

**REAL LIFE
CHINA
1978-1983**

Richard Thwaites

**Rich Communications
Canberra**

Cover Photographs

Left: The Imperial Grand Canal, near Yangzhou, being rebuilt by bucket and spade as it was originally built in 500BC.

Centre: Peanut seller, free market.

Right: The National People's Congress, where three thousand delegates vote unanimously to support current Party policies. In 1981, one man voted "no", but this was later attributed to deafness.

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Real Life China 1978-1983

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PREFACE TO THIS EDITION

The first-hand observations on which this book is based date from the years 1978 to 1983 that I spent in China as resident correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

"Real Life China" was first published only in Australia, thanks to the marketing arrangements of multinational corporate publishers. For most of the past twenty years the book has been out of print. During this time I have continued to hear from readers who have valued the perspectives provided on contemporary events in China, and who have sought out copies of the book in libraries and second-hand bookshops.

Electronic publishing now makes it possible for the book to be generally available once more, and perhaps to reach a wider range of readers and researchers interested in China's complex path through modern history.

Reviewing the text after twenty years, I decided not to attempt the extensive revisions and annotations that would be needed if I were to try to account for all that has happened in China and the world since 1983. Electronic publishing has allowed the inclusion of some additional photographs, but otherwise the book is republished in its original form, as a reflection of China and the world during the period in which the book was generated, not the China or the world of today. I have amended the book title to "Real Life China 1978-1983", so as to clarify the historical context.

Canberra, February 2004

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This book was possible only through the trust and co-operation of very many ordinary Chinese, official and unofficial, including the Information Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, my formal hosts in China. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation assigned me to China as a correspondent, and supported me there over the five years during which the material was gathered. Lastly, my wife Dilber, supported, advised, and nursed me generously throughout the long months of gestation. To each of these, and to other friends who may recognize pieces of themselves in these pages, I owe my sincerest thanks.

This book is dedicated to Dilber, my wife.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

on pronunciation

For Chinese names and phrases, I have used the *Pinyin* romanizations now accepted as the world standard for the Chinese language. A decision is not so simple in the cases of place names such as Peking and Canton which have been standardized in the English language for generations. A number of governments, however, including American and Australian, have been persuaded in the course of restoring relations with the Peoples Republic to adopt standard northern Chinese pronunciations and spellings for these place names. There is no sensible precedent for this, and the Chinese certainly do not reciprocate, coining their own versions at will for all foreign names, to suit their own language. However, on the grounds that official and journalistic usage are following this odd and onesided trend, I have been persuaded to use here the two most common place names, Peking and Canton, in their local forms - Beijing and Guangzhou.

For those unfamiliar with the *Pinyin* romanization, a rough guide:

Vowels - closely approximate to English. Read diphthongs as separate vowels.

Consonants - generally consistent with English, with the following variations: the second column represents the nearest English equivalent.

c = ts

q = ch

x = sh

z = dz

zh = j (*not* the Russian voiced sibilant, as in *Zhivago*)

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INTRODUCTION

No country can match the sheer mass of China. Images of China as the archetype of a mass society have dominated Western observation since the very first encounters. They still do: a million Red Guards assembled in Tian An Men Square to have their zeal blessed by Chairman Mao; a hundred thousand peasant labourers, with buckets and spades, digging a new course for a mighty river; the human waves of the Peoples Liberation Army rolling over enemy resistance in time of war.

Chairman Mao himself chose to liken the Chinese people to an ocean. Chinese society, the Chinese nation, is of a scale that the human mind baulks to comprehend, as it baulks from the vastness of the universe. And China seethes. China has always seethed - if not with revolution, then with enterprise; if not with renewal, then with struggle to survive; if not with dissension, then with mass mobilisation.

In a world of shrinking distances and finite resources, the spectacle of China's looming bulk - one quarter of the human

race under a single, purposeful government - can seem fearful. Most thinking Chinese, themselves, fear the size of their nation's population. They prefer to think, and to live, within the microcosm of their town, their work unit, their family, the four cement walls of their own quarters.

I am driving at night up Chang An Avenue - the long, straight boulevard that has been bulldozed through old Beijing, across the front of the Forbidden City, bisecting the capital from west to east. Though the road is very broad, car drivers must go with care. Long, articulated buses snake in and out from the kerb, and cyclists swoop from lane to lane without a sideways glance.

Peering ahead, I see the road blocked by a dark mass, flecked with the glint of metal, moving towards me. As we close, I find it is a throng of thousands upon thousands of young men on bicycles, in such numbers that they have taken over six of the avenue's eight traffic lanes, by sheer weight of numbers forcing all other vehicles into the remaining two lanes. Even those are invaded from time to time by swooping young outriders. Many seem to be shouting, and the air vibrates with the shrill of bicycle bells.

'It's the football', says a passenger. The Beijing Workers' Stadium holds eighty thousand spectators, and more than sixty thousand of these arrive and depart from a big match by bicycle, in a vast living tide such as this one in which I am now caught up.

Through inexperience, I am slow to steer to the side of the road in the face of this wave, and am forced to slow suddenly to a crawl when the wave hits like surf - ranks of jostling, weaving cyclists passing me on both sides. Alarm must be evident on my face, as I notice that many of those gliding past my window are taking an amused interest in me and my foreign passengers, marooned in the capsule of our car on

this alien flood. Some rap cheekily on a window with a knuckle as they pass. Others peer in with a grin and make some personal remark or other about the foreigners inside. A number shout 'Hurro!', in the strangled, parrot-like tones they consider a fair representation of the English language. Competitive youths make specially daring swoops across our oncoming path, to show that they are not intimidated by foreigners, nor by motor cars.

After more than ten minutes, the horde begins to thin, and I am once more navigating on something approaching my normal expectation of a road - a space designated for motor traffic. But in those minutes I have been impressed with an elementary lesson about China. Those tens of thousands of young cyclists are acting in the certain knowledge of their mass power, as they flout rules and take over the road, secure in their numbers from any police retribution. And yet, as each one passes my window, his reaction is totally individual.

The life of the Mass is real enough, but the life of the Individual is just as real, and more absolute. This ought to be self-evident, but the seething, mass nature of China makes it all too easy to overlook, which is why the lives of individual Chinese are the basis of this book.

China has been the very definition of a mass society for two thousand years. Its population has been at the limit of what its environment could support, with known technology, for most of that time, and with almost no margin of security against famine. Survival itself required mass action - to build irrigation schemes, to raise flood dykes, and then to defend the fruits of what had been built against hungry marauders.

Mere bully barons could never last long - the next bad years would find them wanting, and, in the end, the survivors would be those who had planned, built, and organised the peasants on a mass scale.

The ideal Chinese state was not simply an environment of basic securities and services, but an organic society, in which each individual had fixed and clearly-defined responsibilities. An Organic State, in an Organic World, in which the human hierarchy was an extension of the general laws of Heaven. Heaven and Earth met in the person of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven, whose shamanistic rites ensured the correct turning of the seasons.

