no security problems for foreign students in China, Yu said.

However, he added, owing to different customs and cultural backgrounds--and the tendency of young people to get excited easily--there have been "unhappy incidents" between Chinese and foreign students and among foreign students themselves.

Yu said that Chinese and foreign students needed time to get accustomed to each other. The problems that occur in this process should not be described as racial discrimination.

"China has always been opposed to racial discrimination," he said. Acts of racial discrimination inside and outside schools will be criticized and possibly punished according to law."

On June 9, John F. Burns filed this report in the New York Times.



## AFRICANS ACCUSE CHINESE OF RACISM

Peking Officials Deny Charge

After Violent Confrontation

At Tianjin University

A noisy campus party celebrating African Liberation Day provided the spark for a confrontation between authorities and African students, who use the occasion to charge that their treatment in China was racist.

The affair began on the night of May 24 when a crowd of 400 Chinese at the university in Tianjin besieged 40 Africans and their guests at a party in a campus dormitory.

It has continued through two weeks of recriminations, a protest march by Africans through Peking, and a news conference at which officials have denied racism exists in China.

Although confrontations between Chinese and Africans are not new--in the early 1970's, more than a dozen Tanzanians at the Peking Railroad Engineering School were sent home after burning portraits of Mao Zedong--the Tianjin melee was one of the worst.

In the five hours before the police intervened, two Chinese are said to have been injured with beer bottles, while three Africans

are said to have suffered superficial wounds from a barrage of rocks that had the Africans and their guests, including at least two Americans, barricading themselves into the dormitory kitchen.

Feelings among the 1,600 Africans studying in China, almost all on Chinese scholarships, have not been helped by lesser incidents in Peking, Nanjing, and Shanghai.

The incidents have demonstrated a broader current in Chinese life, the propensity among frustrated young people to strike out, sometimes violently, against foreigners who arouse their resentment.

Although condemned by officials, the outbursts serve as a reminder that antiforeign instincts linger despite an open-door policy that stresses the benefits of foreign contacts.

In the Tianjin case, the undercurrent was indicated by Chinese complaints after the melee that foreign students were receiving privileged treatment, in the form of better rooms, food, and stipends. In this context, Western diplomats say, the noisy music played by the foreigners may have been the occasion, but not the underlying cause of what followed. One of those in the dormitory, David Fraser, an American correspondent for

Reuters, said later that some of those inside the building had feared for their lives.

By the time I had received a copy of the Burn's article from a friend in the States, I had come to some of the same conclusions. I saw that individuals weren't so much to blame for what had happened as the situation itself, but that didn't make teaching class any easier the rest of the semester which thankfully ended three weeks later.

During that time, I tried to keep in contact with the African students, young men a long way from home and very isolated from support. One of the Africans told me he felt like a political pawn. Sent by his government to China to obtain an education unavailable in his own country, Benjamin had to learn to read and write Chinese in six months in a language institute in Beijing before moving on to Tianjin University. Although he wasn't pleased about being sent to China, this was his only opportunity for an education. He knew of Chinese students' reputation for not liking black students before he arrived, but the offer of a scholarship by the Chinese government was too good to pass up. It was his only opportunity. Like other foreign students in China on scholarship, Benjamin received better living conditions, more allowance money, and more privileges than Chinese students, something he had no say in. He lived, however, a segregated existence and was constantly harassed or ignored by Chinese students.

But the problem goes beyond emotional and intellectual bigotry of the Chinese students. It is more complex than that. I couldn't stay angry with them for very long, not even Mark. Many of the students do have racist beliefs, but given the context, I found it hard to fault them. They have no experience with "outsiders" until they come to the university. Their culture judges groups and not individuals, but then that certainly isn't just a Chinese phenomenon.

Also, administrators perpetuate bad feeling between the two groups by not integrating the foreign students with the Chinese students who feel that the "special" treatment afforded the foreign students is an injustice to them. They live eight to a dorm room; the foreign students live two to a dorm room. They receive 15RMB per month; the foreign students receive a 150RMB per month stipend. They must receive permission to travel away from the campus overnight; the foreign students come and go as they please.

As far as my reaction to the riot itself, I suppose I expected the university to deal with it in an "American" way, and my anger was a result of that inexperienced expectation. This was not a singularly Chinese occurrence, nor was Tianjin University the first university in the world to stagger through such a complex set of events. After reconsidering where I was and the political realities involved, I was ready to accept that the university dealt

with the "incident" in about the only way it could. President Wu wanted to de-politicize the problem and initially appease the Chinese students in order to keep them from escalating their "incorrect" behavior. I also think the university officials have not forgotten the time during the Cultural Revolution when students essentially ruled the campuses, explaining some of the reticence I saw in taking measures to control the students.

Two weeks later, the riot had never really happened. Except for the absence of the foreign students, the campus had returned to normal. The World Cup Football games began on TV and final examinations began, completely diverting the students' attention from the May 24 episode. The weather had turned hot and humid, and everyone was exhausted, both physically and mentally, from the long term. I decided to do my job and stay out of the middle of needless controversy. The whole event and its ramifications were above my head. My only wish is that the whole thing had never happened. I was never more ready for vacation in my entire life as I was that June. The strain of life abroad had caught up with me. I needed a break from China, but I didn't want to admit it.

## CHAPTER V

### DECOMPRESSION

During June, all of the foreign teachers living at the Guest House, except for me and Andrea Thompson, left to return to their homes. For weeks, I listened to them all talk of flight schedules, what the first thing they would do when they got home, and how good it was to be leaving. I was initially envious, but finally bored by their anticipation. Andrea and I had been rehired for the following year, and we both planned to spend our summer vacations travelling in China. We decided to join forces since we both wanted to go to Canton, Hong Kong and to a mutual friend's home in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province. Because of different teaching schedules, I finished before she did, so I decided to go to Hohot, Inner Mongolia and Datong, Shanxi Province for a week. Then the two of us would take the train south to Canton and Hong Kong, the mecca for foreigners who needed doses of what Andrea called "WD" (western decadence): pizzas, movies, books, television, shopping malls, and music.

Before I left for Hohot, however, I was told by Mr. Guo that a "slight change" had been made in the summer vacation

schedule.

"The university is beginning a new system this summer--like your universities in America--summer term. You must teach a five week term this summer. You will teach two weeks, then have your holiday, and then teach three weeks, and then begin the fall term."

I listened incredulously to Mr. Guo. I had made plans to begin my vacation with Andrea in late June. A nonchalant Mr. Guo was now telling me that I couldn't leave until mid-July and that I would have to return to Tianjin in mid-August instead of the first of September. This development wouldn't have angered me quite so much if the department had told me about it sooner than three weeks before the spring term ended. As soon as Guo gave me the news, I went looking for Mr. Ji.

"Please explain to me this new summer term business," I said to a nervous Mr. Ji who could tell I was in one of my moods.

"It is something new that the university wants to begin this summer. All teachers must teach a five week summer term, just like in the United States."

"Why wasn't I told about it before now?"

"The decision was just made by the president. You can teach two weeks, take your vacation, and then finish the summer term in August. You need not give exams. Just continue with what you were teaching."

"You mean there will be no tests or grades for this summer session? Have the students been told this? They won't bother to study or do any work if there are no grades. Would you? This is a bad idea," I said. "Besides, I had other plans and this wasn't part of my agreement with the Foreign Affairs Office. I don't agree to do this. Not only will it be a waste of everyone's time, this is not the system at all in the States. Both teachers and students decide for themselves if they want to participate in summer sessions. This is absurd."

"The students will work. They have been told this is for their benefit. The Foreign Affairs Office has also agreed. You must teach. Everyone must teach a five week term."

"You are taking advantage of me because I am staying in China this summer. One of the reasons I wanted to work a second year was to get the opportunity to travel this summer. I was told I would have eight weeks. Now you tell me I will have only five. I must speak to Director Yu or President Wu. I don't want to teach this summer."

I marched to the Foreign Affairs Office only to find that Director Yu had left for the summer to attend conferences in England and Canada. The only person I could find to talk with was Mr. Cui, a new employee in the office.

"I will not work this summer," I told him.

"Mr. Yu has told the Foreign Language Department that



you agree. You must work. He has said this."

"But I never agreed to do this. When I applied to work next year, this summer term was never mentioned. This arrangement had nothing to do with me."

"The president just made the decision. All teachers must work this summer. This is the new rule now."

"But Andrea Thompson is not working this new summer session, so all teachers are not working this summer."

Mr. Cui disregarded this remark. No matter what I argued and finally threatened, he repeated the same lines: "All teachers must work this summer."

I next visited the chairman of the Foreign Language Department, Director Zhang. He apologized for not being able to inform me of the new summer workload sooner, but restated what Guo, Ji, and Cui had told me--verbatim. When I told him I refused to work until September, he simply told me I had no choice.

"If you want to work here next year, you will work the summer term. This work unit will not release you to work anywhere else in China. So you'd better work the five weeks and everyone will be satisfied."

He knew he had me, and I did the extra work. I went to Hohot, came back to hot, sweaty, lethargic Tianjin and taught two weeks, spent five weeks travelling with Andrea, and returned in mid-August to finish the summer term. Students were as unhappy about the added class time as I

was, manifesting their displeasure by sleeping through class, reading newspapers in class, being late to class, and cutting class altogether. The classrooms were like ovens by early June. In mid-July, they were ridiculous.

I was involved in one more dispute with the university before the term ended, and as usual, I was on the losing side. Part of my contract guaranteed me a return ticket home after one year of work. Because I would travel during the summer, I requested money instead of the ticket. The Foreign Affairs Office agreed to this readily. I thought it very considerate of them to be so accommodating until I received my money. Rather than reimburse me the price of a one-way ticket, which is what the university would have had to pay had I gone home to Texas, they gave me half of a round-trip fare. The difference in the two tickets was over 600RMB. I tried to explain why this turn of events was a serious injustice, but I ran headlong into the arms of the university's bureaucracy and was thrown for the count. I was even more outraged when I found out that Kurt had taken his ticket, gone to CAAC, obtained a refund in FEC, bought a ticket at United for 500 yuan less, and pocketed the difference. I was stuck with 3000RMB when I should have had 3600FEC.

Before I began my forced labor (the summer term), I had a week off. I had been told that the best time to go to Inner Mongolia was June and that I could expect the

grasslands to be green and the weather to be superb. To get to Hohot, I had to take an early train from Tianjin to Beijing where I could get another train to Hohot. In Beijing I had no difficulty buying a softsleeper ticket for a train that left later that same day. I was RMB rich and decided to treat myself to a first-class ticket in hopes that I could enjoy some privacy and comfort.

My train left Beijing for Hohot at 6:30 on the evening of June 21. My softsleeper berth was like a luxury suite at the Ritz in comparison to the hardsleepers I had always used before. Instead of six berths, there were only four; instead of a wooden platform to sleep on, there was actually a mattress; and instead of the berth being open, there was a door to shut out the maddening noise of the loudspeakers and other passengers. I planned to read, write, grade some papers, and take pictures of the countryside, but just before the train departed, some thirty tourists from Minnesota boarded the softsleeper car. Once they found out I had been living in China for one year, I felt like a guest on the Phil Donahue Show.

I did find it interesting to watch the reactions of these college teachers from Minnesota. While I was basking in the comfort and privacy of the softsleeper car, they seemed to be doing their best to find fault with accommodations. I'm not saying that they were "ugly Americans" or anything like that. They were nice folks.

They just weren't ready for what they had been told were "first-class accommodations."

"Can you believe those bathrooms? There is just a hole in the floor."

"Why don't we have any hot water in the washrooms?"

"I can't drink hot water. Do they have any icewater?"

"These pillows are too lumpy. Do they have any softer pillows?"

"Why don't they turn on the air-conditioning?"

"Can't they go any faster? We'll never get to Hohot!"

"I just can't believe no one on the train speaks English."

Several of them came to my berth to ask questions about teaching at a Chinese university. Because they were a group of teachers, their tour had included Beijing University, some institutes and middle schools. I think they found my comments jaded, especially after they had been give the choreographed glimpses of Chinese education that the government and university officials wanted them to see. My attitude about Chinese universities had also been affected by the May 24 riot, the plane ticket rip-off, and the summer term extortion. I probably came off as something of a snob, but I just wasn't in the mood to answer the questions of journal article writing academics who seemed to be asking me questions that they already had answers for. I suppose I pushed a few wrong buttons (or the right ones because of my

reticence to speak "authoritatively about China's educational milieu") because they left me alone very soon out of Beijing.

Everyone's attention turned from talking to gawking two hours out of Beijing anyway. As the train snaked its way through the mountains northwest of Beijing, a late evening thundershower and lightshow began just as the sun was setting and just as we crossed a section of the Great Wall. We were able to see the Wall when it became illuminated by the lightening. It was a magnificent and eerie scene. The Great Wall appeared as a spine criss-crossing the silhouette of the barren arid mountaintops.

Train 89 arrived in Hohot at 8:11 the following morning, and I caught a cab to the Inner Mongolia Guest House. I inquired about dormitory accommodations and went to the CITS office to see how I could get to the grasslands. There, I met four other foreigners who had booked a mini-bus to Xilamuren that morning, and they convinced me to join them so that the individual price of the tour would be lowered from 120RMB to 90RMB. Within an hour of my arrival in Hohot, I found myself in the back seat of a Toyota van on my way to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia. The tour would include two days and one night at Xilamuren, a designated tourist area. For foreign tourists, the only way to get to the grasslands northeast of Hohot was through CITS. No individuals travelling alone were allowed in the area. I

think this regulation was more a matter of economics than security, but the Chinese government does get nervous if you go wandering around the country alone following your nose.

The ride to the commune, about 75 miles, lasted nearly three hours. It took us through rugged countryside punctuated by rocky hills and mesas that reminded me of southern Idaho. This was the least populated region of the country I saw--at times very desolate and almost uninhabited. But the landscape changed as we steadily climbed to the top of a plateau the size of Rhode Island, and as we reached the top, the rocky sun-bleached land began to turn into a sea of pale green.

Before we arrived at headquarters of the commune, we turned off the paved highway onto a dirt road that traversed the rolling grassland like a brown ribbon. It was lined with blooming wild flowers that looked like marigolds or buttercups, and it stretched ahead of us for miles. Occasionally, on a hillside, I saw huge flocks of sheep and goats tended by lone herdsman squatted down on their haunches. We drove along the dirt road for almost an hour, and as far as the eyes could see the grasslands unfolded like billowy light green waves to a horizon marked by a turquoise-blue sky and snowy-white lazy clouds.

The headquarters of Xilamuren Commune was an ancient, dilapidated Buddhist temple which housed a reception office, a restaurant, and an arts and crafts shop. We were

"welcomed" by two somnolent girls dressed in Mongolian tunics and tennis shoes, hustled into the restaurant, and served gigantic platters of delicious broiled mutton called "Shoubayang," which translates to hand-eaten lamb. After lunch, the CITS guide escorted us to our quarters for the night--modified Mongolian yurts. A real yurt, "mengubao," is a domed tent made from sheepskins stretched over a wooden or bamboo framed used by the nomadic herdsman of Mongolia. Ours, however, had a wooden floor, an electric light hanging from the ceiling, and ornate doors. This yurt "motel" was used exclusively by tourists, but it gave me an inkling, at least, of what life in a real yurt must be like. We slept on thick rugs on the floor and used several quilts for extra padding and warmth.

As luck would have it, the Minnesotans also arrived, and the yurt motel was filled. I shared space with the tourists I had met in Hohot: a Japanese student, an Englishman teaching English in Japan, and a young Australian couple who were travelling around the world. We got on very well and planned to have a Mongolian barbecue feast for dinner together.

That afternoon, the five of us were taken to a Mongolian home about thirty miles from the commune headquarters to see how a "modern" Mongolian family lives. When we arrived, we were introduced to an elderly couple who invited us into their home for milk-tea, rock-hard goat

cheese, and sesame seed buns. They were retired shepherders and worked for the government during the summer, receiving foreign tourists in their home.

Their home was a two-room adobe structure built on a cement slab. One room was a combination living room and bedroom. Half of it was taken up by a quilt-covered brick platform called a kong. The kong was hollow and during the winter months hot air from the stove in the kitchen flowed through it to keep the couple warm. It was on the kong that the woman served us tea around a small table. On the walls of the room were pictures of Mao and Zhou Enlai and a poster of a ski resort in New Zealand. The other room served as a kitchen and storeroom. Their electricity came from a wind-powered generator that looked like a large airplane propeller. They had no TV because reception from the Hohhot transmitter was too weak.

The old couple was very friendly and polite. When we asked if we could take their pictures, they volunteered to put on traditional tunics, which they slipped on over their Mao suit-blue clothes. I felt like I was on an Indian reservation in northern Arizona, only I didn't have to pay a fee to take the picture. The old man spoke Mongolian, Mandarin, and, to our surprise, a little Japanese. His wife spoke only Mongolian, but through her husband, she asked the guide to ask each of us where we were from and what we thought of their home on the grasslands. Both of them gave



set speeches about the improvements in the living standards that the Party had brought to them, pointing to their home, refrigerator, and electric generator as concrete evidence. I noticed that their home was not the only one with a generator. I also saw a few motorcycles, and even a few large TV antennas.

Next, we were taken for a ride through the grasslands to a knoll that was the highest point in the area. The view was spectacular. I felt as if I were in the crow's nest of a tall ship looking out at an endless sea. A strong north wind whipped my hair about my face. I could see forever in all directions. The grassland was dotted with small adobe rancheros, like the one I had visited, and immense flocks of sheep and small herds of horses and cattle. The wide-open space made me think of Texas, and I felt good being away from the claustrophobia of urban China.

Dinner at the commune's restaurant was one of the best I had in China. Rick, the Englishman, Rie, the Japanese girl, and I ordered Mongolian Hotpot for three. Mongolian Hotpot, "Shuangyangrou" in Chinese, is similar to a fondue. A large, coal-fired urn of boiling water is placed in the middle of the table. Garlic, ginger, cilantro, salt, and pepper are put into the water. Then you take thin strips of raw mutton and dip them into the water with your chopsticks. Shredded cabbage and soybean meal noodles are also put into the water. The meat cooks very quickly, and then you dip it

into a brown sauce made from sesame oil that is very spicy, like a Mexican mole. When you have eaten all the mutton, cabbage, and noodles you want, you ladle up the broth which has become a rich and tasty soup. We ate three platters of mutton and a dozen sesame seed buns and drank several bottles of potent local beer. If I could have eaten more, I would have.

After finishing our Hotpot, we waddled to a large yurt located in the middle of the yurt "motel" complex to watch a song and dance performance. The commune's entertainment troupe performed Mongolian folk dances and songs. The show was a fitting nightcap to the mutton dinner. The singers sang beautiful melancholy songs, and the dancers in tunics, knee boots, and fur hats, danced wild, energetic dances. One of the performers sang and played the "erhu," a two-stringed violin, and he stole the show. His face reminded me of a young Groucho Marx without glasses: black vibrant eyes, bushy expressive eyebrows, and a thick moustache. He was hilarious, but when he sang, he sounded like a Mongolian Leadbelly--earthy and real. The exotic atmosphere that the performers created ended, however, when thirty bloated Minnesotans got up to sing "We Shall Overcome." I wondered what they were going to overcome. The squat toilets? But the Mongolians loved their rousing rendition. It was a too much for me, so I left before they began "Home, Home on the Range."

The sky that night reminded me of a West Texas sky. The stars were close enough to pluck from the heavens and put in your pockets. The night air was also crisp and fragrant. I had to return to the yurt for a sweater. I watched an old man pass by the fence of the motel with three or four hundred bleating sheep and disappear into the night. I could also hear the Minnesotans start "Old Susannah."

The next day was pretty ridiculous. We were taken to the commune stables for rides on flea-bitten horses and a geriatric camel with narcotic eyes. I refused to ride when my time came. We watched two Mongolian men wrestle and then a simulated version of polo. These demonstrations were boring and contrived but thankfully didn't last very long. I don't know who was more bored, me or the poor Mongolians who had to go through these absurd routines for the "foreign guests." I was amused watching the Americans, armed with microphone-equipped VCR cameras and telephoto lenses, milling around looking for that perfect Mongolian shot.

When it came time to leave the grasslands, I felt irritated because I had enjoyed little time to myself. I remembered asking my students once if they ever needed to go to the country to be away from everyone. Their reply was as choreic "Why?" The dude ranch environment of the commune wasn't really what I had in mind for my troubles, but at least I saw the grasslands and spent some therapeutic time in the wide-open spaces. CITS has no idea how corny its

presentation of Inner Mongolia is, but if you the "Mongolian experience," you have no other options.

Hohot, itself, is about as Mongolian as Cleveland; it is just another replica of a typical industrialized city in China: congested, polluted, and monotonous. Almost all of the temples and reminders of the past have been destroyed by war, the vandalism of the Cultural Revolution, and the passage of time. I spent one night in the Inner Mongolia Guest House and left the next morning at 6:57 for Datong.

To get to Datong, located between Hohot and Beijing, I had to purchase a hardseat ticket, the only kind of ticket sold at the Hohot train station. After I boarded the train, I found the conductor and converted my hardseat ticket to a softsleeper even though the journey was only five hours. The other alternative was to stand in the aisle of a hardseat car because the train was filled with passengers from as far away as Urumqi in Xinjiang and Lanzhou in Gansu.

Train 44 arrived in Datong at noon. The Datong Guest House supplied me with a dorm bed (dorm board really) for 8RMB, but the hotel had no hot water at anytime for showers. After a nauseating lunch of unidentifiable ingredients in the dining room, I bought a city map at the Datong Friendship Store where I found it impossible to buy so much as a Coke with my RMB no matter how much I waved my white card in the face of the obstinate worker. I wondered if she had ever seen a white card before or could even read.

