

REFLECTIONS ON CHINA

To have had the privilege to travel to China for two weeks gives rise to exhilaration and appreciation. It does not entitle me to proclaim any knowledge of a country which still claims my ignorance. I know very little about it, the government, the society, the economy, even the day-to-day living to which I was exposed. Of the history, I am familiar with only the briefest outline, and its art and culture will remain for some time a formidable task on my list of learning. Yet the impressions with which I have been left are too numerous and enchanting, (I hesitate to use the word illuminating.) for me not to make some effort to share them. Mind you, these vignettes are not a complete or orderly itinerary of my tour nor do they reflect much research on my part. Nonetheless, it is hoped that they will delight the reader and perhaps inspire individual pursuit on his own. Having said this I must confess that my trip to China was not of my own choosing. I was a special guest of a party of twelve from the northeastern United States and Canada headed by my friend Dr. Alex Tanous. For the past few years he has conducted several tours around the Near East, mainly to Egypt, and was most excited about a possible trip to China. China was not on my list of desired countries and, though interested in history and archaeology, for some reason China never attracted me. It was, therefore, with some misgiving and not a little

apprehension that I accepted his generous offer, (I was to be the official photographer though my amateur camera ultimately prevented me from getting many of the better shots.) and become the ubiquitous number thirteen. Nor was I delighted with the prospects of travelling with a group on a pre-arranged tour. Having done all my previous travel either alone or with one or two people unimpeded by a set schedule, I was not overjoyed at the thought of being boarded around in a tourist bus. I knew such an opportunity might never come my way again and I was determined to make the most of it.

Though frustrated by seeing so little and exhausted in the end by all the rushing around, the trip proved an invaluable educational experience for me (and I think all of us), and changed forever the way I thought of China and her culture. I cannot say that I was unappreciative of the Chinese, rather I was indifferent to them. To me, the Greeks were my favorite people and now, though still a philhellene at heart, the impressions I have of China have awakened in me a new sympathy for things Eastern. For here is a vast country, the world's third largest after the Soviet Union and Canada. With now over one billion people they are for the first time in their history not starving to death. So many Westerners are contemptuous of Communism yet it can be said that no other system would have done a better job in lifting up the Chinese people and their land from the disaster it was in fifty years ago to the reforms and improvements of the present decade. China is a land of

enormous change, a challenge they have met with head on, and realizing the necessity of superior foreign technology (if not investments), they have opened their doors in a manner undreamed of even ten years ago. Foreign investments are coming into special economic zones and joint ventures are sprouting up all over China. There is a limited form of free enterprise and a surprising number of farmers, many from the more progressive area around Shanghai and Canton (Guangzhou) who are buying their own homes as well as owning their land. This, all through the reforms of their present leader, the 81 year old Deng Xiaoping, have brought the average Chinese to a higher standard of living than at any time in their over 5,000 years of history. There is still no freedom of press as we know it, nor of travel, though these items dampen the average Chinese's spirit far less than we might think. Always practical, they are quick to point out that things aren't so bad, as now over 80% of the population in the urban areas have television. Also the rural areas (80% of the population, or approximately one fifth of the world's population) are fast getting electricity and running water, even the remotest areas. This to them is more important than having the money to buy a car or to be able to travel to Cincinnati. Of course they would prefer both options but they are grateful for what they have and remain tranquil in the face of current impossibilities. They are anxious to regain the ten years they have lost due to the Cultural Revolution of the late Mao Tse Dun, a black period they wish to forget.

The Cultural Revolution was a misguided attempt by Mao to prevent the country from being wooed by Western concepts and ideas, the influence of which on the people at the time he found intolerable and threatening. The subsequent wholesale destruction of all things Western eventually led to his downfall but not before enough damage had been done to make their situation in the modern world highly precarious. Thus their current efforts at transformation. During this period everyone was required to keep on his person a little red book containing quotations by Mao and to recite one of them before proceeding with the most routine of daily tasks. Thus one had to say "The workers are the heart of the people", or any other, upon entering a crowded bus, to be followed by one from the driver before being admitted. Or they might say something like "The people believe that Mao loves them and takes care of them." before buying a bar of soap. Our guide in Beijing, Gao, said that during this time, all Western literature was prohibited and that even doctors and other professionals as well as famous artists (including the famous dancer Miss Shu Xiang Bei) were persecuted or sent out to the country to work as laborers.

Fortunately, all of this is now behind them. Audiences may still not have the silent attention and etiquette that Westerners would show when watching Miss Bei in a performance of "Woman of the Red Guard" (nor would we be impressed by their small-scaled ovations) but they know a good thing when they see

it and so do you. I was privileged to see Miss Bei in an excerpt from the above ballet and was amazed at the artistry of this woman. Her technique was also formidable, incorporating into a neoclassic choreography acrobatics and other native Chinese elements. She is one of the truly great dancers of the world who, now allegedly in her fifties, suffered great hardships during the Cultural Revolution.