By Mandate of Heaven, the Emperor ruled not merely over one nation among various, but over Tian Xia, All Under Heaven. The practical limits to his actual domain at any period reflected merely the ignorance of those Barbarians who still refused to recognise the Emperor as Son of Heaven. Borders of China were, simply, the borders of civilisation. Let barbarians howl and cavort as they may, beyond that pale.

'Taming the barbarians' was of course both a practical goal of Chinese governments, and commendable in the eyes of Heaven. An expansionary Emperor was almost certainly a good Emperor, but successful government of the interior was, ultimately, a more decisive assessment of his reign. An unworthy, incompetent Emperor could lose the Mandate of Heaven itself, and could be replaced by anyone, from prince to peasant rebel, whose very ability to attain and hold the throne would be certain proof that the Mandate had been passed, by Heaven, to him. Thus dynasties rose and fell.

In early 1978, the Peoples Republic of China was seething inwardly, with particularly powerful currents of change in the body politic, while outwardly in something of a hiatus. Like a dormant creature sloughing its chrysalis, a few splits along the crusty spine were revealing bright and promising colours beneath, but with yet little indication of what final form was to emerge. The programs of extreme Maoism had been officially rejected. Their figureheads had been imprisoned and reviled as the Gang of Four, led by none other than the revered Chairman Mao's own widow, Jiang Qing. The coup against them had been a tactical masterpiece, relying on the support of some of Mao's own closest protegés in the national security apparatus. It had left the formal mantle of leadership resting uneasily on

the shoulders of Hua Guofeng, a man of unknown convictions, unimpressive track record, and uncertain power base, whom few foreign observers could see as more than a regent, in the old Chinese tradition.

The image of the Great Leader Mao Zedong himself remained sacrosanct. His body, contrary to his own recorded wishes for a humble cremation, lay embalmed in a huge, garish new mausoleum which, symbolically, destroyed the last remaining vista of Beijing's former imperial splendour - the view from Qian Men gate tower across Tian An Men Square to the Tian An Men (Gate of Heavenly Peace) itself, with the golden rooftiles of the Forbidden City rising beyond it. On the terms of the coup alliance, Charman Mao's prestige was not to be destroyed, and the future question would be just how the mystical, magical authority of his name, invested with thirty years of Party eulogy and credited with all the Party's achievements, could be used to support future policies beyond the ken of the dead leader himself.

The final decade of Chairman Mao's declining years had seen conflicting currents in China's relations with the world. The hysterical fears and conformism of the Cultural Revolution in China had paralysed China's international diplomacy for a number of years. Yet in the midst of these posturings and futile denunciations, a wave of anti-conservative governments were elected in a number of Western democracies. These governments opposed the diplomatic isolation of China which had long been a fundamental plank of the United States strategic world view. In 1971, the Peoples Republic of China was voted back into the United Nations, displacing Taiwan.

Premier Zhou Enlai initiated the famous ping-pong diplomacy, using non-political, 'people to people' exchanges to moderate lingering cold-war hostilities against Communist China. US Secretary of State Dr Henry Kissinger paid a secret visit to Beijing on behalf of President Richard Nixon, and the resulting Shanghai Communiqué made it clear that the United States itself was seeking eventual restoration of diplomatic ties. The next twelve months saw a flood of diplomatic 'normalisations' with China by America's traditional allies,

including Australia. As a standard feature of these diplomatic packages, there was exchange of foreign correspondent accreditations, and by late 1973 the first three Australian correspondents had joined the tiny foreign press contingent of Beijing.

By mid-1978, the size of the foreign press corps had grown only slightly, to around thirty. Of these, around one half were the 'Easties' - communist-bloc correspondents left over from the days of socialist internationalism, by now treated with suspicion and disdain by the Chinese officials assigned to facilitate and monitor their work. They ranged from acute and experienced east european sinologists to the most obtuse KGB disinformation agents, and included a despondent fringe of Vietnamese, North Koreans, a wild-eyed Albanian (soon withdrawn), and Lamzhaw, known affectionately as 'Lambchop', the wistful, Chinese-speaking correspondent for the official newsagency of the Mongolian Peoples Republic, who took his briefings from the Soviet Embassy.

Another third of the number were the Japanese, who had built a rapid reputation on arrival as newbreakers, for their ability to read the ideographs on Chinese wall-posters. They were also prized, as colleagues, for the propensity of visiting Japanese officials and businessmen to give them full and flavoursome briefings after talks with interesting Chinese individuals, in marked contrast to the timid practices of Western visitors. The Japanese reputation for accuracy, however, was beginning to tarnish somewhat, as Chinese-reading correspondents from other countries became able to check the same sources, often with much tamer conclusions.

The final third of the corps were the 'Westies' - basically Western Europeans, with the honorary addition of Australians, a Canadian, and a stray Filipino who happened to be the son of the Ambassador, who happened to be a close associate of the President's wife, and who happened to spend almost his entire time elsewhere, engaged in pursuits unknown. When I joined the corps in June 1978, only one other Western agency, Agence France Press, considered it useful to keep a Chinese-speaking correspondent in Beijing. 'You can't talk to anybody, anyway',

was the prevailing view. But when I left, five years later, there were more than a hundred foreign correspondents accredited to Beijing, amongst whom all the major agencies numbered proficient Chinese-speakers as a matter of course. The China Story, in journalistic terms, had ceased to be a curio piece. It was recognised as an assignment of serious reportage and significance to all nations.

Beijing of 1978 was indeed a bizarre world for a Western journalist. As far as China was concerned, journalism was an extension of government information and propaganda effort - in the case of foreign correspondents as much as for themselves. Any such thing as 'right of access' or 'freedom of information' was absolutely unthinkable.

The basic principle of China's method of handling foreigners within its frontiers has not changed in centuries. That principle is that every foreigner on Chinese soil must come under the direct responsibility of an identified Chinese authority which, in the last analysis, is responsible for his 'friendly' behaviour. Hence all diplomats are the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry Protocol Department, trade delegations are the responsibility of the particular ministry with which they happen to be negotiating, visiting foreign communist delegations come under a special department of the Chinese Communist Party organisation, and foreign tourists belong, during their stay, to the China International Travel Service. Visiting overseas Chinese have their own, separate host organisation.

We journalists were marshalled under the Information Department of the Foreign Ministry, who were solely empowered to authorise all entry and exit visas, travel permits, official government briefings, requests for government interviews, and, in the early days, any liaison whatsoever with other Chinese organisations for the purposes of setting up stories. In this context, it was entirely futile for a journalist or any other foreigner in China to try to insist on his 'rights'. China's only experience of foreigners having 'rights' in China was when such concessions were forced out of weak Chinese

governments by foreign powers through force of arms, and these so-called Unequal Treaties were always considered an intolerable affront to Chinese sovereignty. Rather than sojourners with rights, roughly equivalent to citizens of China, foreigners in China must learn to consider themselves as 'guests' - with the significant difference that while we were totally without rights, we could be allowed extensive privileges, at the discretion and grace of our hosts, the Chinese people. We had been admitted to China, on the insistence of our respective foreign governments, as part of the terms of diplomatic relations - and hence our role was presumed to be closely identified with that of our respective embassies.