I explored the areas of Datong described in the guidebooks. The main temple of HuaYuan Si was one of the biggest temples I saw in China, and the day I was there, a celebration of some sort was going on. The temple complex was filled with old women and a few old men and several Buddhist monks and nuns. The old folks were eating, posing for pictures, and receiving blessings from the monks, all of them very old. I tried to find out what was happening but was unsuccessful. I think my presence was seen as something of an intrusion, especially when I tried to take some photos. An old monk asked me what I was doing in Datong. I told him I had come to see the caves. But when I asked him about the large crowds of senior citizens gathered at the temple, he walked away. I did not feel welcome.

Datong was one of the poorest, dirtiest cities I had seen in China. Many of the streets were unpaved, few sidewalks had been constructed, and the houses and shops looked rundown. Many of the shops were closed. Grit and coal dust permeated the air because Datong is a coal-mining town.

The people of Datong had a look about them that reminded me of people I had encountered in the coal-mining areas of Appalachian Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia. I felt like an invader from outer space as I walked the dusty streets. The people stared at me in a different way than I had previously experienced, and these blank-faced

stares of illiteracy and isolation made me uneasy. I saw few smiles in Datong.

That night, however, I happened onto one of the most curious and unexpected places I ever ran into in China. I refused to submit my stomach to the noxious Datong Guest House dining room for a second time, so I walked down the street to the Yungang Hotel where I hoped I could get something harmless to eat. The cavernous dining room at the Yungang was brightly lighted, clean, and very over-staffed. The food, unfortunately, was no better. After eating a bowl of rice, I ventured into the Yungang Hotel Coffee Bar and Disco for a drink.

I was pleased to find cold QingDao Beer available, and as soon as I sat down at the bar, the bartender slipped a cassette into the tape-player and I heard Otis Redding singing "Sitting On the Dock in the Bay." The friendly, English-speaking bartender played Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Doors, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, Joan Baez, and on and on.

When I asked him where he had acquired such decadent western music, he told me that an American businessman from Tennessee had stayed in the hotel for three months and had given him copies of the music to play at night when he returned from the mines. Evidently, the American was a coal-mining expert who had been invited by the Chinese government to do consulting work in Datong. I enjoyed the

music and the cold beer and got quietly bombed while the bartender and four waitresses watched me.

The following morning I took a city bus to the Yungang Caves. The caves were the reason I had come to dusty Datong. Located ten miles west of Datong in the cliff face of a heavily mined valley, the 1500 year-old manmade caves contained over 50,000 Buddhist statues. The cave faces have collapsed during the centuries, exposing the statues inside them to the dry, windy environment of northern Shanxi Province. I viewed about fifty caves.

One of the most impressive caves contained a Buddha over fifty feet tall and carved entirely from the rock face of the cliff. The large sitting Buddha had gigantic earlobes and half-open eyes. Other statues in other caves were thirty to forty-five feet in height and no longer complete because of centuries of erosion. Despite the deterioration, the Yungang Caves were definitely worth the trip. I saw nothing else in China to compare with the size and numbers of the religious relics still visible there.

I will remember Datong most, however, as the place where my Nikkormat camera met an untimely end. As I was walking back to the hotel from the bus station with camera in hand and its strap dangling at my side, a bicyclist's pedal snared the strap, wrenching the camera from my hands. The poor man on the bike stopped immediately, but my camera bounced several times before he could stop. He was

absolutely horrified.

I assured him that my camera was undamaged and that the accident was my fault. A huge crowd encircled us as we discussed the situation. I smiled at everyone, but no one smiled back. I walked on down the street, leaving the crowd to mull over what had happened. The accident was my fault, but my camera was totalled. I wanted to cry. I felt like a freshly castrated tourist. I remember wondering what good it was to be in China if I couldn't take pictures.

I had to spend one more miserable night at the Datong Guest House. After two days in the coal dust of Shanxi Province, I craved a hot bath. I also wanted some decent food, something more than cabbage and pork fat. Getting out of Datong was not a thrilling experience either. The train to Beijing left Datong at noon, so I went to the station at 8:00 that morning to get a ticket. I spent an hour in line only to be told that no tickets were available. I was determined to get on that train, so I decided to buy a platform pass, get on the train, and play ignorant foreigner.

I sat down outside the station to wait for my departure, but I drew such a huge crowd that I decided to walk around to kill the time. I was followed by a few beggars. This was the first time in my travels that I had even seen a beggar, let alone been approached by one. One man whose left leg was gangrenous was crawling from person



to person. The stench of his leg was sickening. I gave him some bills I had wadded up in my pockets and walked away from him.

The lines began forming for Train 44 to Beijing while I was wandering around. When I returned, I decided to get in line to position myself for the impending stampede toward the train. The people in line had frenzied looks on their faces. When the gates opened for boarding, the throng surged through the tiny opening en masse. It was if they were victims of a famine and someone was passing out food. I had to pull my pack through because it got caught as I was wedging my way inside. I ran along with the herd of passengers until I remembered I had taken the same train from Hohot to Datong two days before. It had been packed then. Why would this day be any different? My only hope for a seat was to sweet-talk my way onto the train and wrangle a softsleeper ticket from the conductor.

At first, the worker at car eight, the conductor's car, wouldn't let me on the train with just a platform pass. People were pushing their ways onto the train as if they were escaping from some terrible disaster. I waved my red card in front of the worker's face, making no impression, so I just pushed my way onto the train. I guess she decided to let someone else deal with me because she didn't follow me. Luckily, once I was on the train and found the conductor, I was able to buy a softsleeper ticket. I had to go through

something of the same routine to get the last train to Tianjin that night when I arrived in Beijing. When I reached my apartment at 11:00 that night, I felt as if I had been gone a month instead of six days.

For the next two weeks, I endured the first half of the new "summer session." Then on Friday, July 11, Andrea and I left Beijing on Train 48 at 6:35 p.m. for Guangzhou (Canton) and Hong Kong. The thirty-six hour journey to Guangzhou passed pleasantly and quickly. We had stocked up on goodies like cheese, bread, boiled ham, J&B Scotch, and two new novels at the Beijing Friendship Store before leaving, so we journeyed merrily south, eating, drinking, reading, looking, and anticipating the joys of the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou and the "decadence" of Hong Kong.

We arrived in Guangzhou at six o'clock Sunday morning and immediately caught a cab to the White Swan Hotel. Several teachers had touted this hotel as the finest in all of China. We had heard tales of nachos, margaritas, closed-circuit TV, indoor swimming, saunas, Reuben sandwiches, hospitality, and comfort. Knowing that the hotel wouldn't accept our RMB, we had dug out our credit cards, polished them up, and hit Guangzhou brandishing them like Islamic zealots waging holy war. Within fifteen minutes of our arrival at the check-in desk at the hotel, we had obtained a 90FEC room (we were even given a discount because we were teachers)1, had deposited our luggage in our fifth floor

room and were eating at the breakfast buffet in the large ornate lobby which houses a waterfall, arboretum, dozens of shops, two restaurants, a bar, and boutique. I ate my first strip of bacon and drank my first glass of real milk since my arrival in China.

Because we had arrived on the heels of a typhoon, the weather was terrible, hot and humid and cloudy. I never really noticed it, however, because for three days and three nights, we revelled in the self-contained environment of the hotel. It had everything I needed, and at the time I had absolutely no desire to play tourist. For three days and three nights, I ate, drank, swam, read, and watched TV. The White Swan was a great place to forget about Chinese trains, state-owned hotels and restaurants, and all the hassles you face when you travel on your own in China.

We were able to purchase tickets for the express train to Hong Kong at the hotel for Wednesday, July 16. The three-hour ride was actually like time travel. As we left Guangdong Province and entered the New Territories, we left the Third World and entered the developed world. The highways flowing with buses, horses, plodding water buffalos, and bicycles became freeways filled with Nissans, tractors, and motorcycles. Even Shenzhen, the border city, looked more like Hong Kong than a Chinese city. The tall, mirror-glassed high-rises were strange sights after a year of seeing six-story walk-ups. It felt good to be leaving

China, if only for four or five days.

We spent five days in Hong Kong, residing at Chungking Mansions, Nathan Road, Kowloon City. Actually, the name of our hostel in Chungking Mansions was the London House. We rented a room with a private bath, air-conditioner, and TV for \$120HK (about \$15US). It was clean, safe, and fifteen floors above Hong Kong's busiest street, Nathan Road. Chungking Mansions, a high-rise warren of small hostels catering to the economy-minded tourist, was a hodge-podge of humanity--all continents were represented there.

The most interesting thing about the place was its two elevators--one for the odd floors and one for the even floors. Very tiny and ancient, these two elevators were the only way to get and down in the 21-story building, unless you used the stairs, of course. Hundreds of people were staying there, making the journey to the upper floors time-consuming, a bit dangerous (the warning bell for the weight limit went off every time I rode one of them), and very comical. But almost everyone was patient and considerate, and I passed the time observing the vast variety of people who were staying in the building.

I arrived in Hong Kong toting a shopping list several pages long; consequently, I spent much of my time shopping in the Nathan Road District of Kowloon. There are thousands of stores along Nathan Road, and you can wear yourself out looking for the best bargains. I found that prices varied

little from store to store but that careful comparison could save you some money. I bought a new camera and short-wave radio. I suppose I got good deals, not that was a major consideration. I was not returning to China for another year without a camera and a radio.

We went to movies, ate in French, Italian, Japanese, and American restaurants, browsed for hours in bookstores, cooled off in Hong Kong's marvelous subways, and visited Victoria Peak. The window shopping at the gigantic Ocean Terminal Mall was a tremendous culture shock. Lounging in the Waltzing Matilda Pub drinking Fosters, I thought about our return to China. Sitting in front of the TV in our room, eating the Colonel's chicken, and watching "Dallas" re-runs, I wondered if I really wanted to go back.

On Monday, July 21, we returned to Guangzhou. Going through customs was a fairly strange experience this time. I had filled one suitcase with six quarts of Hellman's, ten Hormel Chili Kits, a liter of Bertoli Olive Oil, six boxes of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, two jars of French's Mustard, spices, packages of lentils and black beans, and ten cans of Star-Kist Chunk Light Tuna. You try explaining to a Chinese custom's agent what mayonnaise is.

When we arrived at the Guangzhou train station, thousands of people were trying to get train tickets north. We had hopes of buying tickets for a train that evening, but I was only able to come away with hardsleeper tickets in

different cars. We decided to try for soft sleeper tickets for the following day. I got back into a line for the refund window just as it was closing. Several men, however, asked me what tickets I had and how much I wanted for them. I soon became surrounded by screaming bidders for my two tickets. A policeman finally marched up and told the people to disburse, but I was able to sell my tickets to a man and his wife. They were ecstatic.

After a restful last night and day at the wonderful White Swan, we put ourselves and our mayonnaise on the train to Beijing at 10:00 Tuesday night. We shared our compartment with an elderly Australian couple who were travelling to Beijing to see their Chinese friend who had studied at the University of Sydney. It was their second trip to China, but their first on their own, so we talked about things to do and see in Beijing, hotel possibilities, and shortcuts to avoid the kinds of problems the individual traveller can encounter in China.

The next day, as the train passed through Guangdong and Hunan Provinces, I stayed glued to the window. The countryside was alive with farmers harvesting and planting rice in the paddies. In one paddy, a family would be cutting the yellowing stalks of rice with small sickles and stacking them in sheaves. In the very next paddy another family, up to their calves in water, would be carefully but quickly transplanting iridescent green seedlings into the

flooded field. The roads along the railroad right of way were used to dry the rice. As buses and trucks drove along the road, the farmers raked the rice into the middle of the road so that the vehicles acted as threshing machines. Then the threshed rice would be sacked up in burlap bags and stacked along the roadside for collection.

I also saw hundreds of lotus ponds, fish farms, and banana "plantations." On every conceivable place where something could grow, something was growing. The lakes, ponds, streams, and irrigation canals were also used to the maximum, home to gigantic flocks of geese and ducks. But I saw no modern machinery. All the work was being done by cone-hatted, barefoot farmers and sleep-walking water buffalos. Only an occasional electric line stretching across the paddies offered testimony that we were in the twentieth century. This scene never changed the entire day, except for when we entered the cities.

We arrived in Beijing at 8:46 on Tuesday morning, July 24, purchased tickets to Tianjin, and that evening, back in Tianjin, decided to go to Beidaihe, a small resort located on the Bohai Sea in Hebei Province. It took us three days to get tickets, however, so we were stuck at the Guest House which at this time of year was more like a ghost house. We were the only residents; everyone had left, and the new teachers had not yet arrived.

Beidaihe, five hours by train from Tianjin, was

exquisite. We spent eight days on the beach and eight nights playing Scrabble and listening to my new short-wave radio. I could get Armed Forces Radio, and we listened to some late-night or early morning baseball games live from the U.S. We stayed in an old Russian-built sanitarium that the government had converted into a guest house. Built right on the beach, the huge complex was a maze of cottages, gardens, pavilions, and walkways. Filled with Chinese cadres, Party members, and high officials on vacation, the Guest House offered us a view of the more privileged ranks of Chinese society.

We met Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang. They stayed in the Guest House every summer to escape the heat of Beijing summers. Yang was the editor emeritus of the English edition of Beijing Review, an influential monthly periodical. Mrs. Yang, an American by birth, had lived in China since the thirties. They had met and married when Yang was a student studying in the States. Well-known for their English translations of contemporary Chinese literature, the Yangs were a very charming and interesting couple, and unlike the rest of the Chinese "nobility" staying at the Guest House, they didn't seem to mind talking with us. They ate in the dining hall designated for foreigners. The rest of the Chinese used other facilities.

Aside from the mosquitos and a few overly curious stares, we enjoyed a restful week in Beidaihe. We ate fresh



boiled crabs everyday, baked ourselves in the sun, swam in the clear, cold water of the Bohai Sea, and took long walks at sunset on the sandy beaches. We took up residence everyday at the "Foreign Diplomats' Beach," a stretch of beach reserved for foreigners. We did this out of necessity. The Chinese are not sun-worshippers (they think tanned skin is ugly), and we found we could not lie in the sun in all our tanning-oil glory without causing a crowd to gather. The foreigner's beach offered seclusion, a bathhouse, and a shop which sold cold beer and rented chairs, air mattresses, and umbrellas.

We did take one day-trip to Shanhaiguan, a town 30 miles north of Beidaihe, to see where the Great Wall crumbles into the sea. "Shanhaiguan" means pass between the mountains and the sea, and it is there that the 6,000 mile wall begins. The government has restored the part of the Wall that runs through the city, which is about five miles from the sea.

Where the Wall actually begins on the beach, restoration was going on when we were there. Standing on the beach in the surf below the end of the Great Wall, I was struck by its magnitude and grandeur. Only a few weeks before, I had crossed a section of the Wall on my way to Inner Mongolia, about six hundred miles to the west. That distance encompassed a mere tenth of its total length. At Shanhaiguan, I stood watching young boys dive off the

crumbled ruins of the Great Wall into the Bohai Sea.

Both Shanhaiguan and Beidaihe were packed with Chinese tourists. These people were from what I would hazard to call China's middle and upper classes. I saw no peasant vacationers. It was also obvious that the Chinese take vacations in groups. I saw few individual travellers. Everywhere I looked, a group was lining up for a photo or a bus.

Many large factories and even some universities have their own villas and guest houses, and model workers, officials, and Party members are rewarded with vacations there. Before Deng's reforms and the fall of the "Gang of Four," Beidaihe had been the exclusive haunt of a privileged few in the Party and military. We saw the beautiful villa of Jiang Qing, Mao' widow and leader of the Gang of Four. It is now used by factories and work units from Beijing. From the scale of construction going on in the area, apparently the government intends to open the city to all kinds of tourists. It was a beautiful area--a developer's dream come true.

From Beidaihe, we returned to Tianjin to meet our friend Zhang Hong. A post-graduate student in the Architecture Department, Zhang had become my best friend in China and had invited us to go with him to Qiqihar in Heilongjiang Province to meet his family. I had no idea what to expect, but it seemed very important to Zhang that

Andrea and I meet his parents. I think he wanted to repay us for our help. He was preparing for TOEFL in order to apply for fellowships in U.S. universities. This trip would also give me the opportunity to experience Chinese life away from the university. Besides, Zhang had made all the arrangements for the trip, so we didn't have to hassle with train tickets or anything.

Zhang's brother-in-law was the dining car manager on the train that ran between Nanjing and Qiqihar. It passed through Tianjin. Zhang had written him about our trip, telling him when we would depart. His brother-in-law had written back that he would reserve us a softsleeper compartment, take care of our meals, and take care of us on our return to Tianjin. Except for the fact that the train was three hours late arriving in Tianjin on Thursday, August 7, everything went smoothly.

When the train arrived, Zhang's brother-in-law met us on the platform and escorted us to our berth. He had even arranged for us to be the only passengers in the berth, so Andrea and I had the compartment to ourselves. This was a welcome development--privacy and comfort. Zhang travelled with us in our compartment, but slept in the workers' quarters. We paid the normal price for the tickets, but the hassle-free treatment we received because we had a "backdoor" on Train 143 was great.

Shortly after the train departed from Tianjin, Zhang

went to talk to his brother-in-law about dinner. I had never eaten on a Chinese train before, but when Zhang returned and told us that everything was arranged, I had no choice. Zhang assured us that we would be well cared for, and this proved to be an understatement. We were treated to a small banquet after the other passengers had eaten; consequently, Andrea, Zhang, and I were the only diners. We were served five or six dishes, several bottles of beer, and as a special treat, toffee apples. Zhang had told his brother-in-law that "basipingguo" was one of my favorite dishes. In fact, when this fact became common knowledge, I was basipingguoed to death in Qiqihar.

The food was fair, but Andrea and I raved about it because Zhang's brother-in-law had gone to great lengths to make us feel comfortable. He would accept no money for the large meal.

The next day our trip north took us through the bottom of Liaoning Province, the eastern edges of Inner Mongolia and Jilin Province and into China's northern most province, Heilongjiang. This region of China is fairly flat. Occasionally, mountains rose up from the plains, but at times, as far as the eye could see, the land was covered with cornfields and peanut fields. The villages, however, looked the same as any other region of China. They appeared to grow out of the land as naturally as the gold silk crested cornstalks listing in a light northeastern breeze.

One noticeable difference was the absence of the South's ubiquitous water buffalo. In northern China, the chief beast of burden was the mule and, of course, man.

The train had been late the day before because of heavy rains and flooding. August is the month when the monsoon is at its peak in China, and as we journeyed north, the rain came down non-stop. The river bottoms in Liaoning and Inner Mongolia had turned into gigantic lakes, and I saw many villages completely under water. Peasants had moved to the railroad right-of-way which was elevated and dry, and had built makeshift shelters to live in until the waters receded. We passed through a world of mud and sludge in the waterlogged areas.

In Heilongjiang Province, the rains hadn't been as heavy, so the fields were crawling with farmers harvesting the corn and peanuts. I saw two mechanical harvester churning through large cornfields like small paddle-wheelers steaming up river. But in every other case, farmers and their families were cutting down the corn stalk by stalk, ripping the corn off the stalk ear by ear, and husking the ears piece by piece. As the train slowly chugged through the countryside, the cornfields seemed to emanate heat and humidity and suck up any available breeze.

Even though we arrived three hours late at the Qiqihar train station, Zhang's family was waiting to greet us. It was like a scene from a G-rated movie: son from a faraway

big city university arrives home with important visitors to see the proud family. The center of the welcoming committee was Zhang's tiny mother; his father, in poor health, was waiting at home. Other members of the group included one of Zhang's three brothers, two of his four sisters, a covey of nieces and nephews, his best friend from middle school, and a family friend who had a car.

Zhang hadn't been home in over a year, so the reunion was a tearfully joyful one. His mother was ecstatic to see her youngest child, and it was obvious that Zhang was the object of much family love and pride, being the first college graduate in the family.

After brief introductions and handshakes, the three of us were escorted to the square in front of the station. As we walked, people at the station openly inquired about who Andrea and I were and why we were in Qiqihar. Zhang's brother readily told them we were American teachers visiting his family. This seemed to please everyone. When we reached the square, we were put into the friend's car. The rest of the family got into a van that belonged to Zhang's high school friend's father's company.

A discussion followed about the evening's plans. We were to eat dinner that evening at Zhang's parents home, but Andrea and I requested that we be taken to our hotel so we could bathe and change clothes. The friend with the car, Li, said fine and off we went. Li was about my age, more

"robust" than most Chinese, a constant talker, and loved to laugh. He told us that another one of Zhang's brothers-in-law had reserved us a suite at a recently completed hotel that his work unit had built. This brother-in-law was a construction brigade leader and had a "backdoor" at this hotel. We would be the first foreigners to stay there.

Registration at the hotel was the quickest I had ever experienced in China. Our suite had a large bedroom and sitting room with two sofas, and a large bathroom with the biggest bathtub I have ever seen. The price was 22RMB, an unbelievable deal for what we were receiving. The hotel was like most standard hotels used by Chinese officials and businessmen--nothing like the White Swan, but comfortable, clean, and proletarian.

Li and Zhang showed us to the room and told us they would wait in the lobby while we got ready for dinner. I decided to take a bath first, but when I turned on the hot water, I got the usual cold stuff that seems to come out of all faucets in China. I decided to see just how far our "backdoor" would open. I went into the hall to ask the worker to turn on the hot water. Zhang's brother-in-law appeared on the scene. He introduced himself and asked if the accommodations were adequate. I thanked him for everything, assuring him that we were completely satisfied, but that we needed hot water.

"Meiyou wenti! (No problem)," he said with a smile,

and he went in search of the manager.

When he returned, he told me that I would have hot water in five minutes, and that anytime I wanted more just to inform the manager, whom he would introduce me to after we finished with our baths. I thought about the worker in the Kunming Hotel who had refused me hot water.