It was in Beijing that I was able to see Miss Bei dance. This is the country's capital and my first taste of Red China, the name I had learned from childhood. Coming into the airport was an eerie experience. The first large, circular waiting room was empty save for a few Chinese men and women in uniform bidding us welcome. I suspect they were airline personnel but I do not know. Signs were in English as well as Chinese, a trend that is becoming more and more de rigeur throughout most urban areas of China. Having met our guide, we were driven by bus to our hotel, a modern one next to the more opulent Lido, but still boasting a swimming pool and sauna, on the outskirts of town. From there we were taken after a few minutes for settling in, to the famous Temple of Heaven, a large, circular building originally built in 1420 but rebuilt after a fire in 1889 with (oddly enough) Oregon Fir tree wood. The bus trip there was filled with wonder: poplar-lined streets (still outside of town) with no sidewalks, bicycles everywhere (cars are not privately owned), horse-drawn carts bearing everything from building material to watermelons. (July and August was THE

season for watermelon in China. In Beijing, the farmers would come to the city and set up their tents for the duration, quickly alighting out of their cot with a smile on their face to the first available customer.) Ducks and dogs (few cats') and three-wheeled vehicles but, everywhere, bicycles. As we neared the city buildings were going up on both sides. Construction everywhere. The streets became freeways and then back to streets, this time in downtown Beijing, with its somewhat regimented housing blocks, rather drab-looking buildings, but all clean and with great expectancy in the air. Passing the railroad station, an enormous building of not uninteresting design, we continued through more residential areas, where one could glimpse through narrow alleys, TV antenna, clothes out on lines, children playing between these one-storied blocks of attached flats. Past a large poster with (presumable) parents and a small girl, our guide Gao told us of the one real sadness that now must be faced by the Chinese people: one child per family. This is the only way the population can hope to be stabilized. Luckily, he has a boy. Into the large park surrounding the Temple of Heaven the sound of cicadas erupt suddenly with waves of crescendo and diminuendo. The air is hot but we are far from the only tourists. The Chinese themselves (either from Hong Kong, overseas, or the mainland itself) always outnumbered the Westerners. and the late afternoon smell of the jasmine would weave its delicate dance through your nostrils as if to evoke

some memory of a long distant past. It was still hard for me to believe that I was here, really here, more than halfway around the world, and as I gazed out past the pavilion onto the former sacred precinct of this temple complex (in the same park as the Heaven Temple but this one was in the southern end--someone in our group had asked to go there as well). I wondered about the present and the past of this great land and its people, so different from me, with their strange language and decidedly different appearance. They seemed full of energy, delighted at their new and better way of life, eager to learn and absorb the knowledge which they have lacked for so long. I felt an instant liking and profound respect for these people whom you could not help but admire and wish for the best. No wonder so many Westerners have devoted their whole lives to better understanding these people who, until recently, have been unable to express themselves in a way befitting their true creativity and nature.

And what of the food? Always having been fond of Chinese cuisine, I was in for a truly remarkable gastronomical experience as day by day the food never ceased to be anything other than first rate. The Chinese have always had to make do, but as with everything else, in cooking they seem to elevate the basics to inspired heights. I must admit that, as tourists, we had no doubt better fare than the average Chinese, with at least two or three meat dishes per meal (excluding breakfast which was always at the hotel), while this is a luxury to most

Chinese. Normally they have meat (pork, lamb, rarely beef) only once a day, if that; chicken more and sometimes fish. They have made an art out of using the least appetizing bits of an animal (which richer countries would discard) and making them into superb-tasting items. Although some of the more exotic dishes unfortunately (or fortunately!) escaped my palate (e.g. fish heads, ducks feet, dog and cat meat, fish lips, rat and eyeballs to name a few), there was hardly a day that some new dish was not experienced. I particularly like a kind of stuffed breaded eggplant and eel meat proved most succulent. Vegetables and meat alike were invariably fresh though many were put off by warm beer. One would eat on very small plates, each course coming in turn (amounting to as many as thirteen or more) and usually eaten with steamed rice. I somehow managed to use my chop-sticks throughout the entire trip, though mushrooms sometimes posed a problem and I'm sure not on a few occasions the natives were given cause for laughter at some of our attempts. I remember most vividly our first 'night out' at a restaurant next to the cloisonne factory we had just been visiting. As it became apparent later on, this was one of the more modestly rigged places: sort of a large hall with folding chairs and lighted decorations at one end with a kind of cafeteria ambience. The ceiling was plain and white-washed, windows tall with white curtains (the following day for lunch at the Summer Palace the hall was smaller and with yellow ceilings and curtains, though with beautifully painted