In those early years of China's re-opening, when the total foreign community in Beijing was still a mere handful, practical and social reasons ensured that journalists did indeed maintain close relations with their embassies, though with nothing like the relationship presumed by most Chinese. It was a long time before most could come to terms with the fact that Western journalistic reportage on China was often at variance with official embassy reportage, and it was not unusual for embassies to be powerlessly infuriated by the activities of journalists whose work hampered their own diplomatic objectives, but whom they were powerless to control.

Some journalists, particularly those inculcated with the highly competitive values of domestic political reportage, were almost obsessive in their desire to 'beat the embassy' political reporters. The most common attitude was one of guarded co-operation, with embassy staff usually prepared to swap views and limited information, sometimes on a 'background' basis, with journalists who would, equally, guard the independence of whatever individual sources they had been able to develop. The more interesting briefing sessions, then, could take on something of the character of a card game - journalists and embassy staffers fencing, bidding, perhaps bluffing a little, to draw the maximum of each other's information before, if ever, revealing their full hand.

For journalists brought up in the tradition that their role required strict independence from government, it could be a

galling irritation to have Chinese organisations persist in sending personal and official mail to the embassy, presuming we were all part of the same foreign team. On the other side of the coin, the same quasi-diplomatic umbrella for a time gave foreign journalist bureaux a number of customs duty and taxation privileges, soon to disappear as the size of the press corps, and China's hunger for foreign exchange, increased.

After 1978, many of the hostile presumptions regarding contact between Chinese and foreigners were undermined. Overtures to the west, at the official level, made it marginally more difficult for watchdogs at local level to treat any informal, personal contacts between Chinese and foreigners like a national betrayal, as had been the case for so long. As a result, personal contacts became possible to an extent that had been scornfully derided as impossible, only months before. There were still risks for a local Chinese in making contact with a foreigner - suspicion alone can be highly dangerous in a country where 'political reliability' is essential to career prospects.

It still took motivation and courage for any unauthorised Chinese citizen to confide to any degree in a foreigner. Those Chinese whose work brought them into regular contact with foreigners, such as the office and domestic staff supplied to foreigners exclusively by the official Diplomatic Service Bureau, were under constant mutual supervision, and were expected to report all details of the foreigners' and each others' failings at weekly meetings called by Bureau officials. All foreigners residences were concentrated in a few fenced compounds, guarded by armed PLA soldiers and with each gate monitored by Public Security police whose sole duty was to keep tabs on contacts between Chinese and foreigners. Such was their zeal at this that, on one celebrated occasion, the Fire Brigade was prevented from attending a blaze in the Qi Jia Yuan diplomatic highrise apartment block compound because the engines arrived at the gate without the proper letters of authority to enter.

In most such apartment blocks, the 'automatic' elevators were manned with entirely superfluous staff, whose work kept

them in such a state of perpetual boredom that they were only too keen to keep a detailed eye on the comings and goings of foreigners' apartments. We resident foreigners soon realised that there was no such thing as a private relationship in Beijing. This was sufficient intimidation to deter almost all casual local contacts, and to eliminate any faint-hearted Chinese from even attempting to make friends with a foreigner.

Most foreigners who did develop personal relationships of any kind with Chinese found that their friends fell into three general categories: the reckless, the naive, and those secure enough of their place in society, or of their family's standing, to feel they could ride above any petty harassment. The Government of the Peoples Republic of China officially defines itself as a 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat', and the definition of State Secrets in China covers, in effect, every single item of information which has not specifically been authorised for publication. In this context, any Chinese who confides in a foreigner without prior government authorisation, even in relatively liberal times, runs the risk of being accused, perhaps at some time far in the future, of disloyalty to his nation, or worse. Chinese themselves are extremely sensitive on the matter, and it imposes on any author, writing about real Chinese people, a grave responsibility to respect their confidences. For this reason, whilst all the personal stories in this book are true as told to me, in many cases I have made changes to names and other facts which might identify the individual.

Chapter one

Revolutionary Successors

Chairman Mao Zedong is dead, Premier Zhou Enlai is dead, most of the old PLA Marshals are dead. The teenagers who took up arms as peasant rebels are honoured old men, living in privilege on a glorious past, in which victory was simply to destroy a human enemy, by cunning or by force. The real enemies of today cannot be herded into re-education camps - even a million counter-revolutionaries would be a mere flea-bite to the mighty state apparatus of the People's Republic of China. The tidal waves of the twenty-first century - a doubled population, exhausted soil, crumbling cities, the obsolescence of massed infantry - have already begun to crash against the crimson walls of Zhong Nan Hai, where the inheritors of the revolution now sit over these gloomy reports in the pavillions of departed emperors. The revolution has grown old.

Chairman Mao had watched his Revolution ageing before his eyes - watched men who had sacrificed their families and risked their own death, time after time, for a fervent ideology, move into the homes of a destroyed wealthy class, and assume

the silken robes of privilege and power themselves. Even those who kept to their former ideals of a frugal personal life became enmeshed in webs of preferment, building their own clans of loyal, indebted followers, jockeying for Party status - surrendering, as Mao saw it, to that same Confucian bureaucratism which had fettered Chinese progress for two thousand years.

Mao's answer was to launch a new doctrine of Perpetual Revolution, according to which the corrupting, conservatising effects of state power would be kept in check by constant, violent challenge from below - from a proletariat who, by definition, were pure of the sins of power and property. Yesterday's revolutionary hero could be today's renegade capitalist-roader. Five percent of every community would always become irredeemable class enemies - they must be constantly rooted out and destroyed. Suspects must be ruthlessly tested and reformed, for their own good as well as society's. It was a doctrine of religious witch-hunt, familiar at different stages in the history of all peoples, and it resulted in the same catalogues of manic, self-destructive violence on the part of the ignorant, the fanatical, and a fresh breed of power-drunk opportunists. What was launched as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in 1965, was later to be known as China's Ten Years of Chaos.

This is not the place for an account of the Cultural Revolution. Many solid accounts are extant, and it is now well-recognised as one of the greatest social convulsions the world has ever seen - comparable in many respects to the Inquisition or to the rise of European fascism. The Chinese Communist Party itself now officially recognises that the Cultural Revolution's sustained attacks on all civil authority, on skill, on education, on research, on history, on the arts and even the sciences, came close to destroying the whole intellectual investment of the world's largest nation. The tiny educated class was physically destroyed or at least terrorised into paralysis, and, in a nation where modern technicians and administrators were in desperate shortage, training institutions were closed for years on end. No-one was properly educated

for a space of almost a decade.

In 1978, many of those still holding positions of power, including Mao's 'chosen successor' Hua Guofeng, were identified supporters of the Cultural Revolution, and the true evaluations of it could not yet be published. That came later. In the aftermath of the coup against the Gang of Four, Chairman Hua and the Central Committee had issued a call for Four Modernisations (of agriculture, industry, science, and defence) to bring China abreast of advanced world levels by the year 2000. This campaign was promoted with the euphoric propaganda style inherited from the Cultural Revolution apparatus, but the propaganda soon came down to earth with a bump.