Within five minutes, we had hot water, and within thirty minutes, Zhang, Li, Wang (Zhang's brother-in-law who was the construction brigade leader), and the manager of the hotel knocked on the door. They came in, we were introduced to the manager, who bowed and extended an official welcome, and we were told that if any problems arose, he would take care of them personally. I felt like an ambassador.

From the hotel, we were taken in Li's car to the Zhang's home. I couldn't help noticing that Qiqihar, a city of one million, was very similar to Datong. Many of the streets were unpaved, and few sidewalks lined the streets that were. There were fewer six-story walk-ups than usual. I asked Zhang's about Qiqihar's prosperity.

"Qiqihar is a poor city. I mean the city government has less money than cities like Tianjin and Beijing. It is not the capital of the province, so there is less money for the city. But the people here are prosperous by Chinese standards. You will see what I mean when you visit my home, and the homes of my family members."

I thought Zhang had a screw loose or something as we



parked on a paved street in front of a long, narrow alleyway that ran between a group of one story buildings that looked more like hovels than "prosperous" homes. The alleyway was a muddy lane in which smelly sewage and garbage was floating. Zhang could tell that Andrea and I were uncomfortable as he lead us through the mud. The smell was awful.

But you can't judge Chinese homes by outward appearances, at least you couldn't the Zhangs. We came to a small gate, and Zhang motioned for us to go in. We entered a tiny courtyard filled with blooming roses and gladiolas, a parked Suzuki motorcycle, four small chicken coops, and several bicycles.

"Nick, this is my home. Welcome you to my home," Zhang said with a big grin on his face. "This is my parents' home on the left and my brother's home on the right. They share this courtyard. What do you think of it?"

"It is very nice, Harry," I said, using Zhang's English name.

We were shown into the sitting-room-bedroom-dining room of his parents' home. They had three rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom with a shower, and a small shed in back for cooking during the summer, and the courtyard. The house was immaculate: linoleum floors brightly polished and walls freshly painted. I noticed the symbols of prosperity Zhang had mentioned: a color TV, a double-cassette recorder, a

refrigerator, and a portable Toshiba washing machine.

As usual, Andrea and I were directed to the sofa, a folding table was placed in front of us, and we were offered tea, beer, brandy, wine, and cigarettes. Directly, Zhang's father tottered into the room to meet us.

Mr. Zhang was a wrinkled, stooped, wiry old man with a mouth full of gold-capped teeth. I believe he had emphysema because he had trouble talking for very long. He would become short of breath, but that didn't stop him from chain smoking. A retired high school teacher (he and Mrs. Zhang had both taught Mandarin and literature), Mr. Zhang was friendly and generous, but I don't think he knew quite how to deal with his youngest son's American friends. He said little, grinned a lot, smoked constantly, and drank whenever one of his sons-in-law filled his glass.

We were joined at the table for the evening meal by Harry's oldest brother, the obvious head of the family. The eldest of the Zhang's children was a plywood factory manager and, according to Harry, very successful. The state-owned factory he managed operated under a contract system that he had initiated. Management and workers were rewarded according to productivity; the better job you did, the more money you made. Harry's brother had the power to hire and fire, but he said he rarely used it.

Others who joined us were Harry's best friend, Liu, from high school, Li, the driver, and another one of Harry's

brothers who lived in the house next door and worked in the plywood factory. Harry had explained that Chinese remain lifelong friends with their high school classmates and that friendships formed at university weren't as important. Harry and Liu were very happy to see each other. Harry had missed Liu's wedding because of a conference he had to attend in Beijing, and one of the reasons for the visit home was to honor his friend and his new wife. When she was introduced to us, she was still wearing the bright red clothes of a new bride. She stayed in the room where we were eating for only a short time.

The meal-time situation at a Chinese home when they have special guests is a fairly segregated affair. Each meal we were served, five or six men joined us at the table. The women cooked and stayed in the other room. Occasionally, one of the children would sneak in to get a peak at us. Only towards the end of the meal when the women were certain that we and the men had eaten our fill would they come into talk a bit.

Mrs. Zhang did join us the first night, but she soon gave up her chair to a late arriving son-in-law. For one thing, we were drinking some of Mr. Zhang's oldest liquor, and women in China don't drink much if anything at all. For another, there just wasn't enough room. I counted 29 members in all at the first dinner.

We did get to have a less rigorous meal with Harry's

thirty-two-year-old sister and her husband, Wang, in their apartment. Only six of us ate and two of Harry's sisters joined us for the meal. But when the whole family gathered at the parents' home for meals like the first dinner, we were treated to large and tasty dinners and entirely too much booze.

I had never seen men in China drink like the men did at the Zhangs'. We imbibed several bottles of baijiu, sweet wine, and countless bottles of beer. The "ganbei's" were taken seriously there. If Li, the driver, toasted international friendship and drank a full shot of the white spirits, I was expected to do the same thing. The 110 proof liquor had the worst smell of any booze I've ever drunk, but anytime I refused the offer of a refill, everyone began apologizing for the poor quality of the "humble wine" they had to offer. The only thing that saved me from complete annihilation was the vast quantities of food and a sympathetic Harry who convinced his brothers and brothers-in-law that Americans just weren't used to such strong drink. I think they derived a measure of satisfaction from this confession.

And the cigarette smoke. Chinese men like to smoke while they eat. They like to smoke while they do everything. It is customary to handout cigarettes during family gatherings. It is considered good manners. Young Chinese women don't smoke, especially if they are unmarried.

Harry's oldest sister smoked, and Harry told me she was considered a very "independent" woman by the family and her friends, but she was in her mid-forties, her children were grown, and she was a cadre at a hospital. I only saw one young Chinese woman smoke while I was in China, and she turned heads. The Chinese believe only "fallen" girls smoke.

The day after we arrived in Qiqihar, Andrea and I had lunch at the hotel. Wang had told the manager we wanted a couple of dishes, soup, and rice. We were not pleased when the waitresses set plates of sea cucumbers, squid, and a whole-cooked fish in front of us. My stomach was still reeling from the ganbeis the night before. But we didn't want to offend anyone, so we picked at the food and asked for the bill. I expected the worst and the worst was what I got. The lunch-tab came to just under 100RMB. At most, we would have spent 10RMB for lunch had we ordered it ourselves.

That night, we made jiaozi at the Zhangs'. The evening was festive and baijiu smoked. My stomach was really on the blink, but I was not able to fend off piles of dumplings that kept appearing on my plate. By the next day, I had a full-fledged dose of Mao's revenge. Later I found out I was suffering from amoebic dysentery. When the Zhangs discovered I was ailing, Wang showed up at the hotel with medicine and ten rolls of toilet paper. The week's schedule

of family dinners and outings, however, remained the same. It was a funny kind of ordeal. I would have never survived without the charcoal pills Mrs. Zhang gave me for the diarrhea.

We visited the homes of Harry's oldest sister and Liu and his new wife. Located in six story walk-ups, both the apartments were the nicest and most modernly outfitted homes I visited. Wang boasted of the success of the Four Modernizations when we ate at his home, pointing to the Sony TV and cassette player, Toshiba refrigerator, washing machine and air-conditioner, two electric rice-cookers, and a natural gas stove. The apartment was filled with house plants and pictures of the family. Wang was proud of his acquisitions and the comfort of his home, and the more he drank that night, the prouder he became.

When we were taken to Liu's home, I was very surprised that a young couple would have such spacious and new living quarters. He and his wife had just moved into a brand new apartment, and it was furnished with all the symbols of Deng's economic reforms. The floors were even covered in hardwood parquet tiles. I asked him how he had obtained an apartment when young couples in Beijing and Tianjin had to wait sometimes for years to get a one-room flat.

"Housing is no problem in Qiqihar. Besides, my father is a cadre in the Housing Ministry for this district," he explained.

Harry just smiled at me and said, "Big backdoor. If I come back to Qiqihar to work after graduation, I can get me a wonderful place to live like this apartment. I have many backdoors in Qiqihar, but none in Tianjin."

I also asked Liu how much it cost to furnish his new apartment so well. The young couple had a new TV, icebox, oscillating fan, cassette-recorder, sofa, chairs, bookshelves, the hardwood floors, double bed, and on and on.

"This was very expensive. I saved for many years, and my family gave me 10,000RMB when I got married. I had to have the money to get married. Her family expected to me to have these things."

Liu took us one day on a day-trip to the newly opened Zhalong Bird Reserve. We were privileged to get to see it. The reserve, a series of marshes and small lakes, is home to over 400 species of birds during different time of the year. We didn't see all 400, but we did see some beautiful red-billed cranes and wild geese. The drive, in one of Liu's father's Toyota van, was wonderful in and of itself. Qiqihar is located on about the forty-seventh parallel. Mostly flat, the farmers there grow corn and wheat. It looks similar to parts of Minnesota or Wisconsin.

On another day, we were taken to the city park to the circus. Andrea and I enjoyed the performances, and the Chinese enjoyed our enjoyment of the performances. Held in a big-top tent, the circus must have been like circuses were

decades ago in the States. We were given front row seats right by the ring, introduced to several of the performers, and given bags of sunflower seeds and bottles of orange soda.

When the horses ran by, dirt splattered our feet. The acrobatics were unbelievable. I watched contortionist, plate spinners, beam balancers, wire-walkers, and trapeze artists. I also got a kick out of watching the up-tilted heads of the big-eyed children watching the performers. Mr. Zhang, who was a little senile, really had a good time, too. He did point out to me that the costumes and makeup of the performers were patterned after Beijing Opera characters: highlighted eyes, lots of feathers and plumes, platform shoes, long-sleeved silk robes, and strange and funny-looking hats. The quality of the show was exceptional, one of the best circuses I had ever seen.

On the day before we were to return to Tianjin, Andrea and I, as is customary in China, repaid the Zhangs for their hospitality by hosting a banquet at a local restaurant. Li, the driver, had a brother who was the head chef at a state-owned restaurant, and he arranged everything for us. We told Li how much we wanted to spend and left the choice of dishes to his brother. We gave Li the money, a carton of cigarettes for his brother, a carton of cigarettes for him, and all we had to do was arrive at the restaurant at noon for the banquet. Li even picked us up at the hotel; the



Zhangs arrived by bus and on bikes.

I was concerned at first that maybe we hadn't arranged for a large enough meal. But the food arrived in massive quantities and for almost two hours. Seated in a private dining room with two large tables, we did not finish the banquet until almost three. I sat at one table with Mr. Zhang, Harry, his three brothers, his three brothers-in-law, Li, and Liu. Andrea sat at another table with Mrs. Zhang, Harry's three sisters and sisters-in-law. The children were in school.

We exchanged toast after toast, and I presented a picture book of pandas to the Zhangs that I had purchased at the Beijing Friendship Store. When Mrs. Zhang opened it, she looked at me very strangely, and leaned across to our table to whisper something to Harry. Harry looked at me and grinned.

"My mother says the pictures are very beautiful, but the words are written in Japanese. She wants to know why you are giving them a book written in Japanese."

I suppose my face turned red as Sichuan peppers. I hadn't paid any attention to the captions of the pictures. I just thought the pictures of the pandas in the mountains of central China were very beautiful and had hoped the book would make a good gift. I explained I had made a mistake and would return the book, but Mrs. Zhang wouldn't hear of it. She even asked both Andrea and me to write something in

the cover.

On Wednesday night, August 13, we were escorted to the train by the whole Zhang clan. Harry's brother-in-law who worked on the train had already arranged for our compartment. Wang, in deference to my intestinal condition, sent me off with five rolls of toilet paper and a big grin. Li presented us with his and her watermelons. Mrs. Zhang held Andrea's hand until we boarded the train. Even old Mr. Zhang braved the rainy evening to see us off, and he must have shaken my hand five or six times. As we pulled away from the station, they all shouted "Goodby, we hope to meet you again."

Except for the dose of dysentery I picked up, the trip to Qiqihar was a great mood elevator. To be around such a nice family for a week was a good way to finish the summer vacation. The Zhangs wouldn't let us pay for anything the whole time we were there. We did pay for the hotel and the final banquet, but because of connections, "the backdoor," the costs of both were roughly one-third of what we would have had to pay otherwise. I learned how the "backdoor" works in China that week in Qiqihar. We never had to use taxis; Li or some other family friend with transportation always meet us at the appointed times. If we ate in a restaurant, we ate where the Zhangs knew someone, ensuring good food and service. When we were taken to the circus, one of Harry's high school classmates was a supervisor in

the work unit; consequently, we were admitted without tickets and given front-row seats. Andrea and I simply let the Zhangs kill us with kindness, generosity and hospitality.

Once we were back on the train, we both knew that we had about all the attention we could stand. It was time to get back to the Guest House. I was sick and didn't want to see anyone until I was better. The trouble was that classes started on Monday, August 18. I had to complete the last half of the "new summer session." I read in The China Daily as we travelled south from Qiqihar that the temperature in Tianjin that day was 96. Maybe I should have taken Mrs. Zhang up on her offer to stay in Qiqihar at her home until I was well.

## CHAPTER VI

### "ANY MONKEY CAN TEACH ENGLISH"

The last two weeks of August were also the last two weeks of the "special" summer term. The students who had returned from vacation came to class, but they didn't really expect to do anything important until the fall term officially began on September 1. In fact, the new foreign teachers hadn't even arrived yet, so I was the only teacher working in the EST section. I used the time to help the '84EST students work on compositions, their major weakness.

Rather than write, the students wanted to talk about the The Times Beijing bureau chief, John. F. Burns, who had been arrested and expelled from China for allegedly spying on military installations in August. He was to be the first of three foreign journalists thrown out of China during the school year.

Mark, never one to beat around the bush, asked, "Are all foreign journalists spies?"

"No one has convinced me that John Burns is a spy yet. And I don't think many foreign journalists are spies," I responded.

"But our government has said this man is a spy. He

went into parts of the China that he was not given permission to visit. Why did he break the law?"

I had heard on VOA that Burns had wandered into a restricted area without the proper travel permits, and that is risky business for journalists. The VOA report stated he was only taking a vacation with two friends: one American and one Chinese.

"I think he made a mistake, perhaps. But I don't think he is a spy. If your government really thought he was a spy, why would it let him go?" I directed this question to Mark. He didn't know what to say.

"Can foreign journalists go anywhere they want in the United States?" David asked.

"They can go anywhere I can go, and where John Burns went in China, I can go because I am not a journalist. This doesn't make any sense to me, but that is the rule." I was surprised at the amount of interest this event had generated.

"Do you think your country has spies in our country?" Sheri asked.

I cleared my throat, and they all giggled. "I don't know and don't care to know. Most countries have spies or people who gather information for their governments in most other countries. It is just a fact of international politics. But don't you think it would be difficult for John Burns, a large Caucasian, to be a secret agent in

China?"

Again, they laughed.

They also wanted to talk about what I thought about the Chinese education system after teaching in China for one year. I hedged a bit by telling them I did not know enough yet to come to any conclusions. I wanted to know what they thought about the quality of their educations at Tianjin University. They were uncharacteristically outspoken. Major complaints were unqualified teachers, the inaccessibility of professors, little or no choice in their curriculum, and the living conditions.

I asked them to write about education in China--the system, university life, the popularity of learning English, and so on. This project would consume our two week summer session, and I could help them in class with their writing. I also found that although their writing skills weren't nearly as good as their reading and speaking skills, they tended to express their own individuality more in writing. I think this was because they trusted me and had very little opportunity to air what for them might be controversial ideas or complaints.

The compositions ranged from glowing praise for China's education system to more concrete complaints about campus living conditions. Underlying all of their comments on these topics was a sense of relief that they had passed the right exams at the right times. Sheri wrote about the

series of examinations that students face from a very early age.

### Competition at Each Step

China's lower education includes primary school, six years, and middle school. The middle school consists of two parts--junior and senior. Each part lasts three years. For most of Chinese children, getting themselves enrolled in a primary school means the beginning of a competition that will last twelve years or more.

In China, children go to primary school when they are six years old or older, and they will stay there for six years because of the establishment of the six-year system which replaced the old five-year system in 1984. The school year opens in September. Each school year has two semesters with winter and summer vacations coming between them during January and August respectively. Most of the schools are run by the local governments and several by factories for some children of their employees.

The majority of students can go to junior middle school after they graduate from primary school. But they have to take an examination to decide which school to go to. Although all the

junior middle schools are supposedly equal in every respect, there are still a few schools which can get better students, that is, students with higher marks, than other schools because of their good reputation among students and their parents. In order to go to this kind of school, the children have to work very hard once they begin school life. This heavy burden is somewhat cruel to little children. The government is trying to change the situation, but the efforts seem to bear little fruit.

After the students go to middle school, the competition develops. Not every middle school offers the last three years; besides, the senior middle schools are classified into ordinary and key senior middle schools. Over 85% of the key senior middle school students attend a university or a college, but in ordinary schools, it is just the opposite. This situation adds to the junior middle school students' pressure. For them, entering a better junior middle school means more acute competition. For those who are in relatively poorer schools, the chance to go to a better senior middle school is less. Most of them will go to work if they have the chance or to a technical school to prepare for factory work, and



some go to professional trade schools to become tailors, chefs, nurses, and so on. They leave the competition from then on. But those who want to go to university will struggle to enter senior middle school, especially key senior middle schools.

In spite of the high percentage of the key senior middle school graduates who attend university or college, the competition in key senior middle schools is still very sharp because all want to go to a better university or college. For the students, the three years in senior middle school is very hard. They have to endure fierce pressure both physically and psychologically. Even after the entrance examination, their mental tension cannot be relaxed until they get the admission notice from a certain university.

After so many years of effort, most of the students have very good basic knowledge. The problem is that since they have to spend a lot of time reading textbooks from about the age of six because of the traditional examination system, many students lack social experiences, and they even can't do experiments in laboratory well because those are not contained in the entrance examination. This situation is getting more and

more consideration during recent years, and with the development of reform, the educational system in China has greatly changed. In the past few years some big cities, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou [Canton], have begun to use different examination papers from other cities, and also some universities are beginning to take in students before the national unified examination by another special examination. They are trying to find a better way to judge whether a student is qualified for higher education or not and to stimulate the students to open their eyes to more things outside their textbooks.

The lower educational system, however, has fostered many qualified students for universities and colleges, and it is getting more and more proficient. Most of the Chinese students appreciate it although it is still far from perfect.

The pressure on students who have been "designated" as potential university candidates is intense; it comes from parents, grandparents and junior and middle school teachers. On the other hand, if a student is from a middle school that is not a key school (university preparatory high school), the pressure is minimal. In fact, at those high schools, a student must be essentially self-motivated to acquire the

skills to pass the exams. He is really not expected to go to the university.

Like most of my students, Frank graduated from a key middle school. He and four other students in '84EST graduated from Tianjin Middle School Number 18. Over 90% of Frank's graduating class passed university entrance exams. (Of course when foreigners want to visit a high school in Tianjin, they are taken to Middle School Number 18.) Frank wrote about the popularity of learning English in China. Because Frank was trying to become a Party member, his writing tended to be less argumentative than other students, but this didn't keep him from expressing himself well.

#### English Education:

##### Paving Stones to the World

English, as the number one language in the world, holds a unique position in China's foreign language education. Especially in the last decade, it has become so common to hear of people learning English, that the rush to learn the language almost forms a sort of prevalent epidemic. As the "open door policy" bites into every corner of our society, the campaign to learn English, which reflects this policy and has brought China closer to the outer world, is stimulated.

But does systematic English education exist

in China? The answer is surely in the affirmative. This is carried out by those teaching institutions, such as primary schools, middle schools, and high schools, where English, as well as other compulsory courses, is taught.

Children in primary schools are characterized by short attention spans. They are not likely to focus their attention on their teachers very long. Also they are quick at acquiring knowledge by imaginative thinking. Therefore English teachers (as do other teachers) may like adopting the method of blending teaching with all sorts of amusing games, such as pictures drawing, recitations of children's stories, English songs singing and so on to animate the class in preference to simple instruction. Children are endowed with good memories. Teachers always exploit this gift by instilling more knowledge through an inventive atmosphere. No students are leaving soporific in class. They are deeply attracted by the teachers' dangling and delivering intellectual challenges. Thus a key role the English teachers in primary schools are playing is to offer the children a hand to establish their interests in English. This is essential and has a vital significance to the students when they

pursue advances studies later.

Who will cash in on all these exertions? The students, of course. After the preliminary stage at the primary school, they now enter a higher order of education--middle school, where everyone is inspired to study more sophisticated knowledge to the top of his bent. Rather than plain everyday cliches and simple fragments they had at the primary school, they are now starting setting foot in English grammar. The wide blue ocean is unfolding before their eyes, which teems with terrible storms and risky reefs. Their light skiffs are to weather all kinds of tempests and to stand the test of them. A series of pattern drills in the textbooks is imposed concurrently to help the students in their journey. At this stage of study, the teachers still try to animate the class by regularly doing conversations and error-finding exercises among students, so that everyone may learn something through laughter or relaxation. However, texts invariably need memorizing, as is recognized as a good means of studying English, by which the students are getting substantiated in mind.

In high schools, it is self-evident that the students should rely mostly on themselves. The

students are told that there is no shortcut of mastering a language; what is required is industry, perseverance and determination, through which they will ultimately enjoy a rich harvest. The teachers now are more like beacons, under which the students reach out in the dark of night for the dawn of victory. But this is a relatively fatal stage. If they successfully wrap it up, they will be in time soaring in the knowledge kingdom with their full-fledged wings.

This English educational system offers the students an opportunity to get a systematic study of the language. But this is by no means adequate. There is no limit to knowledge. In order to introduce advanced technology and management techniques and to do more business, just as the previous generation of Chinese students, the new generation is now doing their utmost and will prove to be the backbone in China's modernized construction.