decorations--the favorite color seemed to be blue, however). The chopsticks were invariably placed on the right of each dish with one end on a small platform, usually a miniature porcelain figurine or silver holder. Rarely did we have linen napkins. Usually the dining halls and restaurants were cool, thank God, as the weather was the only thing that was truly difficult to bear. Extremely hot and, after Beijing, more humid than I have ever experienced in New York. I rarely saw a Chinese sweat. At one place, Guilin, which is inland on the Li (pronounced Lee) River, even at night standing still the sweat poured off me making almost any endeavor most uncomfortable. The natives, however, were riding their cycles and walking around in droves. The buses and hotels were air-conditioned (not the local buses which we would pass often on our itinerary--at rush hour I pitied those poor souls crowded together in that heat. The sight of it was enough to wipe your brow). The Chinese hotels we stayed at were all excellent, save one, in Guilin, which was undergoing renovation and which had a sign in front of the lobby (which was wide open as no walls had been rebuilt there yet--no doubt they were to be glass) which had in very peculiar English an apology which ended up with: "We thank you for your forgiveness." Rooms were comfortable clean and always would have a thermos of hot water with tea bags provided. Though in some areas you were never quite sure they understood you, (our wake-up calls were often not given) they always seemed to do their best to make you feel at home. Of course, the hotels on

our tour were first class hotels (more or less) though many in our group would refute this. In Beijing, we had an indoor swimming pool and a sauna. The last night I wanted to try the sauna but was told it was closed. After talking to the lifeguard, he asked me to join him and the others after they locked up so I had a most wonderful sauna anyway. All this was for no extra charge (in Hong Kong and Tokyo the situation is quite different). New hotels are going up apace and with them the quality. Three years ago only one hotel had a revolving restaurant on the top; now at least three do and more are being built. No longer is the White Swan Hotel in Canton the hotel nonpareil in China. For years one of the few western looking buildings in the country, it has been surpassed by numerous others, hotels as well as office buildings, all part of the new construction boom. Hotel cuisine is also excellent and the one outside of Shanghai in which we stayed, had the most beautiful tiled mural in their dining room depicting the meeting of the West (i.e. India) and the East in an orgy of magnificent color right out of the Arabian Nights. Also, mind you, there was a color TV set in every room, (in every hotel as I remember). The hotel in Zian even had a brass holder for the toilet paper and I was tempted to take it.

The Chinese people work six days a week, eight hours a day and in many of the cities work around a three-shift schedule allowing work around the clock. The educational system is similar to ours save the children go to school on Saturday,

though usually for half day. Primary or grammar school is compulsory, then middle school, which is like our junior and senior high, and finally university which, owing to the limited number of facilities, is open to only about 4% of the graduates from the middle school, after very strenuous examinations. Only those students who are at the university level may study abroad, but the government makes it difficult by granting few scholarships. Even in the cities it is still basically a blue-collar society with many of the jobs in our urban areas largely non-existent e.g. corporation hierarchies, lawyers, salesmen, realtors, etc. Free enterprise, though limited, is growing, especially in the more progressive south, where farmers are buying their own homes and others are setting up small businesses like some privately owned restaurants in Canton. Those expecting to find a society modelled after the Russian form of communism are in for a big surprise as a new way of life continues to grow. We visited the Summer Palace, largely expanded by the powerful Dowager Empress Cixi, around the turn of the century. Going here will clearly lay to rest the thinking of anyone who still thinks that the people here are worse off now than under the old system. The Empress clearly had her own interests at heart and even used money appropriated for the country's navy to build a large white marble boat from which to overlook her lake. The country rapidly fell to nearly irreparable ruin during her reign.

One of the many highlights would certainly have to be

seeing and scaling the Great Wall. Travelling into the mountains beyond Beijing you could catch glimpses here and there atop the peaks, now completely verdant in high summer. The road was steep and difficult in places yet definitely preferable to the new and rather colorless road which was under construction below us, straighter, safer, and more monotonous. At one point we passed under a stone bridge while the Trans Siberian Railway steamed past, its engine and green cars brightly polished as if brand new. Being at the Wall was like being at a kind of Chinese Disneyland, so full of tourists and shops. The walled section where we were taken has been restored but if you hiked on it far enough, you would come to the unrestored sections. I have never walked on anything so steep. As one guide book has it, "it was built to hold five horsemen riding abreast, now it holds about 15 tourists walking abreast." If you walked far enough you could lose the crowd and gaze in relative solitude upon the surrounding landscape. Occasionally the chirp of a bird or the flight of a large dragonfly would interrupt your thoughts. The mountains were in front of you, and to the other side the valley extended to a level plateau as far as you could see. The wall was not the product of one era, though the result we now see was done during the Ming period around 1400. The first consolidation of several earlier walls was undertaken in the third century B.C. and as it now stands it is the only man-made structure visible from satellites. That night we had Peking Duck. (I haven't yet

heard Beijing Duck, even in Beijing!).