The realist faction in the leadership, growing stronger by the day, insistently pointed out that few of those charged with bringing about the Four Modernisations knew what they were talking about, in either technical or management terms. As examples, there were some spectacular blunders of over-reaching in the heavy industry sector, most notably the purchase from Japan, for some six billion dollars, of a quite unsuitable blast furnace and steel complex for Bao Shan, near Shanghai. When the scandal was revealed, there followed a salutary period of retraction in central planning, during all further spending on wholesale industrial development purchases from foreign countries was suspended. Among other things, this costly experience demonstrated that current leaders, mostly peasant revolutionaries of narrow experience and little education, must either learn to take advice from better-qualified juniors, or else move aside. China's economy could no longer be commanded like a guerrilla band.

Deng Xiaoping, at that time nominally a Vice-Premier, was the driving force behind this reassessment. A Communist of great resilience and toughness, Deng's long career had been marked by two things - an unwavering belief in the central role of the Party in China's future, and a lack of dogmatism as to what the shape of that future might be. Deng's famous expostulation that 'it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice', had thrown him time and

again into conflict with the party dogmatists - chiefly Chairman Mao himself. With Mao now gone, and the country mobilising in rejection of the Cultural Revolution madness, Deng gained the momentum to fight a winning battle against dogmatism, and against those in the leadership whose usefulness was crippled by it.

One of the first campaigns was the restoration of those tens of thousands of administrators and academics who had been thrown out of their jobs during the Cultural Revolution. The next phase, led by Deng's own example of official retirement, was to encourage, or even enforce, retirement of those who had outlived their usefulness, in favour of younger, supposedly more vigorous and flexible administrators. The cry went out, 'Find the Revolutionary Successors', and two generations of frustrated, disillusioned, talented Chinese began to see a glimmer of motivational light at the end of their long tunnel. One of them was Sun Chaoyang.

The legend of the Chinese Communists as 'peasant revolutionaries' is, like most such historical legends, not the whole truth. Their strategy of mobilising and enlisting the support of the peasants in their struggle with the Nationalist regime undoubtedly brought them to power, and their armies were drawn very heavily from the ranks of the desperate and dispossessed of the peasantry, but not too many of the Party leaders who eventually brought those armies to sweeping victory could actually claim genuine peasant birth. For ideological reasons, many leaders had their personal histories retrospectively amended to make them look more proletarian - a quaint reversal of the historical practice of successful peasant rebels 'discovering' royal bloodlines once they mounted the Imperial throne. In fact, the presence of representatives of the intellectual and moneyed classes of China among the ranks of the Communist Party leaders was significant.

Sun Chaoyang's father is one of those bourgeois intellectual Communists, whose biography would read like that of thousands of other young idealists of his generation. Sun's grandfather had been a member of the traditional scholarly class in China, a Mandarin of middle rank who had passed one

of the last of the Imperial civil service examinations. With the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty and the Imperial government in 1911, he continued to live where he had last held office - in the southern city of Suzhou, a famous centre of the scholarly life. He dabbled with progressive ideas, but devoted more and more of his attention to his opium pipe. Sensing the dilapidation of Chinese society as he had known it, the old grandfather decided to send Sun Chaoyang's father to a 'Foreign School' run by missionaries in nearby Shanghai, which already by that time was the centre of industrial and intellectual Westernisation in China.

What he had not intended, however, was that his son, rather than studying foreign methods of getting rich, became involved with the radical student movement in Shanghai. In stormy scenes, the old man demanded, in the name of filial obedience and the pre-eminence of the interests of the family, that the son abandon his radical affiliations. When, like so many fathers of his class and generation, he was rejected, he formally disowned his son and lapsed into an opium-soaked senility.

Sun's father felt deeply torn by the break with his family, but he became more and more deeply involved with the underground Communist movement during the forties. He took part in guerrilla actions behind Nationalist lines in Shanghai itself, and was wounded in a street battle. His family relented enough to hide him from the Nationalists while he recuperated. After the Communists had achieved government power, Sun's father, like so many of his contemporaries, found very rapid promotion as one of the relatively tiny band of trusted and capable cadres attempting to rebuild a vast and turbulent nation into the theoretical model of a communist Peoples Republic. However, his war injuries were a continuing handicap, and his career came to rest with him as an instructor in one of the Peoples Liberation Army's large establishment of colleges and political institutes. He married late, to a woman of similar background with a trusted position in the army support bureaucracy, and they had one son, whom they named Chaoyang (Dawn), after their hopes for New China.

Chaoyang apologised that he was unable to take me to meet

his parents, since their work-unit was a military one, and their home therefore regarded as a military compound off limits to foreigners. It was a surprise to me that he found it necessary to apologise at all, since most Chinese prefer to leave such minor embarrassments unmentioned and unexplained. It may have been that his father's rank was such that the impossibility of a foreigner visiting his home was very clear-cut, and therefore not very embarrassing - but it was also typical of Chaoyang's quite exceptional self-confidence that he would breezily issue even this rather aborted kind of invitation to a foreigner. But then, he had as good reasons for self-confidence as anyone I knew in China.

By the time their son was born, Sun Chaoyang's parents were already Establishment. Being both Red Army and Party members of long standing, their welfare was looked after by both wings. Their housing was comfortable - a spacious courtyard residence requisitioned from a former capitalist, now fled to Hong Kong. Fuel and food produce were delivered to their door by army transport workers from the army's own system of farms and coal- mines. Medical care of the highest standard was free from the local military officers' hospital. Salaries, pegged strictly to seniority, were sufficient indulge in some purchasing of antiques and works of art sold off by former bourgeoisie who had not transferred their allegiance in time to the new regime, and were now living in reduced circumstances. But most importantly, they had the *guanxi*, the 'connections', to obtain special favours from time to time when required.

Chaoyang said they never abused these privileges. He himself was admitted to an elite primary school, along with the children of other senior officials and army officers. He had a lively intelligence, and had been encouraged all along at home, where books were held in high esteem and always available. Chaoyang studied diligently and went through his schooldays with flying colours. Those colours included high marks for Ideology classes, and a clean record as a member of the Young Pioneers - the communist equivalent of the Boy Scouts. In due course he was admitted to the Communist Youth League - the

next essential step on the road to Party membership.

Then the Cultural Revolution broke over them. Sun's family, with their middle-class origins and their intellectual interests, were immediately at risk - prime examples of the people Chairman Mao and others were deriding as the 'Stinking Ninth Category of Class Enemies' lurking within the Party. For a time their military status protected them, but eventually a radical faction turned its attention to them, sending the old underground fighter, wounded in action, out to do humiliating and painful manual labour so that he might 'learn from the masses' about the real meaning of revolution.

Chaoyang never said which faction he had belonged to in those days of confusion and betrayal. As a good Youth League member and a believer in Chairman Mao he took part in Struggle Meetings to denounce people like his own family, and he joined the Red Guards at the first opportunity. He travelled the country on the free Red Guard trains to 'exchange revolutionary experience' with the peasants, especially in famous scenic areas. If, as I suspect, he followed the normal pattern of youngsters from his stratum of society, he probably stayed with the more conservative factions of the Red Guards and avoided outright attacks on his father's class of old-time revolutionaries. Whatever the case, it was a period he did not like to discuss in great detail. Rather, he preferred to dwell on the aftermath - the mass dispersal to the rural villages of educated youth, ordered by Chairman Mao as a cure for the chronic mass revolutionary hysteria which by that time was threatening real civil war to the whole country.