Frank always displayed a cheerful optimism about being in the English program. He definitely had an affinity for the language and couldn't afford to complain if he wanted in the Party. But like all the rest of the students in the English For Science and Technology Section, Frank had chosen Tianjin University because he wanted to major in engineering, not

foreign languages. These students were chosen for the program after they had enrolled in other departments. Because they had scored well on the English section of the exam, the university "placed" them in the English program. Many of them were not pleased with this shift in curriculum. They knew that with training in English they would more than likely end up at the front of a classroom--the back of the line of status, pay, and mobility in China, especially for high school teachers (just like in the U.S).

Some of the students coped with the lack of choice in their careers better than others. David seemed to have accepted that he would be an English teacher rather than an architect. Harry, on the other hand, expressed bitterness and disappointment. Their two essays are good indicators of what life is like for a Chinese university student.

#### How about University Life in China?

In China, some university students always complain that their lives are dull and monotonous. They call the university life "three points and one line" life. Here three points represent three sites--dormitory, dining hall and classroom; and one line represents the road that connects these three sites. Everyday students go to these three points along the fixed line. Their whole lives are spent sleeping, eating, studying and go on in circles year in and year out. Is the university

life really like what these pessimistic students have described?

For university students, studying is still the main part of their lives. That's what they come to a university for in the first place. So as students, they can't be disgusted with studies although studying is hard work. If they think that studying is too hard or dull, they can adjust their lives in their spare time. This is not the case in the middle school, because in the middle school students have to spend most of their school time on listening to teachers. But in universities, students have more spare time. So how to make use of this spare time is the key to whether students' lives are dull or rich.

I am a junior in Tianjin University. Having looked back at my past three years, I don't think my life is dull.

When I was a freshman, studies were not so heavy. I thought I should have a strong and healthy body. So I began to learn football [soccer] which has now become my favorite sport. And also I joined a "Wushu" class in which I learned "ShaoLin Quan" from an old man [a particular type of martial art]. These sports brought me much happiness and energy. I benefit a



lot from it.

In the second year, studies became heavier. And I also found that my knowledge was too limited and that I needed to read more books to increase my knowledge. So I spent much of my spare time on reading masterpieces in literature and attending various lectures on science, culture, and history. I also like to see good movies. I think that is a good way for me both to relax and to gain knowledge.

At the beginning of this semester, I suddenly found that my life lacked music! That's a very sorry thing! My life should not be like that! So I bought a guitar and learned from a classmate of mine to play it. Now after dinner or before going to bed, I usually play my dear guitar, crooning a song. It helps me to refresh myself from tiredness and relieve my unhappiness. Now I find I can't live without it.

Living together with my classmates, I also get much happiness. On weekends, we often hold dancing parties in our classroom; on fine Sundays, we like to go to parks and have a good day; during spring vacation, we like to go out farther, then we decide to go for an outing to suburbs. The beautiful Nature gives us much

enjoyment. We seem to have arrived in another world which is so pure and peaceful.

Now some of my classmates have had girlfriends or boyfriends. Love makes their lives even more colorful. Every weekend they go out with their dates. One of my roommates, who is in love with a beautiful girl, always comes back very late at night but always in high spirits. Hearing the merry sound of his feet, I am sure he has had a good time. Although the university doesn't allow the students to be involved in love and calls for them to study hard, this kind of phenomenon still exists. I think it's human nature that a young fellow falls in love with a girl. It can't be forbidden by authority. Letting it develop naturally is the right attitude that the university leader should adopt.

Therefore, in China, the university life is not so dull as some students have claimed. But why do they have such feelings? I think the main reason is that these students are too inactive and are always in a passive state. They always think that the university should hold many activities, and then invite students to take part in them. They fail to see that their own lives should be created by themselves, not the president of the

university. The president has no responsibility to teach his students how to entertain themselves in their spare time. As young people who will enter into the society in the near future, students should learn how to arrange their own lives properly. The Chinese educational system may have some disadvantages and needs to be reformed. But it is not the main reason of the dull university life. I should say, in China there is no dull university life, but a few dull university students.

Harry's analysis stems, I think, from the feeling that he has had no choice in his future.

#### University Life in China--A Happy Tragedy

In China, the university is believed to be a cheerful realm by the public. Going to this kingdom seems to be the only way towards success for young people. Every year, millions of high school graduates and waiting-for-job youths are crowded at the university's gate, trying to gain a ticket to the realm.

The world inside the gate, in their minds, is so magnetic and mysterious. After all, only a few of all the entrance exam takers can get the passport. Of course, they are considered to be the lucky dogs. They're full of joy. While these

lucky ones are still immersed in happiness, the reality of the university strikes them remorselessly. The university is not a kingdom. It is not at all as good as people have expected. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. The university is like a hell in which students suffer from the beginning to the end.

Usually, the whole university life is four years long. The higher the student's grade is the deeper the students suffer.

Freshmen and idealists are synonyms. When freshmen first come into campus with their ignorant hearts full of joy and ambitions, everything in the university is so new and so strange to them. Their innocent minds sprout with new thoughts, new ideas and new views on life. They believe that after graduation, they will be promising and able intellectuals. One can recognize a freshman at first sight by his innocent smile on the face. Actually, freshmen's happiness is based on fantasies and wrong impressions of the university. When they discover that the real life in university is dull and bitter, they will feel empty inside. Once their beautiful dreams are broken, they begin to suffer from lack of mental ballast. Disappointment and

despair haunt them. Their young hearts are wounded badly. And this mental scar worries them till the next year.

When freshmen become sophomores, the idealists turn into romanticists. Sophomores hope that the consolation which comes from affection can help them escape from suffering. They also hope the affection can cure their wounded minds. So young lovers spend most of their spare time going to the movies, dancing, or dating. But all these can't help a lot. What is worse, this kind of emotion can seldom lead to true love. Once this puppy love ends, the students' wounded hearts will be hurt badly again. The boat of a student's life is crashed by a squall on the sea of bitterness. If there were no intimate companions to be their lifesavers, they would drown.

After the storm on the sea, the students land on the third year of university life. Juniors have seen the whole "realm" clearly. They know the university life inside out. They begin to complain about everything: the food is bad; the teachers are incompetent. Though they complain all the time, they can do nothing to change the bad situation. Juniors are suffering from their own incapacibilities.

Relatively speaking, seniors suffer the most. They face the distribution. In China, every university graduate has hardly any choice when he wants a job. The government has planned it for all the students. And after one has got a job, he can hardly change it; as is just like a rivet on a metal plate. Seniors are really like the prisoners in the hell who are waiting for the adjudication. They are very nervous and almost driven mad.

The whole story of university life ends. How happy the students were when they first came into the campus, and how lucky they were considered to be at that time. But the happy and lucky beginning leads to a tragic story. This "happy" tragedy can only bring a pained look on the student's face.

I think most of the students in the English Section felt like Harry--a bit betrayed, very disappointed, and worried about the future. Students in other departments didn't have this morale problem because their opportunities were greater. '84EST knew that out of a class of nineteen, fifteen or sixteen of them would end up teachers, and they had not planned for this when they took entrance exams at Tianjin University. They had not planned on becoming "rivets on a metal sheet."

The first new foreign teachers I met in the fall of 1986 were Mike from New York and Susan from Minnesota. Both were right out of college, had no teaching experience, and neither were English majors. Susan had a degree in art, and Mike had a degree in mathematics. I was a bit miffed that they had been hired because I had recommended two friends who had undergraduate degrees in English. The Foreign Affairs Office had told me that my friends were not qualified, but I knew the university was holding out until the last minute to see if someone unbelievable like a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics would freak out in the States and want a job in China. Of course, this didn't happen, and Mike and Susan were hired in late August. Susan was touring the world, and Mike was in China, studying Chinese at the Tianjin Foreign Language Institute. They were what Ji later told me were last minute hires because the university felt two native speakers were better than no teachers at all, something I had argued against before.

I invited them to dinner one evening. Andrea Thompson helped me prepare spaghetti and garlic bread. We were both proud of our efforts, but we forgot that young Mike and Susan hadn't been in China for over a year and that a plate of spaghetti was no big deal to them.

As we ate, Andrea and I told them about the students, the classes we taught, and some things to do in Tianjin.

Mike seemed uninterested, and finally he complained that he thought he was being hired to teach math and computer science. He had the mistaken idea that the university needed those kinds of instructors.

"They told me today I have to teach English. I don't know why they are making me do that. I am a mathematician. Any monkey can teach English!"

I looked at Andrea, and we both stuck out our jaws, started scratching our underarms, and wailing like Cheetah. This comment of Mike's was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy and would come back to haunt him, and for weeks every time I saw him, I did my monkey routine.

In fact, in late November, Xu Xinfeng from the Foreign Affairs Office called me to ask me to warn Michael and Susan that they would be fired if they did not improve their "teaching methodology." I told her that this responsibility belonged to the Foreign Language Department. I also told her that the department had no right to complain because it had hired two people who had never taught an English course before. The university wanted to put me in the position of being the heavy--"a face-saving" device for the university. When I told Michael and Susan that students were complaining about them and that students' complaints about foreign teachers were taken seriously, Mike became defensive and Susan was surprised. No one from the department had said anything to them, neither Mr. Ji nor Director Zhang. The



outcome of all of this was that Micheal quit at the end of the term, and Susan put more effort into preparation and finished the year. For me, this incident was another example of the problems inherent in Tianjin University's Foreign Language Department.

As the other new teachers arrived the last week of August and the first week of September, I was struck by their obvious enthusiasm and a tendency to give the university the benefit of the doubt. They experienced scheduling hassles, vague class directives, ancient textbooks, and broken appointments--the things Andrea and I were used to, but no longer overlooked. But just as I had wanted to avoid confrontation when I first arrived, the newcomers seemed uninterested in my comments and suggestions. They reacted to me as if I were some kind of malcontent. The difference between me and them, however, was that I felt like a resident working in a job and they felt like "guests."

In mid-September, Mike, Margaret, another one of the new teachers, and I were asked by the Foreign Affairs Office to be extras in a movie being filmed in Tianjin. We weren't really so much as asked as informed that the university had offered our services. A Shanghai production company needed three foreign extras for a children's movie it was making at the amusement park in Tianjin.

I was not thrilled to be included in this project. For

one thing, I was still having intermittent trouble with the amoebic dysentery. For another thing, no one could tell me exactly what the movie was about except that it was for children. I had visions of being some defecting American in a propaganda film and as soon as I returned to the States the first words out of the Custom's agent's mouth would be: "Why were you in that film?"

Deputy Director Liu assured me the film was non-political in nature. I had difficulty believing this because as yet I had not seen a movie that didn't have a political bent to it. When I asked her how much we would be paid, she said something about the experience itself being reward enough. Later I found out that the university received money for our services; work unit employment operates that way.

The estimated two nights' work turned into five, but after it was over, I was glad I took part in the project. I met the most precocious children I have ever met, observed what filming with a minimal budget is like, and found out that people in the arts in China have very much the same kinds of personalities as people in the arts anywhere.

The children, between eight and twelve, had all been in movies or on TV before. Out of the group of twenty-five, several were famous child actors in China. All of them came from single-child families, and all of them were spoiled prima donnas. Still, they were delightful, outspoken,

energetic, and talented.

When we weren't filming, which was most of the time, they played "paper, rock, scissors" with me or asked me the English words for things they would point to. Most of these kids were roly-poly little folks, and the adult supervisors constantly gave them sweets, cakes, and orange soda.

The filming of the movie was tedious going. The film crew had one camera, an antique generator that constantly broke down, and only a few spotlights. When the director called for a different angle during the filming of a scene, the camera and lights had to be moved; consequently, most scenes were filmed from one angle. The director must have been a child psychologist in another life because he was great with the children.

The director, crew, and adult actors were obviously show-biz folks. From their mannerisms, dress, and personalities, I could tell who held higher status. The man and woman who were the adult leads arrived in new Japanese cars; the rest of the crew arrived in a leased city bus. The director, the child star, and the man and woman were staying at the new Hyatt; the rest of the crew were staying at a guest house. I had a good time being around these people. Unlike many of the college teachers I knew, they seemed to be enjoying their work, even if they only had one camera.

I never found out exactly what the movie was about

until I saw it the following March. I was able to understand from the director that the plot involved a group of children who acquire the lease for a failed restaurant and turn it into a successful business. It didn't sound very communist oriented, but then when you hear Deng Xiaoping speak, sometimes it's easy to forget he's the most powerful communist in China.

On October 1, however, I knew for sure that I was living in a Marxist state. I had spent the previous Liberation Day in Tianjin because of the university's anniversary celebration, but this year I decided to go to Beijing to Tianan Men Square to see how Liberation Day was celebrated in the capital.

When I arrived at the square, all I could see was people--at least one million. Although no parades were scheduled, the square was filled with sculptures and symbols of China and the Party made from flowers. A giant red star made from poinsettias was located in the center of the square. Nearby, a large dragon stood glaring defiantly at the crowd. There were fountains, hammers and sickles, lions, smaller dragons, and smaller red stars.

The crowd was so thick that I could hardly move from one floral exhibit to the next. The one advantage I had over almost all of the one million or so people gathered was my height. I know many of the people filed through the square and never saw anything much but the backs of those in

front of them.

No one, however, had difficulty seeing the gigantic portraits of Marx and Engels, and Lenin and Stalin that had been put up on opposite sides of the square. I was shocked to see Uncle Joe's smiling face. It seemed very out of place to me, but then I was the only person I noticed who even paid it any attention. Another large portrait had been set up next to the red star in the middle of the square. I thought I recognized the man in the picture, but I wanted to make sure so I asked a man standing next to me.

"Who is that man in the picture," I asked in Mandarin.

"You know Chinese," he said in semi-shock.

I nodded and repeated my question.

"That is Sun Zhong Shan (Sun Yatsen)."

"Is his picture shown every Liberation Day?"

"Oh no, this is the first year," he replied, and went on to tell me who Sun Yatsen was as if I had never heard of the man. I listened attentively and thanked him for his help. The appearance of Sun Yatsen's portrait and a newly released feature film about his life signalled a changed interpretation (by the Party) of his contribution to New China. Beyond the portrait of China's first president, thousands of people were lined up to walk through Mao's tomb.

Liberation Day, 1987, however, was ironically overshadowed by the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince

Philip to China. The week's visit was extensively covered on television and in The China Daily. The government even constructed a new hotel for her royal highness near the living quarters of the highest officials like Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, and Zhao Ziyang.

Each night on the news, we were treated to pictures of the Queen in the Forbidden City, the Queen at the Temple of Heaven, the Queen at the Great Wall, and the Queen strolling in a garden in the Summer Palace with Deng. Each place Elizabeth visited, children by the scores waved Chinese and British flags. These were the children of the children a generation ago who would have bitterly denounced the royal family of England, but the Queen's press secretary announced that the her trip to Beijing was "full and a cause for joy."

I wondered how Mao would have reacted to seeing President Li Xiannian welcome the Queen with a twenty-one gun salute in front of the Great Hall of the People or listening in as the Queen and Deng dined on Peking Duck and chatted about bridge at a guest house built especially for the Queen?

Deng Xiaoping is a world famous bridge player; consequently, when my students found out that I knew how to play, they frequently asked me to teach them how to play. I put them off for almost six months, not because I didn't want to help them but because I was waiting for a book on

bridge to help me. When the book arrived in late October, I decided to start a Monday night bridge class/club. I posted a notice in '84EST's classroom and told some of the post-graduates about the class. I expected a handful of beginners, so I only printed twenty handouts for the first meeting. When I arrived at the classroom at 7:30 the first Monday night, I was greeted by more than seventy applauding would-be card players. The room was packed--SRO.

I was not prepared for this kind of turnout, but I was pleased with the group's initial enthusiasm. The twenty handouts were gobbled up by the hungry grabs of those students close to the lectern. They held the xeroxed copies like trophies or medals; this happened anytime I gave magazines or books to students during class. I promised the rest of the group I would make more copies for them by the next meeting.

The Monday night bridge class had two rules: speak English and have fun. For the most part, we abided by the rules, and I think that for some of the students, these "social affairs" helped them to gain confidence in using English--confidence they lacked in formal classes. Shy students, like Cathy and Louise from '84EST, turned into bidding, arguing, laughing, confused, questioning, capable English-speaking bridge players on Monday nights. Some of this was transplanted into the classroom. Some did not, but I know the students who attended the Monday Night Bridge

Class improved their spoken English even if they were learning bridge from one of the world's poorest bidders. They didn't know that, and I wasn't about to tell them.

The first three or four sessions I spent introducing the basic operations of the game. This information weeded out about half of the class who expected to learn bridge in one hour and be playing the next. Those who stayed on became much better players than I. They had no difficulty memorizing the five-card major bidding system, something I've never really done. Their success in learning bridge was a reflection of their ability to memorize. The Chinese education system is built around memorization, rote training, and repetition, and these kids were great at tasks that required these learning skills.

After the fourth session, we divided into teams and began playing hands. The class became more a free-for-all than a stuffy bridge club meeting. The arguments over bidding, the discussions about the order of play, the jokes about "dummy," and debates about things having nothing to do with bridge were all conducted in English in an atmosphere of relaxation: no "teacher," no monitors, no pressure.

These students were starved for what we would consider regular social interaction. All of them had spent most of their lives preparing to take exam after exam in order to get into the university. They really hadn't figured out how to have fun. The bridge class gave them the opportunity to



be themselves. It also gave them the opportunity to socialize with members of the opposite sex.

It was fun for me as well, but I became aware that this "class" wasn't looked upon with complete favor by certain people. Students who were Party members stopped coming to the class after the second meeting. Other students who wanted in the Party were told they should spend their time doing something more important. My spending so much time with the students made officials nervous. The class, however, was allowed to continue until the end of the semester.

The end of the fall semester of 1986 was as exciting but not as life-threatening as the end of the previous spring semester. Neither I nor any other foreigner was, however, a central figure in the events of late 1986 in China--that role first belonged to the university students and ultimately to Deng Xiaoping, China's most powerful man.

During early December, I began hearing reports on VOA and Radio Australia that students in Hefei and Shanghai had held public demonstrations for "democracy." I found this news totally unbelievable, and when I asked my students about the reports they either didn't know about the demonstrations or weren't going to express any opinions about them.

As December progressed, the frequency of the reports

increased on VOA, and I began seeing stories about student demonstrations in the South China Post, an English daily published in Hong Kong I could buy in Beijing. These "outsider" reports indicated that the demonstrations were not isolated incidents, but were events of significance. Neither CCTV nor The China Daily made any mention of student unrest. I asked my '84EST class about this "oversight" because by now they all knew about the large demonstrations that had been held in Shanghai, Wuhan, and Hefei.

"Will the Chinese newspapers or television report what is happening in these cities?" I asked.

In unison, the class responded, "Never!"

"But won't they have to eventually? Everyone knows about the demonstrations, don't they?"

David spoke up first. "Sure, everyone knows. We listened to BBC and VOA and we have a grapevine here in China, but the government will never allow these things to be on TV, never!"

I felt brave. "Why are the students demonstrating?"

"For freedom. They want democracy and freedom," Mark said, unaware that I was aware he had used the third person pronoun instead of the first.

"Are you planning to demonstrate?" I asked, not expecting an answer and not getting one. "Please be careful. Don't do anything to get yourselves in trouble without thinking about it first."

My students' predictions that the government would keep the demonstrations out of the news proved wrong. On December 22, newspapers and radio stations reported that "the majority of students took part in the demonstrations out of concern for reform and with good wishes for speeding up the process of socialist democracy." The reports went on to include information about "lawless elements overturning two cars in front of the municipal government [Shanghai] and some bad elements insulting women."

On December 23, a proclamation was read on nation-wide TV. The proclamation, taken from the newspaper Renmin Ribao (The People's Daily), the chief publication of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, said:

Political stability and unity is the key factor determining the success or failure of China's socialist modernization, and is the most important guarantee for persisting in reform and opening up to the outside world. As the reform is a deep-going revolution, it is normal to have different views on the questions. The Party and government welcome criticism and suggestions offered through normal democratic channels. But if some people take extreme actions just because they have different opinions, they will affect stability and unity and obstruct the smooth progress of the reform. Even if done with good intentions, things

will go contrary to their wishes, and they will play into the hands of those who harbor ulterior motives and are anxious to stir up trouble.

That was the first statement Renmin Ribao published about the student demonstrations and when the statement was read on TV, the first coverage they received on television. From reports from outside sources, I knew that student demonstrations had been going on in China since mid-November. I did not find out about these events until early December. For some Chinese, the information did not reach them until late December. My students were very surprised by the reports on CCTV even though they were days after the actual demonstrations.

The disparity in the reports from the outside and from the Chinese government was immense. VOA and The Times estimated the participants in the December 19-21 demonstrations in Shanghai at forty to fifty thousand. The government said just over 10,000, pointing out repeatedly that Shanghai has 175,000 students. Western journalists reported numerous arrests in Shanghai and Beijing. The Public Security Bureau claimed to have arrested two "student impostors" in Shanghai and one "demagogic trouble-maker" in Beijing. Despite the differences in these reports, everyone agreed that the government had shown remarkable restraint in handling the demonstrations. I think Hu Yaobang, the Party Secretary, was responsible for that restraint and that

restraint cost him his job in January when he "resigned" as Party Secretary.

On December 24, I was on my way to the Catholic Church for Christmas Eve Mass when I noticed a large group of students gathering around the fountain in front of the administration building. I stopped to see what was going on. As I watched the crowd continued to grow to about four thousand. This took less than ten minutes. As the crowd grew, the chants became louder. At first I couldn't understand them, but finally I heard "Minzhu! Minzhu!" (Democracy! Democracy!) very clearly. I was seeing Tianjin University's first and last student demonstration of 1986.