That night after the dinner, Alex and I got our wish to stroll around on our own through the downtown area. One young Chinese stopped me immediately to talk, so eager was he to know about Westerners. He enjoys reading Mark Twain, O'Henry and other American authors (in English) and I promised to send him some. (Their knowledge of the West is not small--one lady on our tour was astonished to meet a man in Shanghai who knew the capital of her state of Maine. And many are learning French and German as well). We walked down an unlit alley. No one uses lights on their bikes and even the cars are on parking lights. But no one gets hit. There were so many people out. In one back street next to a construction sight we could peer into the makeshift dwellings and see bunk beds and many kitchen utensils as well as clothes strung out on lines. Behind one of the houses was a gathering of about 60 or so all watching a color TV program with obvious enjoyment. The night was warm but it was considerably cooler in Beijing than the rest of the cities we visited. We even wandered into a couple of shops--a large department store that resembled an old discount-warehouse store. Not that it was dirty, it just wasn't neat or attractive as we would say, but had its own charm, nevertheless. The Apple PC has arrived, but at near \$7,000. it is out of most people's reach. another store was the Foreign Language Bookstore and you would be surprised to see so many English titles, though most

of them safely confined to the last century. We took a cab at the downtown Beijing Hotel. It was a luxury air-conditioned powered-window machine with a tape cassette playing pop Chinese music which would strangely switch to English for some of the songs (sung by the same singer). Travelling like this through China's capital was hardly something I had anticipated, nor probably anyone else, for that matter, even ten years ago. But here it was and the cab driver obviously was enjoying every minute of it. One of the songs in English was about an old straw hat:

"Ma ma--that old straw hat was the only one I
really loved,

But we lost it--no one could bring it back

Like the love you gave me."

Or "Sad movies always make me cry." what would Mao think of that? That night back at the hotel there was considerable excitement as Miss Bei, the dancer, had received my message (due to the indefatigable help of one of the clerks at the desk) and would be calling me at 10 P.M. She did call but unfortunately did not speak English, so, through another helper, this time a young girl, I asked Miss Bei to answer my questions via the post for a projected interview-article. She was more than happy to comply and also said that she would be coming to America this February on a tour of ten cities, one of which was New York. I don't know who was more delighted, me or the young girl, as the mere mention of Miss Bei brought murmurs

of enthusiasm from everyone. Certainly working at the Yanxiang Hotel was not monotonous that evening.

The following morning we were off to the Forbidden City, so named because at one time this Imperial Palace was off limits to anyone not directly connected with the Emperor. As my guide book put it, "two hundred years ago the admission price would have been instant death, but this has dropped considerably to just 10 fen." Built in the early 16th century, and used as the home of the Ming and Qing emperors, it was gigantic and, to me, sterile. Though beautiful, it was never a place that teemed with life, the life of the people. In one sector, called Hall of Mental Cultivation, the Emperor met with his concubines. "Why not call it Physical Cultivation?", I asked our guide, but he said they liked to give the places a more spiritual connotation! The gardens in the back of the palace were lovely and had pomegranate trees and a most wonderfully scented, white blossomed tree that was new to me. I could not find its name. I can still recall enroute to the airport our guide quizing us on the names of what we had just seen at the Forbidden City and the answer to one (all together now!): Eternal Springs Palace. We gave all the guides and our drivers gifts (mostly purchased from New York) as monetary tipping is considered an insult to the Chinese.

We flew from the military airport to our next city, and I think my favorite one of all, Xian. This was the only time that CAAC (China Air) left on time. Leaving Xian we had a mere two

and a half hour delay (due to a storm in Shanghai), while our flight to Guilin was rather harrowing. After waiting at the airport for over six hours and after some fist-pounding by one particular irate Italian, we finally boarded the plane which, just about to leave the ground, halted and returned to the terminal. We deplaned and after a short conference finally made it to Guilin at 1:30 in the morning. The official reason was bad weather but there was not a drop at Guilin when we landed. I was later informed that the Chinese pilots do not like to fly at night and, in fact, most airports close after dark (this is true even in Japan).