With a large group of his schoolmates, Sun Chaoyang was assigned to Inner Mongolia to 'teach and learn' with the locals. In reality, this meant stepping off the local bus in a small, isolated township on the bare Mongolian grasslands, to be greeted with traditional hospitality by the Mongols, but also with more than a little suspicion as to why these young Hans had been sent there, and whether they would be worth the trouble and expense of the food they would eat. I have no way of knowing how Sun's hosts felt about him, but he himself remembers those three years as the happiest of his life. In this

he is also set apart from the majority of his fellow rusticated youth, who quickly found the primitive conditions, lack of diversions, and grudging hospitality of the locals towards their uninvited guests a kind of purgatory to be endured only as briefly as possible.

Sun Chaoyang did acknowledge that he was luckier in his rustication than many. Life in the grim, exhausted villages of the North China Plain, though closer to home, could offer even greater physical privations and far fewer compensations. Many of the peasants in those over-populated areas were overtly hostile towards the bands of soft, opinionated city children, assigned to them without recourse, sharing their meagre food and lodging, and seldom willing or able to contribute a full share of productive labour.

The numbers over the whole country were vast - over twenty million still rusticated in 1978 - and among them there were indeed some great success stories where the town-bred youth were able to contribute the benefit of their education and initiative in ways appreciated by the locals. Some, like Chaoyang, became teachers in local schools, imparting a degree of basic literacy and general knowledge to adults as well as children, in part-time schools. Some others undertook scientific projects in plant- breeding, pest control, agronomy or such fields. Some became clerks and cashiers in rural collectives.

Sun Chaoyang had spent all his life up till then in the crowded lanes and courtyards of Chinese cities, hemmed in by high walls and nosy neighbours. He referred often to the wide blue skies and unfenced steppes of the Mongolian grasslands, which Han Chinese, from their millennia of intensive small-farming, had traditionally regarded as, at best, 'wasteland', and at worst a hostile home for untrustworthy, nomadic barbarians and horseback raiders. Sun said he found the wide open spaces and the unpolluted air liberating to his spirit, and he learned to love the straightforward and generous Mongolian people.

Chairman Mao's call had been for the educated youth to settle down permanently where they had been sent, but Sun never believed for a moment that his rustic sojourn could

become permanent. In the bitterness of each Mongolian winter, when arctic winds swept down, unimpeded, across the steppes from eastern Siberia, he could journey back to his home town for a few weeks, where his father had now been 'rehabilitated' to his old job and privileges. Some of his friends were beginning to trickle back from their rustication's, with or without official permission, seeking pretexts such as 'illness in the family' to resume a normal urban life.

By this time, universities and colleges were beginning to reopen, but were accepting students on their 'revolutionary' credentials as *gong nong bing* (workers, peasants, soldiers - the three heroic classes of Maoism), rather than on the old bourgeois academic criteria. The new criteria, however, like so many other apparently clear-cut policies in China, were subject to much de facto amendment by strategic local string-pulling and bureaucratic sleight of hand. It was soon apparent that a solid proportion of the *gong nong bing* students being admitted to the reopened colleges were the same children of the urban privileged class who would have entered under the old system. Brief assignments to industry, a rural commune, or the army, had turned them into instant workers, peasants, or soldiers. All that was required was some gentle string-pulling with the local education authorities, or for the exiled urban youth to win the favour of the local Party authorities in their temporary home, who would then nominate them as *gong nong bing* students.

There are things to be said on both sides about this practice, and it would be unfair not to mention that there were many notable successes among the genuine *gong nong bing* students. Some talented and self-educated youth from peasant backgrounds have gone on to brilliant academic careers from these initial opportunities, which they would never have had under the old system, when all schools were filled from the elite families with access to the fast lane of good primary and secondary education. In the seventies, however, it was sadly apparent to the institution staffs that most genuine *gong nong bing* students had been selected by local unit Party committees for their tame political record, rather than for their academic ability. Unfortunately, many of those whose political records

were impeccable enrolled at universities with scarcely a primary education to build upon, making academic standards impossible to maintain.

Sun Chaoyang was well-qualified for university admission on all grounds. His academic background was solid, his political record over three years in Inner Mongolia was unimpeachable, and his family were well-placed enough to ensure that his application was given favourable consideration. He was admitted to the elite Beijing University to study English language and literature.

Perhaps Sun Chaoyang had absorbed, in some mysterious way, his grandfather's Confucian precepts on pragmatic state-craft, for he proved, once again, that he could adapt to new circumstances without abandoning his fundamental orthodoxy. He read widely in European literature which espoused concepts of individualism and social freedom profoundly challenging to current Chinese ideology, but he was consistent in applying to it the Marxist social analysis and utilitarian aesthetics which he had been taught were correct. But, unlike the more simply doctrinaire of his fellow-students, he showed in his conversations with me and with other foreigners that he understood some of the philosophical differences in Western literature not simply as a manifestation of bourgeois decadence, but as a genuine alternative world view, with its own humanitarian traditions worthy of consideration. This was no small achievement for a child of his generation, raised and educated through such a stringently exclusive Marxist orthodoxy.

There were some among the literature students, a very few, who would confess secretly, to foreign room-mates or friends, that they had no faith in the future of China under the Communist Party. It was a deadly secret in those days, when political inquisition could easily bring an abrupt end to anyone's academic career. (This was still possible by the time I left China in 1983, but only for relatively flamboyant expressions of dissent). Sun never made such a confession, but none the less was trusted and liked by the few foreign students in his university who got to know him.

In his growing interest in Western culture, Sun developed an interest in Western popular music - much to the disgust of his parents, who themselves were set apart from most of their countrymen by a devotion to Western serious music, particularly the Russian romantic composers popularised among the elite of China during the period of 'brotherhood' with the Soviet Union in the fifties. Sun developed his own theories on rhythm and blues music as a form of the 'folk' music which had an established place in Communist social theory. This was quite brave, as all those in authority were still convinced that popular Western music was purely a product of moral degradation and class exploitation. Later, as dress fashions loosened up a little, Sun Chaoyang even did his best to grow a moustache - but it never developed much beyond the wispy cat's-whiskers common to light-bearded Chinese youths. While he fraternised confidently with foreigners, he never crossed the fine lines either of personal intimacy or of ideological compromise which could have put his future instantly at risk.

Chaoyang's father had a friend, an old revolutionary comrade from the underground, whose family were the Sun's closest acquaintances. They had come from the same provincial origins and had been through fear and triumphs together over forty years. On one occasion, at the Sun family's house, the two old comrades decided that they should cap off their long friendship with a marriage between their children. With much jesting and toasting, the two ranking Party members made the traditional vows of betrothal for their children. Chaoyang at this time was only fourteen years old, and presumed they were joking. He had learned in school about the Marriage Laws which forbade arranged marriages. Ming, the girl supposedly chosen to be his bride, was only ten.