One of my post-grad students walked past me, and I asked him what was happening.

"Oh, these are young students who are following the fashion to demonstrate. For what I don't know. It is too cold for this nonsense. They are foolish children. They are going to do more harm than good."

"What are they chanting?" I asked Li, a veteran of the Culture Revolution.

"They are shouting democracy and demand freedom of demonstration and oppose tyranny--words most of them do not even understand. I must go. I do not want to be a part of this. You should go too. Everyone who is here will be known."

I considered Li's advice and left for the Catholic

Church. At the front gate of the university I saw several armed PSB officers standing guard at a locked gate. One of them asked me where I was going and let me through without delay. I later learned that the students had tried to march to the mayor's quarters, but additional armed militia had sealed off the campus. Undaunted, the students outflanked the PSB and headed out Nankai University's gate; their request to meet the mayor, however, was strongly rejected.

As I pedaled away from the university towards the church, I wondered what I would find when I returned. I hadn't forgotten that these students could become dangerous brick-throwing delinquents given the right circumstances. I had seen the photos of overturned cars in Shanghai. But the demonstration seemed less charged with emotion than the May 24 riot, and the police seemed content to let the crowd of mostly freshmen and sophomores yell themselves hoarse. The situation didn't seem too serious.

At an intersection near the Catholic Church, I paused to wait for the traffic light to change. A Chinese man of about fifty pulled up beside me. He was singing. At first I paid no attention to him, but then I realized that he was singing "O Come All Ye Faithful" in Chinese. I had become used to experiencing the unexpected in China, but this was extraordinary. I began to hum along with him, and he turned to me, smiling and nodding.

The light turned green, and as we moved through the

street, he asked in Chinese if I were a Christian.

"I was raised in a Christian home," I replied. "Merry Christmas."

"Are you a Catholic?" he asked, as we stopped at another intersection.

"No, I am a Protestant, but I am going to the Catholic Church for Christmas Mass." The intersection became crowded with waiting cyclists. "Are you a Catholic?" I asked him.

He leaned over and whispered that he was. I could tell he didn't want to talk about this where so many other people could hear. He told me goodbye and turned onto a side street.

The scene at the Catholic Church was bizarre. The mass was to begin at 8:00, so I arrived about fifteen minutes early. The square in front of the church was packed with people--several thousand. I had great difficulty pushing my way through the onlookers and spectators to get into the church which was filled to capacity.

I tried to inch my way forward toward the front of the sanctuary, but soon gave up. I felt like I was on a huge Chinese bus. I could barely hear the service when the priest began the mass. It was delivered in Latin and Chinese, and the hymns were sung in Chinese. I could tell the Christians from the curiosity seekers because they knew the words to the hymns and were following the mass. The church had only been reopened to the public the year before

and was filled with more gawkers than faithful. The atmosphere inside the church was a strange mixture of pious worship and side show thrill seeking. I left before the service ended because I felt as if I didn't belong there, as if I were one of the curious taking up a space that could have been occupied by someone more deserving.

Exams at the end of the semester were welcomed by administrators and Party officials because students turned from the business of staging demonstrations to studying and taking tests. By the last weeks of the term, the demonstrations were over and no one was talking about them. The government had decided the demonstrations would end and they ended. The papers were filled with a barrage of propaganda everyday. I soon tired of reading that the demonstrations were the result of "western influence and bourgeois liberalization." The China Daily headlines repeated this theme over and over. A typical editorial contained this rhetoric:

The student demonstrations, although nothing terrifying, were serious major events. They were the inevitable outcome of the weakness of some comrades in fighting the spread of bourgeois liberalization.

This warns us to firmly abide by the four cardinal principles. The principles are adherence to the socialist road, the people's democratic



dictatorship, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought.

Headlines such as these appeared everyday: "Complete westernizing attacked; Socialism: correct choice for China; Democratic dictatorship stressed; Paper raps capitalist tendency." In one edition of The China Daily, the four cardinal principles were mentioned eleven times. Exams served as a chief distraction and the Party's edicts ended these "serious major events."

Exams for me, however, proved to be an exercise in futility. They served as good examples of what part of my stay in China had become; I felt like a cosmetic rouge on the pale ashen face of the Foreign Language Department's sickly attempts at education.

Two weeks before I was to give exams, Mr. Guo came to my apartment for a meeting with me "to discuss important matters."

I was to give four exams. One of the exams would be given to eighty-five students in the cultural introduction class composed of juniors, seniors, and post-graduates. I had announced that the test would be an essay question and fifty multiple choice questions. When Mr. Guo told me that the department had decided that only juniors would take the test and that the seniors and post-graduates would be dismissed, I became very angry.

"This is not fair to the juniors. And how do I determine the grades for the seniors and post-graduates? I was told to give lectures and one final exam. How can you ask me to give grades to students who don't take the exams?"

"This is not a major problem. You can give grades according to your feelings. If you want to make it fairer for the juniors, then I suggest you give them a copy of the exam before the test so they will know the answers." Mr. Guo thought his answers very logical, I guess.

"You can't be serious. I will do no such thing. The seniors and post-graduates will get no grades from me unless they take the exam. I will not give the juniors copies of the questions before the exams. In fact, I will not give them an exam at all."

Mr. Guo looked at me in surprise--as if I were telling him a joke he couldn't quite understand.

"You must give an exam to the juniors. The Party Secretary will monitor the exam, so you see you must have a test on the assigned day in the assigned room. No problem for you to give the juniors the questions. Then they will do very well on the test. As for the seniors and post-graduates, just give them a pass or fail report. You need not give them number grades."

We went around in circles for almost an hour until I could see that no matter what I said the decisions had been made. I finally agreed to give pass/fail grades to the

seniors and post-graduates and to help the juniors with review. I felt totally manipulated and out of energy. I told him I would not give them a copy of the exam. He thought this very unreasonable. I couldn't believe that a teacher would even suggest the things he suggested, but then much of what was "accomplished" in the Foreign Language Department while I worked in it was all form and no substance anyway.

When I told the class about the exam, the seniors and post-graduates applauded and the juniors literally moaned. Their reactions really made me angry. I let them know that as long as their leaders played fast and loose with their grades and standards that their degrees were worthless as far as I was concerned. I asked them if it mattered to them that they all passed whether some worked harder than others. I threw in a reference to their "iron rice bowl diplomas" and left the class.

Out in the hall, I could hear the juniors complaining about having to take the exam and the seniors and post-graduates celebrating not having to take the exam. My speech had made little impression on anyone except the class monitor who reported it to Director Zhang, but he did not say anything to me about it until after winter vacation.

I know that my outspoken criticism of the exam cooled my relationship with the students. The start of a new political campaign the Party called "the anti-bourgeois

liberalization campaign" also chilled interactions I had with students and Chinese teachers. Suddenly, after eighteen months of openness, some of the open doors were being closed, but I was living now in China day by day, had established routines, and I didn't intend to stop them. Winter vacation would provide another opportunity to decompress, and I still found that daily life was an learning experience for me even if I were a "bourgeois liberal."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### "MEITIAN" (EVERYDAY)

6:30 a.m. Echoing between the buildings of Nankai University and Tianjin University is the sound of exercise music coming from strategically placed loudspeakers all over the campuses. I pull the pillow over my head and plan a covert action for the following night. In the cover of darkness, I will move from speaker to speaker with my wire cutters, snipping the wires so that I won't be subjected to an oriental Jack LaLane every morning.

This morning the exercise routine is followed by something classical, Beethoven or Brahms, but the music is so distorted I can't quite make it out. Besides, it's 6:30 in the morning, and I am not yet fully awake. The music stops, and the morning bulletins and news are read by a monotonous, but I'm told excellent, announcer. I pick up something about cucumber production quotas being met. Until seven, the voices and music bounce off the squadron of six-story walkups that house the older teachers until seven. Everyone is up; at least all the Chinese are up. Some foreigners in the Guest House have perfected the art of sleeping through this audio barrage of distortion. I have

not. I look out the opened window towards Nankai and notice dozens of joggers running around the soccer field. I know I am bourgeois because I still react negatively to people running in their street clothes.

At 7:00, I turn on the shortwave, which is tuned to Voice of America. This is my "Morning Show" in China. I listen to ten minutes of news, then twenty minutes of a program called "Frontline," then ten minutes of news in Special English, which I tape for my conversation classes if the reception is clear, and then twenty minutes of science and special interest stories. While I am listening to VOA, I get ready for classes which begin at 8:00. If I don't have a class at eight, I can hear another hour of VOA--that is, the same show word for word.

At 7:55, I go downstairs, say good morning to the workers in the lobby, find my bike among thirty or forty others that look just like mine, unlock it (my rear reflector lens has been stolen), put my books and notes in the rack over the rear wheel, and ride to class. Sometimes, if I am ahead of schedule, I linger by the garden across from the Guest House to watch old women doing taiqi. I can't believe how limber these bow-legged grandmothers are. I also can't imagine how many layers of clothes they have on. They are padded enough to be able to antagonize attack dogs safely.

When I get to Building 15, I find a parking place for

my bike among the hundreds that surround the building and go up to the third floor to my first class, '84EST Intensive Reading. This class lasts until 9:45, when the loudspeakers signal the morning's fifteen minute exercise break. While a few dedicated students and teachers exercise to the same routine heard at 6:30, most of the men and boys smoke and the girls gather in groups to giggle.

I take the time to go to a sidewalk vendor who sells "jinbing guazi." For thirty cents (RMB), I buy a fried bread stick wrapped in a crepe-like pancake made from eggs, flour, and water. The vendor always asks if I want hot sauce and is always surprised when I nod yes. I guess she thinks foreigners don't have a taste for hot sauce in the morning. I notice that the students who are also buying jinbing guazi use coupons instead of money, one of the benefits of socialism I never hear them complain about.

At 10:05, classes resume. I go to Building 19 to meet with my post-graduate class: An Introduction to British and American Culture. Unlike the under graduates, several of the post-grads are usually late to class. And this class is more formal than '84EST. I have difficulty in initiating class discussion. These older students are reluctant to speak out. The younger students are not.

Although classes are supposed to go until 11:50, I have learned that you are not at all popular with students if you don't end class by 11:30 so they can get to their dining

halls early. If I am still lecturing when all the other teachers have ended class, my voice is drowned out by the hallway noises of shuffling feet and cackling voices anyway. At 11:30, I dismiss class.

I return to the Guest House, anticipating the mail. The weather is good today, so Madame Dai has fetched the mail, and it is spread out on the lobby desk. I pick through it. I get a letter from home and feel good. Usually I have no mail and feel isolated, especially if one of the other residents has received five or six letters. I notice the letter that should have gone to Wuhan University is still sitting on the desk. It's been there a couple of weeks even though I have told the staff the letter was delivered to the wrong address. I wonder how many of my letters are somewhere else in China. I also pick up my copy of The China Daily. I get the paper everyday but Mondays. There is no Sunday edition, and the paper takes a day or two to get to me from Beijing. It's not a wealth of information, but it is in English.

At 12:00, the dining hall opens. The blackboard menu looks suspiciously the same as yesterday's:

- |                           |         |
|---------------------------|---------|
| 1. Pork and Peppers       | 1.80RMB |
| 2. Pork and Crepes (eggs) | 1.80RMB |
| 3. Pork and Potatoes      | 1.20RMB |
| 4. Pork and Cabbage       | 1.20RMB |
| 5. Pork of Somek ind      | 1.20RMB |



I look disgustedly at the blackboard, frown at the waitress, and order two scrambled eggs, toast, and a bottle of beer. I long for green leafy vegetables, but none are in season.

I am joined at the long table by several other teachers. We complain about the menu, joke about the "pork of somek ind," talk about students, share mail, and skim The China Daily. I comment on the headlines: "10 Million Rats Killed in Campaign in Beijing." My eggs come and they are hard-fried. I tell the waitress I wanted scrambled, and she looks at me with a vacant stare. My toast is still frozen. I explain to her that the bread needs to be taken from the freezer before they toast it. I am met with another vacant stare.

After lunch, I go to my apartment. All serious activity in China halts from 11:30 to 2:00. This is "xiuxi" or siesta time. I read The China Daily or turn on the TV to see what is on. I never know what's on because there is no reliable TV guide. The China Daily lists programs and approximate times, but I know I can't count on it.

I have no classes in the afternoons right now, so I write letters, grade papers, study Chinese, read best sellers, do laundry, or take a nap until 3:30 or 4:00. Sometimes, students come by to chat in the afternoons, but always after 2:00, and they always leave before 5:00. If they don't, all of the best food will be gone in their dining halls which open at 5:00.

Today, however, I decide to go downtown to find a battery for my watch. If I have to go downtown, I always go right after lunch because most people are taking their siestas or still eating. The buses aren't as crowded, and sometimes I even get a seat. The stores aren't as busy either, but finding a clerk to wait on you can be a challenge at this time of day.

Downtown, I go to Tianjin Department Store No. One. This store has four floors stocked with dry goods, clothing, fabric, appliances, and hardware. It reminds me of a 1950's Sears. I wander from floor to floor because no one that I ask can tell me if the store has batteries for watches. I locate the watch department, but no workers are behind the counter. I see several size batteries, but I don't see the size for my watch. I wait for about ten minutes, but no one comes to help me. I know from previous experience not to approach someone who works at another counter. I leave the department store.

Walking down Heping Street, I look for a jewelry store. I have to look in the stores because I can't read the signs and many of the stores don't have window displays. I walk into pharmacies with shelves stacked with antelope antlers and ginseng root, music stores blasting distorted Hong Kong disco on their sound systems, sweet shops lined with cookie-filled wooden bins, and shops that seem to sell the most unrelated goods. That's why I go into each shop. You can

never tell where you might find a battery. I find what I need in a store that sells bras, radios, cigarettes, and recycled light bulbs today. Tomorrow, it will probably sell something entirely different. It's not the law of supply and demand in China; it's the law of supply--you can demand all you want to. The only logic to the shops on Heping Street is that there is no logic.

At 3:30 or 4:00, I go to our dining hall to check out the blackboard. It hasn't changed since lunch, so I decide to shop for my own dinner. I have two hot-plates and cooking utensils to do my own cooking. I never know what I will buy when I shop for dinner. It all depends on what is available, but I always wait until late in the afternoon to shop because markets and vendors essentially close down during xiuxi and don't reopen until 3:00 or so.

I enjoy shopping for food, but it can also be very frustrating. Today, I hope I can find some beef so I can make chili. I have located two meat markets that sometimes have beef. They are both about fifteen minutes away. If I get to the first one by 3:30, the line is usually short. If I go later, the line will be long, and chances are the butcher will sell out before my turn comes. But today, all he has is mutton bones and ground fatty pork, so I go to the second market. The line is long, but I can see that the butcher has a sizeable inventory today, so I get in line with my Ziplock bag which causes a lot of comment when the

butcher dumps my meat into it and I zip it up. A woman asks me where I got the bag. I tell her I brought it from the United States. She tells me how wonderful it is. I wish I had a spare to give her. When she gets her meat, the butcher wraps it in old newspaper.

While I am standing in line, a cadre or Party member walks up. He's wearing the uniform of the official: Mao suit, fountain pen in the pocket, and Mao hat. I notice he goes to the head of the line and is given a choice piece of meat. Not one of the thirty or so people in line say anything to him, but I shout out "Paidui! Paidui! (line up)." He pays no attention to me, but after he leaves, the people in line congratulate me for saying something and staying in line even though the butcher had also motioned for me to come to the head of the line.

Sometimes, I stand in line, ready to buy three or four pounds of meat to put in the freezer. The first time I did this, I didn't realize I had so badly depleted the supply that many people standing behind me didn't get anything. Today, I ask the butcher if he has plenty of meat. He tells me that he does, so I don't hesitate to buy enough meat for two or three meals.

After buying meat, I go to a grocery store to buy tomato paste. The store is state-owned, and I have difficulty getting the clerk to wait on me. She and another worker are talking. I have learned that you have to shout

to get clerks' attention, especially in state-owned stores. When I finally get her attention, I ask her for four cans of paste. Everything is behind counters in Chinese shops and stores. You can't just pick up what you want and go to cash register to pay for it all at one time. She hands me the four cans, and I give her a 10RMB note. I don't have change, and she is upset because she has to dig through a shoe box of bills to make change. I have to go through the same routine at another counter to get a bag of salt, and then repeat it at still another counter to buy two onions. Shopping in China takes more patience than money.

Next, I bike to the nearest free market. A free market is usually a short street lined with stalls operated by peasant vendors who can sell their goods at flexible prices, and they keep the profits. They do pay a graduated tax. During the right seasons, the free markets are the best places to buy fruits, vegetables, and fish. The produce is always better in the free markets than it is in the state-owned markets, but it is more expensive. Still, most Chinese shop at free markets because the vendors are friendlier, more attentive, and offer better goods. In the free markets, you can feel the competitive spirit.

At the front of the narrow street where the Baolитай Free Market is located, I park my bike. I like to meander from side to side of the street, inspecting what is being sold that day. In the first few stalls, I see the familiar

faces of the bike mechanic, cobbler, locksmith, and tailor. I nod hello to them, but these old guys haven't quite figured out what to think about this big foreigner. Then I pass by stalls that offer canned goods--potted meats, canned mushrooms, tomatoes, and pineapple. The cans of pineapple are rusted because they are too expensive for most people to buy.

As I stroll past the stalls of cucumbers, dried lotus roots, cucumbers, garlic, cucumbers, dried lotus roots, and cucumbers, I can tell that the vegetable of the day all over Tianjin is going to be cucumbers. The best time for buying vegetables is in September and October when you can easily find carrots, celery, cauliflower, leeks, eggplants, potatoes, tomatoes, bell peppers, radishes, and spring onions: a two-to-three-week period of plenty. In the winter, the state-owned grocery stores have virtually no fresh vegetables to offer, but you can find bean sprouts, cabbage, and potatoes sometimes in the free markets.

Past the vegetables, I know I am close to the fish stalls because I can smell them before I see them. Today, one table is piled high with shrimp. I walk up to the stall, and the vendor fills the scales with two or three pounds before I say a word. I look at the shrimp. They are tiny, all head and tail--too much work and too expensive. I shake my head and walk away.

A few stalls down, I pause, even though the smell is

wretched, to watch the eel vendor take the backbones out of a dozen eels that a customer has picked out. The vendor has a four-foot board with a nail driven up through the bottom of one end of it. He sticks the eel's head on the nail, stretches it out on the board and runs a knife the length of the eel, exposing the backbone. He pulls out the backbone, chops off the head, and slings the meat onto a piece of newspaper. Behind him and his bloody apron, I notice a large pile of backbones and heads.

A fish monger shoves a large carp in front of my face. He has a tin washtub full of them. I smile and tell him that I don't like fish with so many bones. He shakes his head because he can't understand my "accented" Chinese.

I like to go to this free market near the campus because some of the vendors know me and aren't afraid to talk with me. I usually buy more than the average customer, so they know I am also worth a hearty sales pitch. Today, as I walk past a peasant from whom I sometimes buy eggs, he shouts to me that his eggs are the freshest in the market.

"My son brought them into the city just this afternoon," he says, as he beckons me over to his stall.

Another egg vendor shakes his head and tells me that his competitor's eggs have been there since yesterday. "Buy my eggs. They are fresh and much larger than his."

I smile at them both and tell them that I don't want eggs today because I have nothing to put them in. Besides,

I had bought a dozen yesterday. Both of the sun-baked men smile at me and tell me to be sure to return tomorrow.

I stop at the stall where I usually talk to a young man. He is a "waiting for job youth" who is helping his uncle sell a hodge-podge of goods. Today, he is hawking some local Tianjin beer, a few brands of unpopular cigarettes, and boiled peanuts. He is waiting for a job assignment, but there are no jobs available. When his father retires next year from a textile factory, he will get his father's job.

I also enjoy stopping by this stall because I get the chance to practice my Mandarin. The young man speaks without the accent of most of the peasants and farmers in the free market, so I can understand him. He also likes to practice his English. My Chinese and his English are about the same level; we help each other out. He tells me where the best bargains are and what vendors to watch out for. Everything is sold according to weight, and the vendors use counter-balanced handheld scales. I couldn't figure out how the scales were calibrated until the young man showed me how they work.

After finishing my shopping, I get on my bike and head back to the university. The streets are packed with rush-hour traffic--thousands of bicyclists, plodding buses, horse-drawn wagons, and a few cars. I am used to the anarchy of the streets. Traffic laws exist, but no one



obeys them. Old men cross the street without looking. People shoot out of gates or side streets without yielding the right of way. If there is a brown-out and the traffic lights aren't working, the intersections become snarled with uncompromising, fist-shaking, bell-ringing fanatics. But coming from the free market, I cut across Nankai University to miss the madness of the boulevard that passes in front of the two universities.

Once I am back in my apartment, I cook the chili, using a Hormel Chili Kit I received in the mail from a sympathetic friend in the U.S. While the chili simmers, I watch the nightly news. It comes on every night at 7:00 and begins with national news, which last for twenty minutes. This is followed by international news for ten minutes, and then the national weather forecast which ends the program. The national news is generally a series of stories about Chinese leaders meeting foreign dignitaries, model workers in state-owned factories meeting other model workers from other state-owned factories, the trial and execution of some embezzling Party official, a "new" invention, forecasts for the upcoming grain harvests, and an endless parade of officials in meetings. Sometimes, the entire national news segment seems to be about meetings in different parts of the country. Meetings are big news in China.

The coverage of international news is brief but objective. The pictures of incidents and events are taken

from satellite transmissions of the outside world's major news agencies. If I can't always understand the words of the announcer, at least I can see the pictures. The reports are brief, but seem to focus on the major headlines of the day. I like to compare what's reported on VOA and CCTV. Usually, there isn't much difference unless it is a story that deals with the United States doing something that the Chinese government officially denounces--like the bombing of Libya.