Xian was hotter, but less humid than we would experience later. Nevertheless, this modern city of wide, tree-lined and dusty boulevards, built near the site of ancient Chang'an, one of the greatest cities in the world in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., proved most enchanting to me (though at least one other person on the tour said you could have it). It was here that we saw the Terracotta Warriors of Ying Zheng (late 3rd century B.C.), ancient pagodas, the old city Drum and Bell Tower, and the medieval city walls, still standing behind a moat which formed a rectangle around the city. There are still the four huge gates of the city visible near the center of each side, built in several stories crowned with the traditional Chinese roof. The Eastern (now very dilapidated) and Western Gates were both double, with an inner courtyard and another gate behind it. Within these walls and towers the old city of

Xian teemed with life (it still does). Dawn was announced each day with the gongs from the huge Bell Tower and in the evening after the Drum Tower echoed into silence the gates of the city were locked. All nationalities once lived and traded here. The best preserved mosque in China still stands in the Moslem quarter of Xian near the large Drum Tower. For two nights we walked in the city, unhampered by tours, and partook of the life of its people. Now the city is spread beyond the walls, as was our hotel, overlooking the Small Wild Goose Pagoda, originally on the outskirts of the city. The first night we walked to the southern Gate (which I thought was the Bell Tower), about 1 1/2 miles away (it looked deceptively close) and on the return could see the full moon flying slowly in the eastern sky. Even the nights were hot and there was construction being done in the moat under the Southern Tower. they would build dykes at night for the work and then flood them again in the day. The next night we took a bus into town and wandered around the Moslem sector. Small shops were closing up while places to eat still shone brightly. On the main street neon lights proclaimed the more popular spots while the off streets were dark as people were seen washing their hands and faces or, as in one barber shop, young ladies were having their hair rolled up for a perm. China at that moment seemed indestructable, blending the old with the new, fearlessly making headway toward the new century which would give them true liberation. There were people in the dark like a couple of

new-born kittens. We waited for a bus that was not too crowded, and when no such animal arrived, we walked. Near our hotel a group of young men stopped us to speak English. One of them, a gas meter-reader who cycles an hour each way to work, was entirely self-taught. Someday he hopes to go to America though the man I spoke to who worked in the hotel gift shop thought such a trip impossible, though he was not unhappy about it. The Chinese are not unhappy, and as at Xian, they work and play hard, the streets not emptying until midnight or even later. On the first night I got a whiff (literally) of real third world urbanization: In Xian, they empty out the public lavatories as they have done for centuries, not just for lack of plumbing (which exists) but because they use the waste as fertilizer leaving nothing to waste. The smell as the horse drawn cylindrical container was filled by a hand-dumped pail was positively a knock out. Also at Xian was the neolithic Bampo village, one of the earliest known settlements in all of China. I was amazed at the remains while a persistent young artist insisted on cutting a profile of me. Both Alex and I succumbed, though Alex's Semitic nose received a distinct Eastern look in the translation.

One expected side trip was to the military hospital to X-ray the arm of one of our group who had broken her arm at the wrist at the hotel back in Beijing. I went along with the woman in question and the guide (and another lady from our group) to see just what a typical Chinese hospital looked like. We went

to the military hospital because, in Xian, it was better than the State Hospital. It is staffed with graduates from the Medical University right adjacent to it (run also by the military). The emergency wing (with signs in English) was quite a dismal looking place with sad people seeking treatment. It did not look clean but apparently made up for it in excellent treatment. The Chinese life expectancy has jumped from a meager 40 years before the Revolution to 64 now, rather a notable achievement, especially in view of the difficulties they face. One of the areas they surpass us in is in vision. Chinese people rarely have need to wear glasses. Starting in grammar school, they daily practice eye exercises for about 5 minutes which strengthens their vision and enables them to read by very dim light, as I saw when I walked through a park one evening in Guilin. This would be impossible for us and again emphasizes how much there still is to learn from our Eastern neighbors. But back to the hospital: the day we went, August 1st, was unfortunately an army holiday and, therefore, most of the doctors were off, leaving only a skeleton crew. We had to go into the main building (which looked like an old fashioned hospital, which it was), where the X-ray was taken. Both the doctor and his assistant were more than courteous and even were happy to have their picture taken by the woman in the arm cast. They asked about New York and America and had genuine respect for a land and culture so obviously different from their own. The X-ray showed no further damage and proved that the healing

was progressing well. All were relieved.

I remember asking our guide about the English language movies on TV and at the cinema, having seen a dubbed version of Tom Sawyer on the TV in our hotel room two nights previously. She said they had a regular show from England called "Follow Me" (I think) and of course many movies from America, usually with sub-titles (recent ones were "Kramer vs. Kramer", "On Golden Pond", and "Star Wars". Apparently E.T. has not yet landed.). After visiting the Shaanxi Province Museum (one of the finest archaeological museums in China (especially notable are stone friezes a la Parthenon and beautifully wrought weapons and jewelry and polychrome vases), Western Gate, and Bell Tower. Then off to the airport, and wait, as our plane was late. The airport was a beautifully designed late art deco affair with high ceilings and a delightful old world atmosphere. Our in-flights in China were always a time of many little gifts and what-nots, lychee juice, painted fans, picnic lunches, key rings, etc. My guide book said that this was hardly compensation for the 100% surcharge that they would add to any domestic flight for anyone with a non-Chinese passport. Maybe. I never did inquire about rates since it was something I didn't have to worry about. Anyway, we deplaned about 10 P.M. at the Shanghai International Airport below a beautiful full moon (In China, you get off the old way, onto the ground which, on a night like this, is still the best). Since we were so late, everything had to be rushed the next day, an undelightful