It was more than ten years later, after Chaoyang returned from Inner Mongolia to the university, that he began to take a serious interest in girls. Very few Chinese expect to begin their 'adolescent' phase of experimental courtship until well into their twenties. Many theories have been advanced by foreigners about this, ranging from low animal-fat diets to

plain old forced repression. In Chaoyang's day, the pressures to conform to a puritan, revolutionary work ethic were very powerful, and the natural stimuli to sexual interest were reduced to a minimum by the disfiguring hairstyles and potato-shaped work uniforms handed out to both men and women alike. Despite these disincentives, Chaoyang began to feel strongly attracted to some of his female fellow-students, and to wonder whether he might be in love. When some of this attraction appeared to be reciprocated by one girl in his class, a kind of tentative relationship developed, limited to brief, tense conversations. Chaoyang decided that he probably was, after all, in love.

When Chaoyang confidentially imparted this idea to his father, the reaction was explosive.

'He just flew into a rage,' Chaoyang told me, 'and absolutely refused to have the girl in our house, even for a visit. He told me that my future marriage to Ming, that little girl, was the only personal objective left in his life, and that I would break his heart if I refused. So I stopped seeing the other girl. But Ming still seemed just a child to me - I didn't want anything to do with her'.

A year later, the incident was repeated over a different fellow-student who had caught Chaoyang's attention, and the old man's tantrum was even more terrifying. Following the footsteps of his own dead father, the old Mandarin, he threatened he would disown Chaoyang if his son refused to marry his arranged bride.

'I pity my father', said Chaoyang, 'so, after another few months, I agreed to be 'introduced' to Ming.' By this time Ming had been admitted to a different, equally prestigious tertiary institution.

The 'introduction' to this girl he had known and ignored all his life took the standard form of family match-making in 'advanced' Chinese circles. Ming's parents came to visit Chaoyang's family, bringing their daughter with them, and the two young people were given an opportunity to exchange a few words of conversation and look each other over. Later Chaoyang, still uncertain, wrote Ming a note suggesting they

might meet on a Sunday afternoon in a park. The park chosen was well away from places frequented by family and friends, so as to offer at least some privacy and to avoid loss of face if things went badly. As he later told it, Chaoyang was rapidly won over by Ming, whom he described as 'extremely sensible about everything, and 'simply the kindest girl I had ever met'.

By the time this took place, Sun Chaoyang's well-starred destiny had led him into a highly desirable job, in a secure, Central Government work unit with access to plenty of privileges. He had become a full Communist Party member. His own family's home was large enough to offer a new couple a room of their own, so there was no impediment on his side to an early marriage. Ming faced a problem - Chinese students almost always live in campus dormitories, and are forbidden to marry before completion of their courses. There was also the risk that, after her graduation, she could be assigned away to a work unit in a remote part of China - a common curse for the educated class in China.

But Chaoyang pressed his suit for an early marriage, now that he had made his choice and it was an appropriate next move in his career. The Party secretary of Ming's institution, no doubt influenced by Chaoyang's good connections and personal record, agreed to permit the marriage if Chaoyang undertook not to interfere with Ming's studies. This he undertook, and they commenced married life on a part-time basis. Five nights a week, Ming lived in the college dormitory, in a room with five other girls, and Chaoyang slept in similar bachelor quarters at his work unit. On weekends, they lived together as man and wife in his parents' home.

Chaoyang was immensely pleased that he had satisfied his father's demands without sacrificing his own happiness. That he had not personally chosen Ming for himself did not alter the fact that he was now delighted with her as his wife. Ming's mother had come from a family of Chinese Christians, with even a minor dose of Western blood in her veins, apparent in Ming's slightly uptilted nose. Her father was also Western-educated in Shanghai. The two old communist intellectuals, now father and father-in-law, would sometimes talk bitterly of

the collapse of their youthful ideals.

'We failed to build a new society', said his father, 'because the Party took on the Confucian feudal style that we were trying to destroy'. It didn't occur to him that the Confucian feudal style was just what he himself had applied in arranging his own son's marriage, thirty years after Liberation and the promulgation of marriage emancipation laws. Chaoyang forebore to point it out to him.

'I pity my father very much', he said again. But Chaoyang himself would continue along the path his father's generation had laid down: Marxist by faith, but not a revolutionary - instead, a Revolutionary Successor with a first-class ticket firmly in his grasp. His father had challenged the declining, Confucian order of things and participated in its overthrow. Chaoyang had been brought up to believe in the new order, a Communist Party-led order. Like the Confucians who preceded his grandfather's doomed generation, Sun Chaoyang accepted that to challenge the system would be both futile and self-destructive. He would serve the Party, and the Party would support him. I trusted his sincerity when he told me, as many others had done less convincingly,

'I strongly believe that only Socialism can save China'.

The last time I saw Chaoyang, he was off to the West. Above stiff competition, he had been selected by his work unit for a three-year research assignment to a university in one of the most comfortable of the 'bourgeois' democratic nations - an exceptionally plum job for someone of his age. According to the Chinese system, Ming would have to remain in China, and I wondered what he would tell her of bourgeois democracy when he returned home to China.

Of China's one thousand million population, six hundred and fifty million are under thirty years of age. These are the Revolutionary Successors who will carry China into the twenty-first century, and few can expect the high road to success enjoyed by Sun Chaoyang. In some developed countries, more than one in three young people achieve some form or tertiary education. In China, it is one in 150,000, and

even the strenuous efforts now under way to improve that ratio - plans to double college admissions, and development of extensive radio and television education systems - have a very long way to go. According to the *Peoples Daily*, primary education is now available to 95% of children, but only one in three will reach the official five year primary standard of basic education. Over 85% of China's children live in peasant villages, where such education as is available must be paid for by the collective itself, and can cost as much as one quarter of the family's total per capita income for each primary student.

In the cities, there is a universal public education system, but with hugely hugely varying standards from school to school. Competition is extremely fierce, not only for tertiary places but also at the end of primary school for admission to the small number of elite Key Schools, which current policies has established to concentrate scarce teaching resources on the most promising of Revolutionary Successors. And the competition, watched over anxiously by ambitious parents, is not purely academic.

The pendulum has swung away from the purely political criteria of promotion exercised during the Cultural Revolution years. In an outstandingly brilliant student, personal eccentricities may be tolerated up to a certain point. But in general, recommendation of 'sound ideology' from the Party machine at every level is decisive. From kindergarten onwards, Chinese pupils are urged to develop their 'collective spirit', to eschew individualism, and to demonstrate Love for the Party, the People, and the Nation (in that order). Those who most satisfy the criteria are dubbed Three Goods students - good at studies, good in physical health, and good in ideology. They will secure earliest admission to the Young Pioneers, will have an advantage in admission to Key Schools, and, at higher levels, will be the prime candidates for the Communist Youth League, for college admission, and ultimately for Party membership. As Deng's campaign for the Revolutionary Successors gathered way, the Maoist criterion which had excluded children of 'suspect' family backgrounds from joining the Young Pioneers, and hence from identifying with school

political ideals, was dropped for the cruel and pointless persecution of children that it had represented.