I watch TV a bit each night to practice my Chinese. The nightly programs are generally unappealing and of a too practical nature for me. You can learn how to cipher with the abacus, maneuver a forklift, repair a tape-recorder, speak French, use a 35mm camera, raise rabbits, or build a better chicken coop by watching CCTV. These kinds of how-to programs take up a large portion of prime-time. Because Tianjin has only two stations (both use the same programming but different schedules), you can't twist the dial until you find something that interests you more than how to drive a forklift.

I do manage to find some programs that I watch regularly. On Sunday nights at 6:30, "Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck" come on for thirty minutes. This program is my favorite. I enjoy the old Disney cartoons and the dubbed dialogue is simple enough for me to understand. On Mondays and Thursdays, "Little House on the Prairie" is presented at

9:00. Michael Landon still comes off as an older Little Joe, even in Chinese. Tonight, I watch "Martin ShuShu," Uncle Martin, or what most people remember as "My Favorite Martian."

"Uncle Martin" is over at 10:00. It is followed by "Notables and Their Remarks," except every time I watch this religiously toned program, the only notable making any remark is Karl Marx. The actor speaks in a soft, lilting manner, like an Episcopalian minister just before sign-off. He even has a puffy hairdo and looks as if he has a crook in his neck.

Because the day starts early in China, I am content to turn off the TV and go to bed. I listen to the VOA Jazz Hour and read until I am sleepy. Maybe tomorrow there will be some oranges or bananas in the markets. I heard that rumor this afternoon. Fresh fruit, this is the stuff dreams are made on in China.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TRAIN AND BOATS AND PLANES

When I called the CITS (China International Service) agent in Harbin, he assured me that the Ice Lights Festival would begin on schedule--January 1. Several of the teachers living at the Guest House decided to make a quick trip to Harbin, an eighteen-hour train ride north, to see the ice carvings, sculptures, and buildings made from massive blocks of ice cut out of the Songhua River. The Ice Lights Festival is one of China's most famous annual events, and we were all excited to get the opportunity to see it. We had a two day holiday and the weekend, so we would spend two nights on the train and two nights in Harbin.

Ten of us set out for Heilongjiang Province on New Year's Day from Beijing. Even though the train to Harbin passed through Tianjin, we had to go to Beijing in order to get hardsleeper tickets. The train left at 7:40 in the evening. The temperature in Beijing was about 20 degrees above zero. The train had no heat, but we were prepared for the cold because by the time we arrived in Harbin the next day just after noon, the temperature would be well below zero.

The first task we tried to perform when we arrived at the Harbin train station was to purchase return tickets. I volunteered for this harrowing duty and ended up embarking on an odyssey that took me through two cavernous, terribly frosty buildings. I left everyone else huddled in the middle of the station trying to stay warm while I tried to locate the office or window where foreigners could buy tickets. The air was so icy that breathing was like inhaling a snow-cone.

After asking several frozen workers where I could purchase tickets, I was finally told that I had to go to CITS in the International Hotel. When I returned to my group, I found them talking with a policeman. He was advising them where to buy tickets and how to find the hotel. He even volunteered to get us taxis, but couldn't promise how long that would take. Because the hotel was only a few blocks from the train station, we decided to walk. We were already ice cubes anyway, so the walk would help to force the blood to numb appendages.

Luckily, we had no trouble finding the hotel, booking rooms, and buying return tickets. Our rooms were warm even though three inches of ice covered the outside of the windows. The bathroom even had hot water. A premature feeling of security overcame us all, but we were happy to be off icebox train.

That afternoon, Andrea Thompson and I took a city bus

to Stalin Park where the Ice Lights Festival is held. We had trouble locating the entrance, and when we did we were turned away. The guard at the gate told us that the park would not be opened until the fifth of January. I argued with the guard, telling him that CITS had told me that the park would be open and that we could see the carvings and sculptures. I pleaded with him to let us in the park. We could see people strolling among the fantastic looking ice carvings. I told him that we had come all the way from Tianjin and had to return on the following day to be back at work. He was unyielding and wouldn't let us in. I wanted to start a political movement of my own right then and there. We began to walk away angry, depressed, and cold.

An official had heard me complaining to the guard and motioned for us to follow him. He lead us through a labyrinth of buildings, directed us to a doorway, and told us we needed 5RMB. When I pulled out RMB instead of FEC, the worker shook her head. We dug through our packs for the right currency and shoved it into her hand. Then she let us through, and we were in the park. If the official had not intervened, we would have journeyed all the way to northernmost China just to experience sub-zero temperatures.

Stalin Park was literally a winter wonderland. It was filled with spectators, sculptors, workers, and hundreds of statues, carvings, and buildings all made from ice. We saw replicas of temples, Russian churches, fountains, and famous

buildings and bridges made from ice blocks. The workers used colossal cross-cut saws to cut the blocks brought from the nearby river into the right dimensions and hot water to melt the blocks together.

In one area of the park, artists were carving figures from large blocks of ice with sculptors' tools. At least one hundred men and women must have been working on their statues that afternoon. The craftsmanship was outstanding. There were statues of soldiers, strong-featured peasants, phoenixes, dragons, fish, and lots of rabbits--the coming lunar year was the year of the rabbit. One statue was a soldier with his rifle in one hand and a dove in the other. Another depicted a woman kissing a soldier goodbye. A huge carved map of China towered over the statues.

I became so involved in watching the artists at work that I didn't notice the arctic temperatures. I took picture after picture until my camera froze up and wouldn't work anymore. I watched workers building large slides of ice for the children, and I watched the children of the artists, workers and officials who had been let in play on the slides that had been finished. Other children stood watching from outside the park.

A heavy snow began falling, and the sky became very shadowy. The ice buildings, walkways, and bridges had been constructed with colored electric lights inside the ice. As the sky darkened, the park became a kaleidoscope of

Christmas colors and sparkling reflections. The three hours we spent in Stalin Park were worth the wretchedly cold eighteen-hour train ride even though we only got to see the illuminated park that night from the outside. It sparkled like carefully cut diamonds and jewels.

The next day we wandered around Harbin. The day was even colder than the one before because the snow was replaced by sunshine and strong northerly winds. I asked a worker at the hotel about the temperature. "Forty degrees below zero," he told me.

Harbin looked nothing like other Chinese cities. Were it not for the people, you could imagine you were in Russia or some other Eastern European country. The skyline of the city was dotted with onion-shaped towers of old Russian Orthodox churches covered in thin layers of ice and snow. The icy main boulevards were lined with buildings that had mansard fronts or high, sloping roofs. Harbin lacked the monotony and uniformity of cities like Beijing and Tianjin. Only Shanghai offers more architectural variety. But the weather that day was too much for me. It hurt to breathe, and my feet felt like semi-dead pieces of meat with pins stuck in them. Andrea and I spent much of the day in the bar of the hotel, drinking coffee and Chinese brandy. We met other foreign teachers from Beijing, Shanghai, and Changchun who had used the brief holiday to come see the ice carvings. Some of them hadn't been lucky enough to get into



the park and were very unhappy. We, however, saw most of what we came to see and left Harbin the next day to return to Tianjin satisfied and ready to begin winter vacation in two weeks.

On January 14, Andrea and I left Beijing for Chengdu, Sichuan Province. The two-day journey took us through southern Hebei, northern Henan, and central Shanxi Provinces. The one full day we had to gaze at the countryside, we saw the rugged, barren areas of Shanxi Province. The landscape appeared poor and desolate from the comfort of our soft sleeper berth. The wheat fields carved out of the mountainsides were colorless patches of stubble. When we passed through cities, a veil of coal smoke hung over them like a sickly grey fog. From the train, I could tell that many peasants still lived in cave dwellings. There was nothing pastoral about the countryside we travelled through on the second day from Beijing.

The next morning, however, brought an extraordinary transformation. As we neared Chengdu, located in the very heart of China's rice basket, the landscape turned into a paint chart of the various shades of green. The villages had a look of prosperity about them that I had not seen anywhere in China. Thousands of large, single-family houses made from real brick, not adobe, punctuated the countryside. The houses had colorfully painted wooden window frames and doors. TV antennas crowned almost every farm house and all

of the houses in the villages. In this area of China, many of the farmers had become heads of "10,000 yuan" households. They are often cited as evidence of the success of Deng's economic reforms.

At first glimpse, Chengdu looked like Beijing and Tianjin--six story walkups, wide bus-filled avenues, and featureless buildings where the same things were sold in shop after shop. But like Kunming and Guilin, the more we explored the city, the more it differed from its northern sisters.

The first landmark I recognized on the way from the train station to the Jinjiang Hotel, however, was an immense statue of Chairman Mao standing in front of the provincial building at the end of Liberation Street. Towering over the end of the wide avenue, the Great Helmsman benevolently salutes the people of Chengdu. At the northern end of the street, an identical statue returns the salute. The figures are six or seven stories tall: you can see the mole on his chin from three city blocks away.

We checked into the Jinjiang Hotel (the only other option was a dank, dark, moldy guest house built in an abandoned bomb shelter), which was full of foreign tourists and Chinese dignitaries. The hotel had a pleasant bar in the lobby, a western-style coffee shop, and a disco. It even offered closed-circuit TV programs in English. We also found that we could use RMB to purchase imported liquor, so

after finding our room, we headed back to the lobby bar to have a few Jack Daniels and water while we looked over a map of the city.

Our major objective in coming to Chengdu, besides escaping the cold of Tianjin and northern China, was to eat authentic Sichuan-style food and visit Emei Mountain, one of China's five famous Buddhist mountain shrines. We had also planned a day-trip to Laoshan where one of the largest Buddhas in China is located. The reports from Emei Mountain, however, were not encouraging. We heard from tourists who had just been there that the weather was cold and rainy and that snow had been falling at the top of the mountain.

The more we wandered around Chengdu and the more we ate, the less inclined we were to make the planned day trips. We fell into a routine for a week: get up late each morning, find a new place to eat lunch, meander through the alleyways and free markets of the city, find a new place to eat dinner, and dance and drink or watch TV at night. The routine was relaxing and quite satisfying.

The free markets of Chengdu were the best I ever encountered in China. They contained as much variety as the markets of Canton, but the prices were much lower. Everyday, I could have bought fresh chickens, duck, pork, beef or mutton. The selection of vegetables was staggering in comparison to what was normally available in Tianjin and

Beijing. I envied the foreigners I met who worked at Sichuan University. They had daily access to broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, leeks, asparagus, red onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplants--all of which looked as if they could have been grown in my grandfather's garden.

Another daily item offered in the markets was doufu (tofu to us), the bean curd that is essential to so many Sichuan dishes and soups. I had developed a taste for doufu because it was available in Tianjin during the winter when it took the place of the vegetables you couldn't get there then. I especially like a dish called "maopodoufu," a fiery dish made from fried bean curd, chili peppers, a spice called Chinese prickly ash, and chunks of pork. I also liked hot-and-sour soup which contained cubes of boiled bean curd in a chicken or pork broth with strips of pork and lots of chili peppers. These dishes were served in a multitude of variations in hundreds of side-walk cafes that lined the streets of Chengdu.

The food in Chengdu was the best I sampled in China, especially for the price. We ate at dozens of out-of-the-way sidewalk cafes and bean curd shops and were never disappointed with the food, service, or prices. We did not eat in state-owned restaurants (except for the restaurant in the Jinjiang Hotel) because we found the small privately owned establishments did a much better job. Every place we ate, however, showcased us while we indulged in heaping

platters of spicy chicken with peanuts, pork in chili sauce, maopodoufu, beef in oyster sauce, and eel and snake with red peppers, garlic, and cilantro. The owners invariably placed us at the table nearest the door or right on the sidewalk so passersby would see two foreigners feasting in their establishments. This caused an immediate increase in their business because inquisitive Chinese would stop at these restaurants and buy something to eat just to watch us and listen to us talk with the owners who often joined us at our table. When we would leave, the owners always tried to talk us into returning for the next meal, promising delicacies and special dishes.

The streets of Chengdu were also alive with vendors, craftsmen, artists, and black marketeers selling a remarkable cornucopia of goods. Two of the most popular items offered by many of these sidewalk entrepreneurs were a Chinese edition of Lee Iaccoca's autobiography and posters of bikini-clad Chinese female body builders who had recently competed in the national tournament in Canton. They had been allowed to wear two-piece swimsuits for the first time, and posters made from the pictures taken at the competition were selling like doufu in Chengdu.

Other unfamiliar sights in Chengdu included an amazing number of pedicabs. I had been told that until recently pedicabs had been outlawed by the Party because the work was deemed subservient and demeaning. But the municipal

government of Chengdu had reissued licenses to the drivers, most of whom were old men, and thousands of them were again plying their trade in the streets of the city.

I also saw more teahouses in Chengdu than any other city in China. They were always crowded with old men relaxed in bamboo chairs sipping tea and chatting or playing mahjongg or Chinese chess. At one teahouse we heard old men singing opera tunes and acting out scenes from traditional Chinese folklore. We caused quite a scene there when we walked in and sat down to listen and enjoy a cup of jasmine tea. For one thing, Andrea was the only woman in the place and for another, she smoked a cigarette. The old men watched our every move, but no one was unfriendly, just extremely nosy and surprised to see a young woman smoking in public.

One obnoxious facet about Chengdu, however, was the money-changers. They followed us everywhere we went, harassing us to change FEC for RMB. Their black market activities went on completely in the open, and they did not want to take a simple no for an answer. They would follow us into restaurants and sit down at our tables to dicker with us over the exchange rate even after I had said in no uncertain terms that we had no FEC and didn't want to change money. One unyielding fellow followed us into the lobby of the hotel, but he was soon chased out by a security guard. In ten minutes, I saw him stalking another foreigner through

the lobby.

The black market exists all over China but it is more in the open the further away you get from Beijing. The rate of exchange usually offered was 140RMB for 100FEC. With the FEC, the money changers could buy imported televisions, radios, washing machines, cigarettes, and so on, sell them for exorbitant amounts of RMB, and begin the cycle again by exchanging the RMB for FEC. All of this was done completely in the open. Occasionally, I would hear of a money-changer being arrested and the foreigner being scolded for being involved, but I never heard of any foreigner being arrested for changing money.

Anyone who visits Chengdu visits the Chengdu zoo because it is the home of more pandas than any zoo in the world, so one morning we booked a cab to take us to see China's national symbol. We saw five or six pandas, all lethargic and dirty. Because Chinese zoos are depressing places, we made our visit a quick one. The animals are kept in small, dirty cages, and the Chinese feed them all kinds of unhealthy things like cookies and candy.

While we were at the zoo, we heard the clanging of gongs and cymbals and the beating of drums coming from a complex of buildings adjacent to the zoo. We decided to investigate, and what we found was one of most unique Buddhist monasteries I had seen in China. We had no idea of its existence because it was not listed in any of the

guidebooks and none of the foreigners at the hotel had said anything about it.

We followed the noises until we found a gate that led into the large compound of mostly destroyed buildings and shacks. Hundreds of Chinese Buddhists were inside the walls of the compound engaged in some kind of ceremony. I can only speculate that they were there for the reopening of the monastery because a few of the buildings had been restored and dozens of construction workers were working on other buildings.

The statues, relics, and ornamentation of the temples left us with the impression that we were looking at the handy-work of the Cultural Revolution. Buildings had been gutted with fire and vandalism, statues defaced, and gardens had turned to patches of weed and rubble. As we walked through the large compound, however, the place was alive with restoration. Two of the main temples had been refurbished, and inside we saw thirty or forty monks holding a prayer service. Outside, old women holding bundles of burning incense sticks kowtowed to the images of Buddha. In some places, they prayed to pictures of Buddhas that had been destroyed or stolen.

In the center of the L-shaped compound was a immense banyan tree surrounded by what had been a lotus pond. Workers were busy cleaning debris out of the pond and replacing the brickwork of the banks. Fifteen or twenty



monks stood watching the laborers with big grins on their faces. They were obviously pleased that their monastery was reopened and that the government was restoring it. I asked one of them about the significance of the tree, but all I could understand was that it was three thousand years old, and Sakyimuni (Buddha) always sat under one. I did manage to learn the name of the temple from him. It was called "CaoyuanSi," which literally means grassland temple, but none of the Chinese back at the hotel who could speak English had ever heard of it. Of course, these were young men and women who wouldn't know about it because of the success of the Culture Revolution, or should I say the Culture Annihilation?

We enjoyed Chengdu. We enjoyed gorging ourselves on the cheap, excellent food; we enjoyed the street scenes: the markets teeming with squawking chickens and quacking ducks, the teahouses filled with Fu-Manchu-ed old men, sidewalk vendors hawking Lee Iaccoca and black velvet paintings of scantily clad women; we enjoyed dancing in the disco and watching ladies of the evening selling their wares; and we enjoyed the adventure of discovering the mysterious monastery.

We did not enjoy checking out of the Jinjiang Hotel.

We stayed there eight nights, so our bill was a sizable one--640 yuan. When the cashier presented it to me, I counted out sixty-four ten yuan (RMB) notes and handed them

to her. She reacted as if I had put a pile of cow manure in her hand.

"This money is unacceptable," she quickly said.

I produced all of our identification cards and handed them to her. She took the white cards and carefully checked them. When she finished, she handed them back to me and said, "These are no good. You must pay in FEC!"

Having encountered this problem before, I simply told her I had no FEC, that the government gave me these cards so I could use RMB, and that she had no choice but to accept RMB as payment for our bill. She refused, telling me that our cards were forgeries. I couldn't believe my ears.

Another worker came over because he could hear my loud protests. He looked at the white cards, green cards, and red cards, and whispered something to the cashier. They went into an office for about twenty minutes and left Andrea and me standing at the desk with our large stack of RMB piled up on top of the bill.

When they returned, the cashier once again told me I had to pay in FEC. I demanded that she call the police and the manager. I was close to exploding. This constant harassment for FEC had finally gotten to me.

The other worker came back out and I showed him on my green card where it indicated I would be working in China until the following summer. I asked him if my green card and red card were in order, how the white card could be a

forgery. He shrugged his shoulders. I again asked for the police and the manager. I think the cashier was horrified by the prospect of involving the police, but she didn't want to be the one responsible for accepting such a large amount of RMB. Finally, she told me where to find the manager.

The manager turned out to be a professional. He knew that in the long run 640 yuan wasn't enough money to create an incident over. He accepted our money, but told us that our white cards were not acceptable at his hotel for any more purchases. We stomped out, caught a cab, and headed for the Chengdu airport vowing to tell everyone in China that the Jinjiang Hotel in Chengdu and not the Kunming Hotel in Kunming was the worst hotel in the land.

Our next destination was Guilin where we would meet several teachers and Foreign Affairs officials from Tianjin University to begin a two-week tour organized by Deputy Director Liu De-fu. The university had offered to pay for half of our expenses for a tour that would include Guilin, Zhanjiang, Haikou, and Canton. Andrea and I decided to go on the tour even though we both hated organized vacations. The Foreign Affairs Office would handle all the arrangements--travel, food, lodging, and transportation to and from tourist sites. For fourteen days, I would not need to worry about train or plane tickets, nasty hotel clerks or finding my way to the places I wanted to see.

We met up with our group in Guilin on January 25 at the

Guilin train station. There, a representative from the Guilin Foreign Affairs Office picked us up in a Nissan minibus and took us to the Ronghu Hotel, Guilin's finest. Andrea and I had worried about what kind of accommodations we would wind up with since no one at the university could tell us where we would stay in any of the cities we would visit. When we arrived at the Ronghu we applauded. The year before we had visited the Ronghu but hadn't stayed there because it was too expensive. Now, we would get to stay in this beautiful hotel for five nights. I was glad we had decided to join the tour.

The highlights of our stay in Guilin were a boat trip down the Lijiang River and the Chinese New Year's festivities we witnessed in the streets of Guilin. We took the same excursion down the Li River we had taken the year before except this time the weather was magnificent: mild and crystalline. The karst formation mountains along the winding Li River were sharply outlined by an azure cloudless sky and appeared to rise out of the earth like gargantuan fingers pointing at the sun in contrast to the year before when they looked like shrouded giants whose heads were covered in gauze.

At times, however, I was bombarded by questions from a group of transactional analysis psychologists that was touring China after attending a convention in Singapore. This was the largest group of Americans I had been around at

one time since my encounter with the Minnesotans in Inner Mongolia. These "in-touch" people made me nervous, but their comments and questions were very amusing.

"Do you think the stares you get here are an active or passive response? Excuse me, I see a water buffalo on the bank. I must get a picture." The frenetic woman turned to snap the photo while waiting for my answer.

"I have never thought about it. Aren't they just curious?" I shrugged, finishing the conversation.

"What about the demonstrations? Don't you think they are a result of the traditional father-son relationship here?" another one of them inquired as we floated past some of the most splendid sights in China.

"I think they are the result of terrible cafeteria food and having to live eight to a dorm room," I countered, wondering if he had noticed any of the country we were floating through.

Then another one of them said something about "unbalanced negative and positive poles resulting in an latent aggression which manifested itself in immature social interaction patterns" after he had asked me how socially mature my students were. I had made the mistake of saying they lacked social maturity without giving any reason. I guess his was as reasonable as any other. I thought my students socially immature simply because they had spent most of their lives preparing to take examinations of one

kind or another.

At one point, an old gentleman came up to me and whispered, "My name is Dinwiddie Lampton, Jr. I am in this tour group, but I am not keen on the ephemeral world. I am a businessman. I spent my life grovelling for cash. Buying and selling is my game." He spoke with the lilting accent of the old Southern gentry that was as unaffected as the peasants pounding their laundry on the rocks along the river.