prospect. Our hotel was the first one that we visited which was becoming computerized and had an arcade of beautiful gift shops as well as the splendid tile mural mentioned earlier. Most of our hotels also had large all-world clocks which showed various cities' times. On this one, New York was conspicuous by its absence. Greater Shanghai has close to 12 million people, arguably the largest city in the world, and it seemed so, that hot and unbearably (for me) humid day. It is also (along with Canton) the most capitalistic of all cities in China with a higher standard of living than many. So many of the major buildings were built in the 20's and 30's by the British, French and other foreigners. During that sad era, the Chinese people themselves were so exploited that Edgar Snow, the American journalist of the 20's (and later a great Sinophile and historian) wrote that children were kept working in the factories mercilessly for 14 to 16 hours a day and would crawl under their stations to sleep at night. Many Chinese were not even permitted to penetrate out of their own small "Chinese Quarter" into the other sections of the city. These old sections now seem quaint, and having been rehabilitated, add color to an already fascinating city. We were taken to the "Children's Park", a neo-gothic mansion now converted to an educational playland where children come on Saturdays, or during summer vacation, as they were now. They wore no uniforms and enjoyed playing a wide variety of video games, could take instruction in Chinese music (of which we were given an

impromptu recital), Western music (mostly of three-quarter size violins), ballet and calligraphy. They even could ride a good-sized Ferris wheel outside on the grounds. There was also a group of young accordionists playing "Home on the Range". Down at the Bund, or Waterfront, we arrived just in time to see a Chinese junk sail out of sight, certainly an unexpected yet wholly congruous vision. Right up from there was the Peace Hotel, whose upper floors were once one of the favorite haunts of Noel Coward. Also in town are quite a few churches both Catholic and Protestant, another sign of the difference of this city. Passing through the streets on our way to dinner we could see the narrow side streets, densely populated and with clothes of many colors hung out on the lines over the pavement. The upper floors usually had wooden balconies with flowering potted plants and other artifacts in various degrees of decay. TV antennae could be seen everywhere although private phones in China are still virtually nonexistent (Even dancer Miss Bei apparently had no phone which added to the difficulty in locating her.), though this too is gradually changing. After dinner we went to see the famous Chinese Acrobatics of Shanghai at their special theater in the round. This was truly exciting and they even had a small orchestra made of both Western and Chinese instruments. One man balanced upon his forehead a filled glass over which he put trays and more glasses and more trays and finally four lamps which he lit by going up on tiptoe. And not all--he then proceeded to mount two free

standing ladders on each side with all of this paraphernalia still intact. There were aerialists and girls with twirling top and a frightening pas de deux on roller skates on a circle no more than 8 feet in diameter raised several feet above the floor. Through it all, all I could think of was the hours of unrelenting work and discipline. Tired as we were, everyone stayed till the end. The next day we were taken to a commune outside the city which is entirely self-sufficient, covering something like 28 square miles, with their own factories, schools, shops and apartments as well as farmers, some of whom have bought their own homes. The population of the commune numbers several thousand (maybe as high as 23) but I lost the few notes I scribbled down and don't remember exactly. Across the commune run several canals on which can be seen numerous san-pans filled with goods which are sold either in the local markets or exported to larger cities or abroad. We visited the school which, during the summer months, had only a few pupils. The pupils were singing songs. We offered to sing "Old MacDonald had a Farm" which was wildly applauded. Then we went off to a day care center. I noticed that the walls surrounding some of the buildings had glass fragments on the top which seemed to me grim reminders of a recent past. Our guide, however, said the glass was put there to discourage children from climbing the walls. A rather strange explanation to me, but maybe true. The day care center was manned, or rather womaned, by a lady who was conducting a music lesson from her

foot-pump organ. The children seemed pleased to see us, though Westerners are now most likely common to them. We were then taken to a section in which farmers lived and worked. Recently farmers have been granted permission to grow whatever they want, how they want, and keep the excess for private sale. Farmers are encouraged to buy their own homes (a fairly good one for 10,000 yuan--about \$4,000 or less, like the one we saw). And new slogans are pervading the land such as "To be rich is glorious" and "The 10,000 yuan Farmer". The home we saw would be drab by Western standards with sparse furnishings, a bare concrete floor, and no refrigerator. Yet three separate bedrooms and two TV's were considered more important. They could sell their home for a profit and increase their standard of living and no doubt will in the future. The home was comfortable enough and for a farmer to have come this far is quite an achievement, not for the farmer necessarily, but rather for the country, to allow it to happen. We were treated to some of the owner's home grown sugar cane, which I haven't had since I was a child.