Tertiary education is considered state property - too valuable to leave the assignment of jobs to those who have received the education up to chance. Distribution offices attached to every institution, and a whole centralised Personnel Bureau structure linking them nationally, were in the habit of treating each year's crop of graduates just as they would treat any other product in a command economy. Organisations wanting to take on graduates in particular disciplines would put in their requests, and the Party authorities in the distribution office would despatch the required number, if available. There were no job applications or interviews, and often no consultation whatsoever with the individual concerned. But because the Central Government organs in Beijing or other major cities had the most pull with the offices, a stronger academic and political record gave a graduate a greater chance of staying, after graduation, in the comparative comfort of urban employment, rather than facing assignment to *Xin Xi Lan* (New Zealand) - a wry acronym for three of the most feared and remote destinations: Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan), Xizang (Tibet) and Lanzhou, capital of far Western Gansu province.

The personal inequities of this system, however, inevitably have some considerable effect on the morale and the efficiency of this individuals concerned. It may never be possible to satisfy all graduates (after all, almost all want to stay in Beijing, Shanghai or the place where their families are), but it does not take a great deal of consultation to make a significant difference. And apart from the wishes of the graduates, the work units accepting the new graduates were keen to have more of a say as well. All too often, persons of rare, specialised training were being misplaced in unsuitable units, permanently, because the Personnel Bureau cadres concerned were themselves generally Party hacks (often demobilised peasant-soldier officers or the wives of senior cadres in related units) without any technical appreciation whatsoever.

Misplacement had been the deliberate policy of the Maoists, as an extension of the `intellectuals must learn proletarian

ideology from the masses' attitude, but with the Four Modernisations in view, wholesale revisions have begun in the personnel placement system. More and more specialist organisations are advertising publicly for job applicants or sending their own recruiters to the colleges to select future staff from the available graduates, as is done elsewhere in the world.

The education crisis was extended backwards into the seventies with an edict in 1982 stating that all those who had graduated from high schools during the Cultural Revolution years 1967-77 were to be considered not properly educated. All would be obliged to undertake catch-up courses (on full pay), and would be demoted or transferred if they could not make the grade. A report in the Shanghai press said that almost half the staff working in government commercial departments were incompetent for their jobs, lacking general education and particular skills.

But there was also a growing tendency, in the early 1980s, alarming to the officials, for many of those who gained college admission to relapse into apathy. Faced with a compulsory assignment at the end of their course, and the established principle of almost no failure rate, regardless of performance, complacency was insidious. These were people who had been witness, as children, to the moral and social chaos of the Cultural Revolution, and who had been called upon to denounce learning as bourgeois by the same Party they were now being asked to serve with conviction. As the Cultural Revolution subsided, they had been faced with strenuous budgets of self-study, family pressure, and political minefields, on their way to the college gates. Those admitted were often treated by their families, just like their Confucian antecedents at the Imperial Examinations, as Young Lords. The story was told of one college student who had been excused all family responsibilities while studying, and whose old grandmother was sent regularly to the college dormitory to make his bed and do his laundry. The ultimate cautionary tale was of a supposedly pampered Beijing language student who became a part-time burglar to satisfy his lust for worldly goods, and was eventually charged with the murder of an old department-store

watchman.

Other children wrote bitter letters to the national youth newspaper, *Qingnian Bao* complaining that they were obliged to do extra shares of housework to make up for a brother or sister who, having been admitted to a Key School, was given a privileged position. As the education system began to revive from the Cultural Revolution, the ambition of many parents for their children became extreme, resulting in the suicides of children who failed the entrance examinations on which their parents had set their hearts. Specialist careers, dependent on admission to the specialist high schools, were irrevocably lost by the age of twelve.

Ba Jin, one of China's most prominent novelists since the thirties, had written for decades about family tensions in a changing world - his most famous novels, *Family*, *Spring* and *Autumn* follow that theme closely. From gentry origins, he later aligned himself with the Communist regime and became chairman of the official Union of Chinese Writers. In 1982, he wrote an article for the left-wing Hong Kong paper, *Ta Kung Pao*, lamenting the situation in his own home, where his granddaughter, at the age of seven, was under constant pressure to succeed:

`I remember when I was a child at school, I was fed knowledge by force and scolded by my elders, and I learned by mechanical memorizing. The same study method which I learned seventy years ago is being used today by my granddaughter Duan Duan - still force-feeding and scolding...

`Duan Duan's parents often warn her that if she does not get marks above ninety percent, she should consider she has failed her exams. I shudder when I hear this... I had a good memory and was able to learn anything by heart after reading it two or three times, but after half a year it would all disappear from my memory... mechanical memorizing is a fruitless effort.

`Often I talk to friends about the students' burden.. all agree

that children should be relieved from their spiritual load...

Others say that the load on their minds makes them passive thinkers, and add that we don't want our youths to be submissive'.

And the pressure is not purely academic. The cultivation of a 'Socialist Spirit' is a major task of all the propaganda organs of the Chinese state, which include the news media, literature, art and theatre. Young individuals are singled out for nationwide publicity when they perform notable actions in this Socialist Spirit. It was not uncommon to read of young people who had voluntarily handed over a substantial family inheritance to the state, 'to help build the Four Modernisations.' The youth newspaper, *Qingnian Bao*, carried many such stories, and others of heroic rescues, feats of production and so on carried out for unselfish reasons by particular youngsters. A fourteen year-old girl was praised when, on cleaning out a trunk of her father's in his absence, she discovered a suspicious amount of money and turned her father in to the police on corruption charges.

Most famous of these was a young cook named Chen, at one of Beijing's most classy restaurants, who waged a campaign of public denunciation against a number of senior government officials and their wives who had made a practice of using their influence to extort free meals from the restaurant managers. Since this exposé happened to suit the politics of the hour, the whistle-blowing cook was made a national hero, a Model Worker, and finally was nominated as a delegate to the parliament, the National Peoples Congress!

From time to time, stories also arose of young people who had attempted to make themselves into such heroes by deceit. A young soldier on guard duty at an airport stabbed and bashed himself in several places, then claimed to have fought off an attack by several 'counter-revolutionary saboteurs'. He was rapidly exposed, and confessed that he was trying to satisfy his mother's demands that he become a national hero. A Youth League branch secretary falsely claimed to have saved the life of an accident victim by donating large amounts of his own blood (something most Chinese, for traditional reasons, are

very reluctant to do). His `report', full of the noblest socialist sentiments, was printed in the *Beijing Daily* before others in his factory exposed the fraud.

Acknowledging that there was considerable skepticism among the youth, regarding Socialist Spirit, the *Qingnian Bao* ran a series of correspondence debates between readers. Many readers wrote cynically, accusing those who donated to the State their inheritances, or treasure troves (the hidden silver hoards of departed landlords, still dug up almost every week, somewhere in China) of being nothing but glory-hunters or abject fools. There was discussion as to whether it was permissible for a Youth League cadre to have cosmetic surgery widening her eyes. The answer appeared to be Yes, in this day and age. A keen Youth League member had become interested in Christianity, through family connections to one of the reopened Chinese churches - was this permissible? No - atheism remained *de rigueur* for anyone who called themselves a communist, as Youth League members were supposed to do. An even more interesting argument raged in a Shanghai paper, *Wen Hui Bao*, over an incident in which a bright young medical student had dived into a freezing canal to rescue an old peasant who had fallen in. Thus wrote another student, from Hangzhou Teachers College:

`.. Zhang Hua is twenty-four years old, with a life of contributions to society ahead of him, while the old peasant is sixty-nine. Admittedly, the peasant could still have some contributions to make in the rest of his life, but nothing to compare with Zhang Hua's contributions. It is not a simple or cheap matter for the State to raise a college student. Therefore, as a college student, Zhang Hua should protect the national treasure his own life, and use his limited span of years to make contributions which are more important than his own life itself, instead of exchanging it for the short remaining life of an old peasant.