He told me a few stories about Louisville, Kentucky, where he was from, and soon had me roaring with laughter. He was a short, stocky man of about sixty, wore a down-filled coat and a hat with the brim turned up all the way around, and had one of the most expressive faces I have ever seen. We talked for awhile, and he invited me to speak to the Toastmaster's Club of Louisville. He was the organization's president. He then moved on to entertain someone else.

One of the psychologists came up and asked me if I knew that the man that I had been talking with was a descendent of Mark Twain. I answered that I didn't because he had only told me his name: Dinwiddie Lampton, Jr.

"His grandmother was Jane Lampton. Mark Twain was his great uncle," she told me as if I had been speaking to English royalty and was not aware of it. First one, then another, and finally several of the psychologists came by

where I was standing on the bow of the boat to clue me in that I had been speaking to someone special. I still have Mr. Lampton's business card, and if I ever get the chance I would like to meet him again. He was special, apart from his famous great uncle.

Chinese New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in Guilin was even more EXPLOSIVE than the previous year's in Dali. Some of the teachers wouldn't even get out of the hotel because of the intensity of the "uncontrolled insanity" that was happening on the streets. Andrea and I, however, joined in the madness on New Year's Eve at midnight. We had purchased an arsenal of rockets, firecrackers, noisemakers, Roman candles, and other miscellaneous incendiary devices earlier that afternoon. Most of what we purchased would have been illegal in the States, but the price was right (we got two shopping bags full of fireworks for less than 30RMB), and we got caught up in the celebration. Besides, it would be our last New Year's in China.

At midnight, seemingly everyone in Guilin set off a rocket or a stringer of firecrackers. Within an hour, the city was blanketed in a acrid cloud of fireworks smoke so thick that it burned your eyes and nose. We did our share to pollute the crisp, clear night, but unlike others in the city, we weren't responsible for any of the numerous fires that dotted the skyline. When there was a break in the explosions, you could hear the sirens. Our inventory of

fireworks was so large that we tired ourselves out before we finished it, giving what was left to some of the hotel staff. The barrage continued all night.

New Year's Day was more of the same madness, but some of it was choreographed. The streets of Guilin turned into asphalt parks teeming with dragon dancers, acrobats, and stilt-walkers. By the end of the day I had flinched so often from fireworks going off under my feet that I had developed a catch in my back. I finally stuffed some kleenex in my ears because the noise level was so deafening. My Nikon camera never stopped the entire day.

From Guilin, we journeyed by train to Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province. The twelve-hour trip carried us to the southern most point the railroad goes in China. Located on the South China Sea at the eastern top of the Leizhou Peninsula, Zhanjiang is being transformed into a resort because of its tropical climate and proximity to Hong Kong.

In Zhanjiang, we were put into a posh villa-type hotel situated on the beach. That night, the Foreign Affairs representatives, Madame Liu and Mr. Lu, hosted a meal at our hotel, the HaiBin Hotel. The meal, the best and by far the most expensive meal I had in China, was a culinary indulgence that I will never forget. I hadn't had any really good, fresh seafood in eighteen months. We were served large shrimps prepared in a variety of ways, including boiled and chilled. We had fish that you could



eat without getting a mouth full of tiny bones, and it was fixed in Cantonese fashion--sweet-and-sour. There were squid, scallops, eel, oysters, and crabs. I enjoyed watching Madame Liu and Mr. Lu eating things they had never eaten before and might never eat again. For the foreigners, the food was the kind you can get at any upscale Cantonese restaurant, but not anywhere in northern China.

We were only in Zhanjiang for two nights and one day and were treated to visits to a Buddhist nunnery and a horticultural research institute. The nunnery was depressing. It housed only a few very old women and one young woman who was the only one able to take care of daily tasks like fetching water and cooking food. Existing only on donations, they lived in quarters carved out of the side of a mountain with dirt floors and wooden platforms for beds. They seemed to be on display for the curious who I heard making belittling comments. The whole affair made me feel like an intruder.

The research institute, however, was actually a gigantic garden of exotic flowers, vegetables, shrubs, and trees. The purpose of the institute was to conduct experiments with vegetation not native to China and develop methods to cultivate it in the country. The scientist who served as our guide was working with macadamia nuts and avocados. He hoped to develop a variety of each that would grow well in Guangdong Province and eventually become

suitable for export.

Early on the morning of February 1, we were taken to the tip of the Leizhou Peninsula to Xuwen, where we would board a hovercraft ship that afternoon for the island of Hainandao which means "south sea island" in Chinese. We arrived in Xuwen two hours before the boat left, so Andrea and I decided to explore the sleepy little city.

The residents of Xuwen had obviously seen few foreigners. Their reactions to us as we walked through the dusty streets were the most extreme we encountered in China. Some simply couldn't believe their eyes, gawking at us as if we had descended from the heavens. Others broke into full-blown belly laughs, pointing and shouting for their comrades to have a look. Many others avoided our eyes, scowling as if we were unwelcome trespassers. One man actually crashed his bike into the back of a stopped truck as he was looking backwards at us. He wasn't hurt, but his front wheel was bent up. He laughed and so did we.

And then came the children. As we walked along the street looking at the vendor's stalls that lined the main street, first a few and then dozens of children began to follow us. I was the Pied Piper of Xuwen. The children kept touching me to make sure I was real. They began to mimic my every action. If I laughed, they laughed. If I said "hello," they tried to say "hello." By the time we reached the end of the main street, at least one hundred

children were following us. This upset a policeman walking down the street towards us, and he told the children to go away and stop annoying the "foreign guests."

One of the most curious things I saw in China I saw in Xuwen. Evidently the city had a problem with rat infestation because many of the vendors along the street were selling rat poison. I didn't find this so strange. What was strange was the way they advertised the effectiveness of their product. Each rat poison vendor had piles of dried rats stacked in front of his stall to prove the reliability of his brand. Andrea and I must have seen a million dead rats along that street.

The hovercraft trip to Haikou, the largest city on Hainan Island, was quick and comfortable, and we arrived at our hotel shortly before dinner. Our accommodations in Haikou were more like what I was used to than the luxury of Guilin's Ronghu and Zhanjiang's Haibin. We had no towels, no soap, no toilet paper, and no screens on the windows; consequently we had a room buzzing with flies and mosquitoes. I felt like the man in the OFF advertisement who goes into the tent filled with varmints but has coated his body with repellent. In Haikou, I had no repellent. The conversation at a dismal dinner turned to malaria. That night, however, the worker ignited some smudge pots that killed the mosquitoes and only half killed us, so we slept comfortably encased in bulky mosquito nets.

We were taken by the Haikou Foreign Affairs representative the next day to a small fishing village on the northeast coast of the volcanic island. The bus ride to the docks where we hired a small ferry to carry us across a bay to the village was wonderful. It gave us the opportunity to get our first look at the tropical splendor of China's second largest island (if you count Taiwan). More lush and exotic than any of the islands I had visited in the Caribbean, Hainan Island was covered with coconut groves, sugar cane and pineapple fields, orange groves, banana trees, and lychee trees. Fields of peanuts were sprinkled in between the palm groves. Barefoot peasants wearing only shorts and bamboo hats worked the fields or lazed around the thatched roofed houses of the villages. Hues of greens and blues dominated the landscape.

The fishing village we were ferried to was fittingly called "Village of the East Coconut Grove." It was located next to a long stretch of beautiful white sandy beach and spread out among thousands of coconut palms. Our objective that day was to swim in the South China Sea and get a sunburn, and this is exactly what we accomplished. I got a tremendous charge from watching Mr. Lu, who had never seen an ocean, let alone swim in one in February. He had us take several photos of him floating on his back in the warm, aquamarine blue water. "My wife will not believe I swim in February," he said.

Quite by coincidence, the people in the village were celebrating a festival day to a Daoist sea god. They invited us to watch and take pictures. The village was not at all compact; each of the fishermen's houses was a self-contained unit with lots of land. Each household had fashioned an altar at the front gate of the its courtyard to present gifts symbolically to the images of the gods that were being carried from home to home in sedan chairs. The tables/altars were covered with cooked whole chickens with roses in their mouths, bananas, rice balls, sweetmeats, oranges, cooked whole fish, and flowers.

At each house, the dancers carrying the idols would stop for a brief ceremony. The family members of the house greeted them with burning incense, endless stringers of lighted firecrackers (some were sixty or seventy feet long), and kowtows to the idols. First the grandfather, then father, then oldest son, then the grandmother and wife, and finally the children paid tribute to the idols in the sedan chairs by prostrating themselves on the ground.

I followed this magical procession to several different households. The people were friendly, inviting me to share in the food after it had been offered to the images of the gods, and were very happy to let me take pictures of anything I wanted to. One man chopped a hole in a large green coconut, produced a plastic straw from who knows where, and offered it to me. I felt as if I were drinking

sweet nectar of the sea gods. I could not communicate with them verbally because they spoke a dialect of Cantonese, but we communicated with smiles and gestures just the same.

The children were mesmerized by my beard and size. When I leaned over, they would tug on my beard to see if it would come off in their hands. They kept feeling my arms and legs and miming how strong they thought I must be. One little boy measured the heights of his friends against mine, very satisfied that he was the tallest of the group. The whole afternoon was so delightful and festive that my jaws hurt at the end of the day from smiling and laughing so much. The only face not smiling was the one on the faded, stenciled pictures of Mao that adorned all of the houses.

Our second, and unfortunately last day, on Hainan Island was spent visiting some extinct volcanoes and hiking down into a dark, bat-filled cave that the Chinese for some absurd reason think is something worth seeing, even if only by the light of an ignited diesel-soaked rag stuck in the end of piece of bamboo. The day's tour ended early, and we had a little time to walk around the city of Haikou which was filled with Hong Kong Chinese tourists.

February 4 started off innocently enough, but by its end, it had become one of the worst days I have ever spent in my life. Our last stop on the tour was Guangzhou (Canton). To get there from Hainan Island, we had to take a ship across the South China Sea. The ship, a five-decked

ferry built to sleep about 750 people, looked harmless enough when we first boarded. We had tickets for the third deck, left section. Our berths were nothing more than wooden platforms arranged barracks-style; consequently, we spent the night with seventy-five people. We were told the journey would take thirty hours.

I have sailed in the Caribbean, taken long ferry rides in the Pacific Northwest, and I have never been seasick before. But when you are on a ship with three or four hundred miserably sick individuals for over forty hours, you vow never to put yourself in that situation again. The ship turned into a disgusting, floating vomitorium. Everywhere I looked, people were struggling unsuccessfully to keep from being sick. And you know when one person gets sick, a chain reaction is set off. That was the case for our "cruise" across the South China Sea. Many people never got off their bunks. They used buckets. The smell became unbearable. I spent as much time as possible out on stern of the boat where I could at least get fresh air. I have never spent a more agonizing forty hours in my whole life.

I think if we had arrived in Siberia the next day, the people on the boat would have cheered, but we docked five hours late in Canton on the north bank of the Pearl River. We were met by a representative of the Canton Foreign Affairs Office and whisked away to our hotel in western Canton. Everyone headed immediately to their rooms and

their showers to try to wash away any reminders of that wretched boat ride.

Our hotel, the Dong Shan Hotel, was a Chinese-Japanese joint venture hotel and very nice except that it was thoroughly rat-infested. Andrea and I hadn't been in our room five minutes before we were visited by a medium-sized, large whiskered rodent who seemed unafraid of my shoe and Andrea's scream. I went to the front desk in my barefeet and told the manager we had a rat in the room. I suppose I expected her to produce an automatic weapon and terminate our unwanted visitor's existence. I think the boat had made me delirious. Anyway, she promised to take care of the problem. When I got back to the room, the rat had escaped through a hole in the wall which I plugged up with a towel.

That night after a good meal and some Hong Kong television, we prepared for bed. As I turned back the sheets of my bed, I heard Andrea scream. Between our two beds was another larger version of our afternoon visitor. Andrea didn't want to stay in the room, and since it was on the first floor, I reasoned that if we moved to the second or third floor, we might get a rat-free room. At 12:30, we moved to a new room on the second floor. At 12:45, a third rat appeared on the scene. I gave up. The spaces between the walls of the rooms were nothing more than rodent roadways. Andrea made me leave the light on each of the four nights we were in Canton.



Guangzhou (Canton) was such a different kind of Chinese city from cities like Tianjin, Beijing, and Chengdu. Its atmosphere was not oppressive, not stifling, and not so proletarian. Rather, Guangzhou was a colorful, bustling city with a lively population of citizens in the forefront of Deng's economic reforms.

I remember having lunch at one of Guangzhou's newest ultra-posh hotels--The Garden Hotel. Andrea, two of the other teachers, and I went there to eat in its Italian restaurant; we wanted pizza. While we dined on a fair version of thin-crust pizza, I couldn't help noticing that almost as many Chinese were eating in the restaurant as foreigners. And these were not Chinese accompanying foreign businessmen. One middle-aged man caught my eye. As I studied him, he ate spaghetti, and I saw in him what China was becoming. He wore a blue Mao suit and hat. An expensive fountain pen stuck out of the pocket of the coat. But that was as far as the traditional uniform of the cadre or Party member went because on his feet he wore jogging shoes with Velcro straps and his eye glasses were not state-issue. His wife had recently permed her hair. She wore makeup, a dress, and hose. I sometimes saw scenes like this in Beijing, but never in Tianjin. They were commonplace in Shanghai and especially Guangzhou.

Of course, Guangzhou is still a Chinese city: crowded, congested, difficult to get around in, in the midst of

transition, and a strange mixture of old and new. Like Shanghai, the streets of Guangzhou overflowed with pedestrians from early in the morning until late at night. The city didn't "roll up" its sidewalks at sundown like Beijing and Tianjin. Also like Shanghai, getting from place to place was a time consuming process requiring patience and fortitude. So much construction was going on all over the city that many major streets and avenues were closed or narrowed because of China's newest national symbol, the construction crane.

Guangzhou was a fascinating study in the contrasts between new and old China. One morning we took a cab from our hotel to the White Swan Hotel on Shamian Island. Shamian Island, located in the middle of Guangzhou in the Pearl River, was allocated to foreign merchants in the 1800's. It was the only place foreigners were allowed to build warehouses or offices for their businesses until after the Opium Wars. Like the old financial district of Shanghai, tiny Shamian Island looked distinctly European. The warehouses, homes, and churches of the nineteenth century "imperialist" merchants now housed work units, governmental agencies, and schools.

Shamian Island is still a kind of "foreign concession" because it is the location of one of China's most famous joint-venture hotels: the White Swan Hotel. Used exclusively by foreign tourists, businessmen, and government

delegations, the White Swan Hotel has become a sightseeing stop for Chinese tourists. They come to the hotel in droves to look at the Olympic-sized swimming pool, the in-door waterfall, the tennis courts, the multitude of shops inside the hotel, and, of course, the foreigners. In Beijing, a Chinese tourist wants his picture taken in front of Mao's portrait in Tian'an Men Square. In Guangzhou, the same Chinese tourist wants his picture taken in front of the diving board of the White Swan's swimming pool.

Directly across the bridge that links Shamian Island with downtown Guangzhou we found, however, a vestige of old China: the QingPing Market. This free market was actually a maze of stalls and shops that line a warren of alleyways in one of the oldest sections of the city. You could find everything that is offered for sale in all of China and many things that aren't. Like the markets in Chengdu, the QingPing offered a large variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other produce. Large quantities of meat and poultry could also be had, either alive, dead, cooked, or pressed.

But QingPing was more than just a market. You could buy exotic items like deer antlers, dried frogs, furs of tigers and leopards, ginseng roots, fungus and mushrooms of infinite shapes and colors, and other less readily identifiable objects. The market was also a zoo, a menagerie of dogs, cats, snakes, turtles, eels, frogs,

muskrats, pigeons, and animals I couldn't recognize. These animals weren't being sold as pets. Cantonese say that they will "eat anything with four legs but the table and anything with two legs but themselves." After walking through QingPing Market, I accepted the saying as fact.

One of the most startling sights I saw in China was in this market. As Andrea and I turned the corner of one of the alleyways, we came face to face with twenty or thirty cooked dogs hanging by their mouths from a pole stretched across two buildings. The medium-sized dogs had been baked to a golden brown and were ready for eating or use in Cantonese recipes, recipes I never sampled not only because I had no desire but also because dog meat is one of the most expensive meats in China.

Nearby the QingPing Market, we located Guangzhou's most famous Catholic church. This gothic structure built by French architects in the 1890's had been severely vandalized during the Cultural Revolution. All the stained-glass windows had been destroyed and the inside of the cathedral gutted. The entrance of the church was still barricaded, but when we approached, an old Chinese man hastily unlocked the gate and allowed us in. In fact, he seemed genuinely glad to have visitors and apologized profusely in broken English for the rundown condition of the church which was engulfed in a web of scaffolding. We did not, however, see any workers. The church must have once been a magnificent

structure.

We spent three days touring Guangzhou. We used cabs everyday because they were accessible and cheap. In no other city in China can you hail a cab from the street. You usually have to go to some hotel or book one ahead of time. We went to the Six Banyan Tree Temple, the Sun Yatsen Memorial, the Arts and Crafts Cultural Center, and a few other places mentioned in the guidebooks. I was struck by the number of Buddhists worshipping at the Six Banyan Tree Temple, especially younger people. Usually, if the temples are used, they are being used by the elderly. I did watch a grandmother teaching her granddaughter how to pray. The old woman wore padded, colorless clothing. Her granddaughter wore pink tennis shoes and a yellow sweat shirt with Argentina's most famous football player, Maradona, stenciled on it.

In Guangzhou, at the major Buddhists temples, I saw scores of grandmothers teaching their grandchildren how to pray. I also saw more houses with images of the traditional door gods pasted on the pedestals than the year before during Spring Festival. I don't know if a resurgence in Buddhism or what the Party labels "superstition" is good or bad. I really think it is neither, but I do think these cultural treasures have a place in New China and that the Chinese, especially young Chinese, should know something about them. Many of my students believe the monks are lazy

panderers who serve no vital function in the country's "Four Modernizations." They express no curiosity in the mystical or spiritual, chalking it all up as mere superstition. I often felt sad that I knew more about China's heritage than my students who see life in simple black and white, good and bad, unquestioningly accepting Marxist materialism.

I found Guangzhou to be the most accessible city in China, more cosmopolitan than even Shanghai. The restaurants were clean and the waiters polite. When I bought something in the stores, the clerks didn't go into neurotic fits because I didn't have the exact change. Cabbies were eager to pick me up and take me anywhere I wanted to go without an argument or proof that I could legally use RMB. They didn't interrogate me before I got in to see if the fare was worth starting the car or not. Real grass grew in the parks and on the campus of Zhongshan University instead of plots of packed down dirt. If I ever worked in China again, I would want to live in Guangzhou.

Like the trip in the summer to Qiqihar, this winter vacation was wonderfully mood elevating. China can really surprise you with its contrasts. Just when you begin to get your fill of the stares, the "meiyou's" ("don't have" or "can't do"), the clerks throwing your change back at you in the shops, the crowded buses and the feeling that you are an outsider and always will be an outsider, you get to see or take part in something special like the day on Hainan Island

in the East Suburbs of the Coconut Grove or the afternoon at the Grassland Temple in Chengdu. These times as a traveler seeking the exotic, mysterious, magical, and even the commonplace always rejuvenated me for another semester's work in dreary Tianjin.

## CHAPTER NINE

### "HOMESICK BOURGEOIS LIBERAL"

During winter vacation, I did not think much about the events taking place in the country; I enjoyed my travels. While I was in Chengdu, however, I had heard rumors that Hu Yaobang, Party Secretary, was going to "resign" because of the November and December student demonstrations. I was walking through a free market, when a young Chinese man came up to me and said in English, "What do you think about Hu Yaobang? He hasn't been seen in public since December 25. Don't you think he has been fired?" I didn't know what to say, and I didn't know quite how to react to this strange young man. This was three days before headlines announced in The China Daily that Party Secretary Hu had been replaced by Premier Zhao Ziyang. The January 17 edition of The China Daily stated:

The Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held an enlarged meeting yesterday. Its communique said that at the meeting, comrade Hu Yaobang made a self-criticism of his mistakes on major issues of political principle in violation of the Party's principle of collective leadership



during his tenure as the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee. He requested the Central Committee to approve his resignation as the General Secretary.

Participants in the meeting gave comrade Hu Yaobang a serious and comradely criticism and at the same time acknowledged his work achievements. Other reprisals against officials and intellectuals held responsible for creating an atmosphere that fostered the student demonstrations had taken place while I was eating my way through Sichuan and Guangdong Provinces. Folks were being kicked out of the Party right and left, but I didn't realize this would affect me until I was back in Tianjin and had worked for two or three weeks.

February and March were cold months in Tianjin, especially in terms of my relationships with students and Chinese colleagues. Whether a connection existed or not I have no way of knowing, but my teaching hours were reduced from 18 per week to 10. I was told by the Foreign Language Department to keep class discussion "precisely centered on the study of English vocabulary, grammar, and composition." In other words, I was not supposed to initiate any dialogue about the December demonstrations, nor was I to engage the students in any sensitive political discussions. Before vacation, the demonstrations had been hot topics of conversation, both in and out of class, but after vacation

was over, no one was saying anything about them.

"This will make things easier for everyone if you avoid controversial discussions," Mr. Ji told me soon after I arrived back in Tianjin in mid-February.

"Oh, you mean like after the May 24 riot last spring?" I responded. "I should act as if these things never happened."

"Please understand the situation and the context in which you live now. Help your students improve their English, and everyone will be happy." I found his remarks somewhat intimidating--an indication that what I and my students said in class would definitely be monitored.

I managed to find out from a student from Beijing that students' parents nation-wide had received letters from the Party directing them to tell their children that any more demonstrations would result in serious "punishments." The Party was using an indirect but very effective method of controlling and warning the students. Also, the Party Secretary of the university told my students in their first weekly political meeting to eliminate their contact with "undesirable negative elements" and restrict their contact with me to scheduled class-time. This was to prevent me from propagating "bourgeois liberalism," a new phrase that appeared in the China Daily shortly after Hu's forced resignation.