We then visited a clothing factory which manufactures (mostly) dresses and shirts. In long, sun-lit rooms the different stages of the process were undertaken with a voice over a PA system explaining the more difficult steps. Patterns were cut from long sheets of material in one room, sewn in another, pressed and packaged in still another (downstairs). Workmen and women are given bonuses for exemplary work, a new

system which seems to be working rather well. Many of the finished products from this factory would be sent abroad. The atmosphere was light and easy and though not air-conditioned, was not unpleasant.

We were taken to the acupuncture wing of the commune hospital, a room up on the second floor. Here we saw souls of all ages coming for this legendary treatment. The medics (or doctors, for I don't know who was who) would stick long pins into a part of the body, in rows and place a cardboard strip which would prevent their ashes from falling onto the skin as hot coals were applied to the pins in order to heat the area being treated. This heat, not the puncture of the skin by the needles, caused some discomfort. All seemed rather stoic and there was a large chart in color with the entire acupuncture system shown. In a room outside there was a conference (of doctors and nurses) going on. all in the semi-sanitary (to us) condition of the out-patient ward of the hospital in Xian.

Since we had some extra time, our bus driver suggested he take us to the ancient central part of the commune virtually unknown to outsiders, our guide herself never having been there. This is called the Seven Trader City, named for seven objects which the town had associated itself with hundreds of years ago. As I had neglected to write them down I could only remember jade, clock, lantern, a 1,000 year old tree and gold. This village, over a thousand years old (the commune dates from the sixties) turned out to be one of the highlights of the

trip. Through a narrow street (known appropriately as Thousand Year Old Street), one was whisked back in time. Here was a market place as colorful as any I have ever seen. Everything (even modern items) was sold here. I stopped to buy some high quality jasmine tea which, incidentally, was not cheap (about \$3. for a very small bag). At the end of this street you suddenly were on one of the canals and seemed momentarily transported to Venice as you gazed from the covered bridge at the boats in the water and the homes and houses built on the river. Crossing the bridge on the opposite bank proved an even more unexpected surprise as on the narrow path between the houses (here they were not up against the water) and the canal were a long string of covered stalls filled with exotic food items. For the first time I saw a basket made of rope with two geese inside. Upon my surprise the man behind them with a bright blue shirt broke into an enormous grin which revealed he had no teeth whatsoever, just as happy at my wonderment as I was with his. Further on were apples, peaches, and over a makeshift fire, a kind of pancake which looked delicious, even though I had just recently eaten. Could it be that I really was in Baghdad, rather than on the outskirts of Shanghai? Only a flying carpet and a minaret on the horizon would have been needed to complete this fantastic scene. Thankfully it is not in any of the guide books! The delay of our journey to Guilin has been mentioned earlier and all of us were relieved when we finally touched down at the airport at about 1:30 A.M. under a

strange and beautiful landscape of limestone peaks in the distance which looked like something from another planet under the moonlight. I had had a window seat for the journey and noticed several cities during the flight with so many lights still on, and now here, well past midnight, on the drive to our hotel, I saw many shops and outdoor bazaars still open. Perhaps it was too hot for them to sleep and the humidity was positively frightful. Never minding, we were all eager to take the long awaited trip the following morning down the Li river, scenically the high point of our trip and also one of the most beautiful areas in all of China. The trip took six hours down the river. Ours was one of several boats but the only one to be towed. Of its three levels, we ensconced ourselves on the second, occasionally going up to the unroofed top to see the landscape from a slightly higher vantage point. We passed many water buffalos, much farmland (in Guilin as in Shanghai, it is warm enough to plant three times a year and, therefore, have a continual rotation of crops. This is something the colder areas of the north are unable to do, thus leaving them less agriculturally independent), many children swimming (some with no panties on) in the river, all shouting "Hello" and hoping for a handout. Most of the villages had thatched roofs, and I could only hope their waterproofing was better than ours when we ran into a huge thunder shower that sent all the top ones running for cover. The mists surrounding and hovering over the peaks, all green with foliage, proved a most haunting sight and as our

tow chugged along, time seemed to stand still around us.

On the trip Alex became acquainted with a young Chinese university student who was given a scholarship from Harvard to study abroad but lacked \$2000. which the Chinese government refused to pay. He was one of the national guides who would travel continuously with his group in addition to the local guides which were the ones we had. Also there were two American women traveling alone (yes, you can go alone). I met two Norwegians, a couple living north of Trondheim, and of course, Germans. In the boat I saw a first--Chinese porters eating with FORKS! Each view seemed to vie with the last, until you were almost "out-scenicized".