The "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign" that began

at the beginning of 1987 ended my Monday night bridge class, and I no longer was asked to give lectures on Thursday nights to the English club. Students stopped visiting me in my apartment, and I rarely went with them to movies, to restaurants, or to shops. No one said anything to me. Students and colleagues were still as polite and friendly as ever. They just managed to stay clear of me most of the time, and I didn't press the issue. By the end of March, I started to count down the days left before my departure in June. I felt isolated and watched more than ever before and I suspected my comments in class were being closely monitored. Andrea Thompson started to refer to me as the resident "homesick bourgeois liberal with the eroding mental state."

The proganda was so intense that I almost stopped reading the China Daily watching television. Everyday, the headlines read like the day before, essentially blaming any kind of problem in the country on the incursion of "unchecked bourgeois liberalization." For example, the editor-in-chief of the literary journal People's Literature was fired from his post and "told to make self-criticism" for publishing a novel "regarded as vilifying and insulting to the Tibetan people." His action was "the inevitable result of the ideological trend for bourgeois liberalization and the erroneous ideas in art and literature."

Party officials stated over and over again that "the

most urgent task for all colleges and universities is to eliminate resolutely the influence of bourgeois liberalization." The student demonstrations were viewed as result of "unbridled westernization" and a few backsliding officials like Hu and intellectuals like Fang Lizhi who was expelled from the Party in late January for "calling for total independence of universities from Party leadership and advocating bourgeois democracy and instigating students to make trouble." The previous semester, the university had invited him to speak on campus.

The arrest of a Tianjin University student for "collusion with a foreigner" intensified the situation at Tianjin University. The student had spoken with an Agence France Presse journalist in Beijing several times on the telephone about the demonstrations. The reporter, Lawrence MacDonald (he had also written several articles about the May 24 riot in Tianjin) was expelled from China, and the student faced a life sentence for his actions. I never heard what happened to him. No one was willing to talk about him, and there was no further mention of him in the news. I did not want to cause any trouble for my students, so I kept to myself until the last half of the semester when it appeared that the campaign had ended.

I noticed other changes besides the lack of interaction with my Chinese students and friends. People I had never seen wear Mao suits before were wearing them every day. I

was told that because of the political pendulum that had existed in China since 1949, people kept two wardrobes: a conservative wardrobe for swings to the left and a fashionable wardrobe for swings to the right. Bright blue and red down-filled coats were replaced by padded Mao jackets. Jeans and tennis shoes disappeared for almost three months.

There was also a renewed "interest" in Mao Zedong. Nightly television programs chronicled and rechronicled his life. I had seen almost nothing about the late Chairman on TV during the previous 18 months. The lines at his tomb in Beijing were four or five times longer than I had seen before. Entire work units took a day from work to parade past the crystal sarcophagus containing Mao's corpse.

By late April and early May, however, the intensity of the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign had lessened, and life on the campus of the university had returned to a more normal condition, except for an event that made the national news. For the first time since 1949, six students were expelled for failing a number of courses. The "innovative" action taken by the university was praised as a "new awakening in China's universities."

But as quickly as the headlines in the newspapers had shifted to attacks on western thought, they shifted away to other issues like the repatriation of Hong Kong and Macao. Students started to visit me in my apartment once again, and

the atmosphere of the classroom became less sterile, less clinical, less superficial. For me, the astounding thing about all of this was how quickly a massive population began to pay lip service to the edicts of the Party and then when the heat was off, fall back into more relaxed routines.

Ironically, while the campaign against westernization was being waged in the press and at weekly political meetings, I had to use an American textbook in the post-graduate composition class that contained documents and essays that make up the very core of "bourgeois" thought. When I asked Mr. Ji if the textbook was appropriate, he told me it had been approved for use in the class. Approved by whom I don't know, but we read Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence," the Constitution of the United States, Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience," and essays by contemporary American writers on the student demonstrations of the sixties. When I asked the students if they were uncomfortable with this material, they nonchalantly asked me why they should be. In class, however, when I asked for questions or comments after explaining one of the assignments, no one moved a muscle. At my going away party given by these students, we had a good laugh about the inconsistency of a rapidly changing China, concluding that any textbook in English was "politically correct" as long as they were available for "reproduction."

A more light-hearted event took place in late April when the Shanghai Film Company released the movie I had "volunteered" to be an extra in the previous fall. I found out from some students that the movie, "Wawa Canting" (Children's Restaurant) was playing at the Tianjin Children's Theater Number Two, and I bought enough tickets for the other foreigners living at the Guest House for a Sunday afternoon showing. We all biked across town to the theater, found parking places for our bikes, and went in.

The theater was really a children's theater. The seats were tiny, and I had to contort my large frame to fit between the narrow rows filled with giggling, chattering kids who had no idea why we foreigners were attending a children's film. We took up an entire row of seats, and until the lights went down for the start of the movie, we were the featured attractions.

The movie was about a restaurant that had gone out of business. A group of enterprising pupils convince the city officials that they could turn the restaurant into a successful business by offering new kinds of dishes that appeal to children. The "plot" involves the efforts of the new managers to get the restaurant ready for its grand opening. I sat through almost an hour and a half waiting to see myself and how I fit into the story.

In the last fifteen minutes of the film, I and the two other foreigners in the movie are welcomed to the new

restaurant by the young manager who was also the star. We take part in the grand opening ceremonies, sample the new dishes (one of them was sickly sweet cotton candy), and I take some pictures of the staff. Because the sound had been added in the studio in Shanghai, my lines were spoken by another English speaker the director had employed in Shanghai. When the time arrived for me to actually speak, what came out of my mouth was beautifully accented British English.

As the lights went up at the end of the movie, the children in the theater began to recognize me as one of the "actors." I was surrounded by screaming, laughing kids and almost as many screaming, laughing parents. They all wanted to shake my hand and even asked for my autograph. I signed my name on sticky ice cream wrappers, crumpled newspapers, and empty cardboard juice containers. I thought I would never get out of the theater. The manager appeared with a camera to take my picture in front of the theater by the poster advertising the film, and he offered me free tickets if I would return the following Sunday. I told him I had plans to be out of town so he wouldn't lose face. I left a large crowd of buzzing fans and climbed on my bike and rode away, waving as I left.

Another highpoint of my last semester as an employee of Tianjin University was the news from my friend Zhang that he had scored 607 on his TOEFL exam and had been offered a



scholarship at Southern Illinois University. I had worked with him for hours on TOEFL preparation, but he had done most of the work himself. His score was the highest score ever made by a Tianjin University student. I felt like a proud parent and was happy that at least one of the students I had encouraged to apply to U.S. universities had been successful.

We made plans to go to the U.S. Embassy together to get his visa as soon as he acquired a Chinese passport. Southern Illinois University had sent him all the documents he needed to get the visa, including a document that insured the Chinese government that the cost of his schooling would be covered by SIU. We celebrated at the Tianjin Roast Duck Restaurant and talked about things he would need to take with him in the fall.

Our celebration was premature. When Zhang applied for his Chinese passport, he was immediately refused because Tianjin University refused to permit him to leave. He was told that he was required to work at least two years after his graduation in June before he would be allowed to study abroad. I suppose Zhang had known that this "regulation" might prevent him from leaving when he filled out the application for Southern Illinois University. His department leaders, however, had written three letters of recommendation for him, and they knew his plan. How they could allow him to go through with the application process

and then not assist him in obtaining his passport still angers me.

I naively involved myself on Zhang's behalf without him knowing about it. I made inquiries about the "regulation" that I had never heard of. I knew that students in Zhang's situation were being allowed to leave, but the more I investigated, the more arbitrary I found the system to be. The students who had little or no difficulty in procuring passports were the sons and daughters of Party members or important university leaders. Zhang had no such "backdoor" to assist him, only a pushy foreigner who didn't know really what harm he could cause.

At banquets and other social functions attended by the president of the university and leaders of the departments, I inquired about the rules that governed which students were allowed to leave and why. I found that no one could tell me exactly what the regulations were, not even the president, whose son and daughter were already studying in New York at Columbia University. When I gave the Director of the Foreign Affairs Office, Director Yu, a brief history of Zhang's situation (without mentioning Zhang's name), he agreed that it was tragic that a student could win a scholarship and not get a passport, but he never offered to get involved. In fact, he pressed for the name of my friend, so I dropped the subject.

I really felt betrayed by Mr. Ji. Perhaps he was

paying me back for all times I had hassled him about schedules, textbooks, and failing students. I don't know. But I made the mistake of taking him into my confidence about Zhang. I told him all about helping Zhang with TOEFL, filling out university applications, and getting letters of recommendation. Then I asked him to get me a copy of the regulations, so I could get them translated and give them to other foreign teachers who were also trying to help students get into universities abroad. I should have been suspicious of Ji's reactions to my story because he knew so much about Zhang, but I thought I was talking with a friend.

Shortly after our conversation, Zhang was called into his department and forced to write a self-criticism for complaining about government policies. In fact, Zhang had never once uttered a complaint. What he was being forced to "apologize" for were remarks I had made myself to Ji who had informed the architecture department that Zhang was trying to get out of the country. I wouldn't have found any of this out if I hadn't run into Zhang in the university post office after he had been through a three-hour meeting with his department leaders and the Party Secretary where he had been criticized for his "bourgeois" behavior. I sincerely thought I had ruined any chance Zhang had of getting a passport, but he convinced me that he had really never had high hopes because he was unmarried, the youngest son of his family, and had no strong connections to "force" him to come

back. Having spent so much time with me over the past two years had not helped his passport application either.

I was angrier at Ji than I have ever been at anyone in my life, except at myself. When I found him in his office, a rarity, I was unable to control my temper. I told him that if he caused Zhang any more trouble I was going to write a letter to the Ministry of Education outlining the incompetency of the Tianjin University's Foreign Language Department and that I would write as many articles as I could criticizing the university and get them published. He was astounded by my anger, denied doing any harm while admitting he had talked with Zhang's department. When I asked him why he had divulged the content of a private conversation, he simply said he was doing his job. I made him promise on his word as a gentleman that he would never mention Zhang's name again and left his office. I never saw him again.

Fortunately, Zhang convinced his department leaders that he had not conspired to get out of the country and that he had done nothing wrong. The reason he was successful in doing this is that all three leaders of the department had written recommendation letters even though they knew about the shadowy "regulation" that was preventing him from getting a passport. The entire episode depressed me and made me feel inept, naive, and foolish. After almost two years in China, I still had the innocent notion that

university professors and leaders would have the best interests of the students at heart. Here was a brilliant student, who on his own initiative, had won a scholarship to continue his education in an American university. It would cost China nothing but the paper needed for his passport, and not one professor or university official would help him. His reward for hard work and diligence was suspicion and jealousy.

The university did one more thing before I left China that really got my goat. At the end of May, the foreign teachers who worked in the Foreign Language Department were invited to a preliminary going away party. I was told by Mr. Guo that the party would also give me the chance to offer suggestions and criticism to the department and would be a good time to discuss teaching with the Chinese teachers of English. I had asked for such meetings for over a year, but not once during the time I taught at Tianjin University was I ever invited to departmental meetings.

When I arrived at the conference room, I was greeted by Mr. Guo, Director of Foreign Languages Zhang, and the branch Secretary of the Communist Party. We sat around a large table and one of the students in the department served us Coke and melon seeds. Director Zhang made some comments about our tremendous cooperative efforts and casually told me that the meeting would officially begin when the cameraman arrived. I couldn't believe my ears.

"Why are you filming this meeting?" I asked him.

"Oh it is for posterity, that's all." he said with a large smile on his face.

I looked at Guo and noticed he was wearing his best Mao suit. In fact, all of the Chinese teachers were "dressed up."

"What is going on here?" I asked Guo.

"What do you mean. This is a meeting to discuss teaching methods and suggestions. Also we want to thank you foreign teachers for your good work."

When the cameraman arrived, the meeting began in earnest, but I got up to leave. Right or wrong, I had quickly come to the conclusion that I was being used again. The department was filming this "meeting" as if we had them regularly. As I neared the door, Director Zhang asked me where I was going.

"I don't want to take part in this. I have asked for meetings for two years. Now, a few weeks before I leave, you stage this meeting to make it look like we have been having them all along. This stinks."

Director Zhang looked nervously at the Party Secretary who couldn't understand English. He said a few words to him and asked me to reconsider.

"Please come back and sit down. We want to hear your suggestions. The filming is insignificant."

I stood at the end of the table and said to the group,

"This meeting is two years too late. You want my suggestions now when they don't make any difference because I will be gone in a month. You complained to me about the quality of some of the younger teachers but you never meet with them. You think that anyone who is a native speaker of English can teach it. You reward the students who do the worst with the jobs that the good students want-- interpreting and translating. Students don't fail even if they deserve to. You have avoided meeting with me because you know I will say these things. Now you meet with me so I will tell everyone we had discussions and worked together. I am sorry you have waited until now to call this meeting."

Director Zhang, to my astonishment, nodded in agreement with everything I said, translating to the Party Secretary who also nodded and smiled as I made my sermon. I could have said anything I guess. The whole affair was arranged because they knew I was not pleased with the way the department was run, but then they still looked at me as a "guest" who would be returning home soon. I was never considered a contributor, just a cosmetic addition to a system that I was convinced needed reconstructive surgery.

I, as usual, didn't want to appear totally uncooperative, so after I had my say, I sat down. The cameraman turned on his spots and began filming us chatting and sipping Coca Cola as if we all did this every week. Most of the laconic Chinese teachers present I had never

met, but I suppose it didn't matter. Besides, no one was really responsible for making any changes. No one in the department wanted to take the risk that making changes involves in China. The best way to get by was to go unnoticed, attend the meetings when they were called, and drink the free Coca Cola.

I took one last vacation in mid-May before I left China. I arranged a week off by doubling classes the week before and journeyed by train to Chengde, a small city northeast of Beijing in Hebei Province. Though the guidebooks had dismissed Chengde as an unimportant sight-seeing area, I found this city which was the location of the Qing emperors' summer resort vastly underrated. For one thing, the train ride to Chengde from Beijing was itself a source of great enjoyment; the train wound gently upward into the mountains north of Beijing across agricultural plains, through canyons, and beside rivers. The apple trees were in full bloom and looked liked trees covered in pastel-colored popcorn.

In 1703, Emperor Kangxi began building a summer home in Chengde that was finished by his son Qian Long. The resort included a summer palace and eleven temples copied from famous temples in minority regions like Tibet and Mongolia. The temples were built so that the leaders of the minority nationalities would feel comfortable in Chengde when they



came to pay tribute to the Qing emperors.

I spent the first afternoon roaming the lake area of Bishushanzhuang ("Park to Beat the Summer Heat"), the park that surrounds the summer palace. The hilly park, surrounded by a miniature version of the Great Wall, was filled with beautiful shrubs and trees in bloom, freshly-painted pavilions and bright boats on the lake, and uncharacteristically, not too many people. I enjoyed being out of doors, away from the crowds, in the fine spring weather--mild and very dry.

The next day I visited five of the eleven temples. Because of the varied architectural styles of the temples and their proximity to one another, Chengde is an excellent place to see a lot in a short period of time. In one day, I saw replicas of temples from Lhasa and Xigaze in Tibet, Baotou in Inner Mongolia, and Lanzhou in Gansu Province. Although some of the temples were in very poor states of repair, they were worth seeing. There were few tourists, great quantities of fresh air and blue sky, and an intense aura of the past at these temples that I often found lacking at many of the recently restored temples in more famous areas.

I started at the Puning Si, the Temple of Universal Peace. It is a working temple, and I watched thirty or forty yellow-robed monks chanting their morning prayers. Built on several layers of a hillside, it houses a huge and

impressive statue of the 1000 armed Guanyin Goddess of Mercy. The statue was over 70 feet tall. The view across the valley from its courtyards and rock gardens was spectacular. I could see all of the other ten temples nestled in the side of the mountain that surrounds Chengde.

From the Puning Si, I walked to the Ximufushou Temple, the Temple of Mount Sumeru. This temple was a replica of a famous Tibetan temple in Xigaze, Tibet. In bad repair, the temple was undergoing restoration, but gleaming in the bright morning sunshine were four gigantic bronze dragons perched at the peak of the main temple.

Another short walk away was the Putuozhongsheng Si, the "mini-Potala," based on the Potala Palace in Lhasa. From a distance, this temple looked more like a fortress than a temple. The red walls of the main temple appeared impregnable. I had to climb up a maze of stairs to the heart of the complex to find the main temple which was surrounded by scaffolding. The temple was so far gone that restoration attempts appeared useless. But the view from the top of the fortress-like walls was magnificent. I could see the gleaming roofs of the Puning Si, the shining dragons of Ximufushou, and the wall that surrounds the summer palace.

Across the valley were the Anyuan Si, the Temple of Universal Harmony, and the Pule Si, the Temple of Universal Joy. Legend has it that Emperor Qian Long had the Anyuan Si

built in the Mongolian style to please his number one concubine who was a homesick Mongolian beauty. The Anyuan Si also housed his hunting weapons. The deer is the city emblem. Qian Long's reputation as a great bowman is eclipsed only by his reputation as a great lover. When he died he had six wives and 56 concubines.

The Pule Si sat at the bottom of Hammer Rock Mountain, a geological freak. The top of the mountain, according to the Chinese, looks like the handle of a hammer. It is a long, narrow rock carved by erosion that seems to stand precariously upright, balanced at the top of mountain. The temple, one of the three lying to the east of the park, has been beautifully restored and presumably looks much as it did when the imperial family used it, ablaze with gilding and butterfly-bright colors.

The complex has a small temple housing a large bronze somnolent but Laughing Buddha and the four Guardians of the Heavens holding the traditional weapons to fight off the evil spirits: a pipa (a lute-like instrument), a snake, a spear, and an umbrella. The main temple contained three immense images of Sakyimuni Buddha: Buddhas of the Past, Present, and Future. The Buddha of the Past holds his hands down to restrain the evil of the past. The Buddha of the Present holds his hands together to indicate an acceptance of the present. The Buddha of the Future holds his right hand up, beckoning the happiness of the future. Pilgrims

pray to the image of the Buddha that applies to their particular worry or problem.

The central building of Pule Si was a structure that resembles the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. The yellow-roofed, cone-shaped building was crowned with a bronze stupa containing the ashes of a famous Buddha. It gleamed in the sunshine like gold.

Chengde is only a five-hour journey by train from Beijing, but not many tourists make the trip. It is not advertised at all by China International Travel Service because the government doesn't want to encourage foreigners to see temples that have not been restored. I found the area a welcome change from the more highly publicized tourist spots. There were no mobs of camera toting, curio buying tourists. I spent three days in Chengde completely free of stress and hassle, quite rare in China as travellers will testify, .

The last few weeks before I left China for the United States were a hectic period of going away banquets, dinners at colleagues' homes, and parties given by my students. At one banquet given by the president, I was given an embossed pen, a cloisonne vase, and a Tianjin University t-shirt that was ten sizes too small. The banquet was pleasant, but I was so ready to leave and had experienced so many of these cordial but stilted affairs that I found myself waiting

impatiently for it to end. I had heard the same speeches, had shaken the same hands, and had worn the same increasingly tired smile for two years.

I was also invited to a dinner at the Wangs' home, the same family who had entertained me when I first arrived. I found out ahead of time that I was going to be invited to the Wangs' by Mr. Guo.

"Has Mr. Wang invited you to dinner for a going away party yet?" a beaming Mr. Guo asked me.

"No, I haven't seen him in quite some time."

"Well, he will contact you. The department has given him money to have a dinner for you."

I don't know why but this bit of information made me very depressed.

"Did the department pay for my first dinner at the Wangs'?" I asked Guo.

"Oh yes, the department wants you foreigners to feel welcome, so we give money to selected teachers to have you in their homes."

The next day, Mr. Wang invited me and Andrea Thompson to his home for a Sunday dinner. I felt like saying thanks but no thanks, but I didn't because I knew that Mr. Wang was only doing what he had been told. The dinner was almost a word for word replay of the dinner a year and a half ago. His wife even went through the same routine about being surprised that we could use chopsticks. We talked about

nothing of substance. I ate the good food, drank too much beer and wine, and posed for the pictures that Mr. Wang insisted on taking before we left. Mr. Guo did not how disillusioned his information about "department policy" had made me.

The going away party given for me by the EST students, by contrast, was very emotional. Some seventy students gathered on the roof of the Guest House to say their goodbyes, give me gifts, and take pictures. Regardless of the change in my attitude that two years at Tianjin University had effected, I still felt sad to be leaving these students behind. It was these students who had made my time in China worthwhile. It was these students who had shared their lives with me and had made me feel welcome in a very strange place. It was these students who I would miss and never forget. It was these students who would bring a smile to my face when I think about China.

Saying goodbye to Zhang was one of the saddest things I have ever done. He had truly been a friend, risking future trouble by spending so much time with me. I had hoped to leave knowing that I would soon see him in the States, but the night before I left, he told me that he had no hopes of receiving his Chinese passport. We parted, promising to write and see each other again some day. It is because of people like Zhang and my students that I want to return to China again in the future, but even as sad as I was to

leave, I was totally consumed by a desire to return home.

I was thoroughly fatigued after two years of living on the outer edges of the Middle Kingdom, fatigued by the stress, the travel, the inconsistencies, and the recognition that I was always living in a fish bowl. I was tired of "special English," the stares, rotten food, and the isolation. I was so ready to leave that even the prospect of 20 hours on a CAAC 747 didn't matter. I found out that I am, indeed, a "bourgeois liberal," and I couldn't wait to get to San Francisco to get on with my decadent life.