We landed in Yangshuo, a small town nestled in the hills on the river and which turned into a tourist shop enmasse every afternoon with the arrival of the hosts. One lovely item: I heard a Chinese violin being played in the street as we strolled through the town. A beautiful, haunting sound that floated through the air above the hustling of the buyers and arrested your (well, mine at least) attention. He would accept no salvos and simply would stop one song and begin another. In the next store as I was leaving, I noticed another musician tuning his up. I would liked to have stayed. Guilin is in Guanxi province, one of the five or six autonomous provinces in China, which has a limited form of self government different from the rest. They all contain a majority of the minority Chinese groups (you figure that out) and have their own customs

and of course dialect. Some of the minority groups look distinctly different and some in the far west have more Caucasian than Oriental features. In Guanxi, though, the main difference was that some could sport a beard, an impossibility for most Han Chinese (though they can grow mustaches). Guilin is a city that overflows with excitement and energy. That evening the humidity was so high that simply standing still produced rivers of sweat running down my body. I walked down many streets filled with people. In the small homes, you could see TV sets on and a fan mercifully producing life-giving air to spaces which, before electricity, must have been nearly unbearable. I noticed that, in this part at least, the Chinese tend to walk either in couples or in groups, rarely alone. I wondered of what they were chatting, perhaps just like us, a day at the office. Our limited time precluded a visit to the famous caves. Too bad, since they are reported to be very interesting and filled with ancient relics.

Anyway, on to our last city of the People's Republic of China, Guangzhou, known in the West as Canton. Canton, known for its cuisine is on the Pearl River, and is one of the most progressive cities in China. The downtown buildings (mostly dating from the 20's) have arcaded fronts to protect the passers-by from the heat as well as the sudden summer down-pours (monsoons). The latitude was about that of Cuba, and so also very hot and humid. Canton's recent past includes the genesis of the Communist Party, as well as the scene of many of

the Opium Wars of the last century. Sun-Yat-Sen, the great father of the Chinese Republic and their Spiritual George Washington, lived for many years here. His memory is enshrined in many monuments, including a large octagonal concert hall. We spent only one day in Canton. Unfortunately we did not stay at our scheduled hotel, The White Swan, (which uses Wedgewood, I later found out). At one of the few stops, a building built around 1890 in the traditional Chinese style (with gorgeous ceramic decorations) and now used for exhibitions. I saw an exhibit of folk art that included an enormous "painting" of a peacock, sewn entirely by hand. This was one of the most striking things I had ever seen and one could only marvel at close range the delicacy of the workmanship, the unbelievable color gradations which produced an overpowering impact, blending both strength and poetry. We also went to a new shopping mall which was the most modern I had yet seen. This was indeed very much like our own. That night we all ate on the top floor of the hotel for a banquet of real Cantonese food --which we paid extra for. Was it good? Of course, it had lots of meat and seafood. That night I was too tired to case the town, especially since our hotel was miles from anything really interesting. The next morning we took our only train ride, into Hong Knog, and I must confess, after two weeks on the mainland and being accustomed to a more restricted way of life, I was shocked. High rise buildings everywhere, and no place held sacred. The people, just like N.Y., running around as if there

would be no tomorrow. Needless to say, I did not like Hong Kong. Even the Chinese here were as cut-throaty as in the States. It made me think again that perhaps less IS more, and though I would not like to live in China, I certainly would not like to live here in Hong Kong. Capitalism and freedom, yes, but there are trade-offs. A sense of self is missing in the people here, as is the integrity of their less-affluent neighbors. Others loved the city. To me the charm, if any, was certainly difficult for me to find. Even the setting, beautiful in itself, and at one time surely was, is now obliterated with concrete skyscrapers vying to outdo each other. Our hotel, The Royal Garden was capitalist at its best and by far the most fabulous hotel I have ever even entered. Hanging gardens with an atrium open to the sky where on all sides the rooms looked down on. There were five glass elevators to take us to the 14th floor with a partial view of the harbor. But even here--not even tea in the rooms was free. I could not help thinking how in Communist China, where they have less, they gave what they could (always complimentary tea no matter how poor the environs). Here in the money, nothing was complimentary. The small refrigerator was stocked to the brim but everything had a price tag.

Anyway, on to Tokyo which was surely the cleanest city I have ever seen. Pollution? It was cleared up by Japanese technology. Everyone in shirt and tie, no rushing, everyone very courteous. Willow-lined residential streets immaculate and

strangely silent as I walked around on my first night out. These people really had a work ethic and were proud of it. If I could read the language (very little Roman lettering here), Tokyo would be a city I wouldn't mind living in.

And so what can I say to wind up? I guess that the inner spirit can never be vanquished. That in spite of great hardships and having to do with less, the real character of a people still emerges victorious. That life must go on despite all and that knowledge combined with wisdom and tolerance will produce the love that we all crave. Thank you China, 1985.