`There's no point in exchanging gold for the same weight in stones... We should not be swayed by our emotions'.

The long closure of the colleges, and the extreme competitiveness of entry once they reopened, left a huge reservoir of youth up to the age of their middle thirties, often highly intelligent and well-read within the bounds of what was available, but frustrated in their hopes of any further education. Radio and Television courses - basic in concept though they were - became extremely popular, as did the educational services, particularly foreign language courses, offered on the international shortwave broadcasts of the Voice of America, the BBC, and Radio Australia. But economic realities left tens of millions of such young Chinese feeling that they had little chance of rising beyond relatively menial careers.

It is a very far cry from the exhilaration of their parents generation, believing with all their hearts that they would not only raise an abject China into the modern age, but would possibly create a new model of society for mankind. For most young urban Chinese who came of age in the seventies, in the civil chaos of the Cultural Revolution and its sordid power struggles, in the shadow of their parents' perpetual terror, the future is a more melancholy prospect. Navigating the shallows for personal security and material advancement will always take precedence over any Great Leap Forward into the rapids of revolutionary idealism.

The subject is the future, and the guest is the best-seller of futurologists, American writer Alvin Toffler. He has come to Beijing on a research and lecture visit as the guest of the Chinese Futurology Association, which exists somewhere in the files of the Academy of Social Sciences. The Academy has sent along a collection of its licensed thinkers, and they sit awkwardly on the edges of their yellow-varnished chairs in this suite of the Beijing hotel. They have made no special concessions to the eminence of their guest. Squashed cigarettes are fetched from pockets to reek slowly between stained fingers. Frayed blue trouser-cuffs ride up to display frank layers of multi-coloured long underwear. A learned young economist peers through thick spectacles of which the left-hand lens is starred with cracks. Mugs of leafy jasmine tea grow cool and bitter on the glass-topped side tables.

Toffler is expounding his 'Third Wave' theory of a future in which decentralisation and individualisation take over from centralised, mass society and industry as the main trend of human development. He tactfully qualifies his theory with the rider that the Orient will not necessarily follow the same pattern as the rest of the world. None the less he has challenged the principles of Leninism, of the one-Party led state.

A social scientist in his fifties speaks out from the charged silence that follows. He bears the social marks of persecution, from which none of his profession escaped in the Ten Years of Chaos. But he remains interested only in the technical arguments of his field, the 'Dialectics of Nature'. Toffler parries politely.

The young economist comes in with acknowledgement that all developments in China since the Opium War have been profoundly influenced by the outside world. He rocks in his seat and his voice takes on the slightly forced cadences of the political study class. But China now differed from other places in that the emphasis in progress would always be towards raising the wealth of the nation as a whole, not of individuals.

The Party may now be openly vague about the Future, but the Future cannot be contemplated without the Party. A young mathematical prodigy in his teens has been brought along. He looks like a factory worker - crew cut, drooping jaw, baggy white shirt, patched grey trousers. He is now on a permanent research stipend from the Academy of Sciences, and is clearly taking no interest whatsoever in the discussion.

At the entrance to the hotel, a greater number of police than usual are making careful checks on any Chinese who seeks to enter. Is bourgeois intellectualism really so dangerous?

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNIVERSAL CADRE

An organised revolutionary movement prepares its trustworthy members as 'cadres' - the responsible nucleus of what will become a national system of government, when the revolution is successful. It's a term inherited from the original French revolutionaries, who borrowed it from the military term for a skeleton unit prepared for expansion to full strength when required. In the Chinese language, the word is *ganbu*. Thirty five years after the communist revolution, the title *ganbu* has clung to the apparatus of power, expanding its definition vastly to cover, loosely, almost everybody considered to hold a position of responsibility over others. Chinese cadres, in their tens of millions, could hardly be described as the 'nucleus' of the administration any more - they *are* the administration.

It's a tricky term to define for outsiders. Even loyalty to the regime is no longer an adequate benchmark, since cadres are by no means all Party members, nor are all Party members cadres - many Party members remain in the ranks of 'workers, peasants and soldiers'. It goes without saying, however, that only in very special circumstances can a cadre expect to have

much of a career if he does not join the Party, somewhere along the way.

Outwardly, the cadre system is a highly regular structure of ranks and classes. At senior levels, an official's rank as a cadre is a personal one, based on his seniority in the administration or, more importantly, in the Party. What government positions he may hold from time to time, at the direction of his seniors, do not affect his personal rank. But because nominal salaries and rewards are anyway very low, the rewards in standard of living obtained from the system by a cadre may very much depend on the complex subsidies, perquisites and fringe benefits accruing to him through the positions he holds. The simplest Western analogy might be with a military career, where mobility between specific responsibilities does not directly affect personal rank.

That was the system intended by the architects of the Peoples Republic. They hoped to run the entire country through an expanded corps of highly motivated, tightly disciplined cadres, whose loyalty to the revolution and to its central leadership would be greater than any personal loyalties to the place where they happened to be working at the time. In fact, they recreated a bureaucratic structure with many similarities to the traditional, Imperial mandarin system, and which the Party itself now recognises was subject to many of the same failings.

At the top end of the structure, the dogmatic nature of central policy through most of the first thirty years had a way of turning mistakes, ineptitude, or mere policy disagreements into 'sabotage and betrayal'. Doctrinal and personal factions created an endless round of defensive power-struggles, at tremendous destructive cost to the nation as a whole. There was almost no such thing as a graceful retirement. To be moved to a job of lesser responsibility or prestige was considered an intolerable disgrace, and would be resisted with all possible power. In the lower ranks, cadres were expected to explain and impose numerous wildly impracticable or contradictory policies over the years, which made cadres the meat in an often hard-pressed sandwich, and damaged their

own credibility with the people they were expected to lead.

The cadre corps embraces a huge variety of Chinese. Apart from the original revolutionary ranks of the Communist party and its supporters, there have been, over the decades, another two generations of post-revolutionary recruits to the ranks of cadres, and also into the Party itself. In 1949, there were some four million Communists in the whole of China. By 1978, there were almost ten times that number. Before the communist victory, to be a Party member was to risk death. After the victory, to join the Party was to become a member of a tiny elite group - still less than four percent of the population - who hold a monopoly of all political power in the nation. One no longer needed to be a genuine idealist to have strong motivation to join the Party. Careerists, realists, opportunists - whatever you may care to call them - were naturally attracted to Party membership.

Among new members of the Party and cadre corps were considerable numbers of the former urban middle classes, the upwardly mobile among the workers and peasants, and, later, the children of those who had already established themselves within the governing elite. China's Imperial public service had been open to anyone of however lowly birth who could attain sufficient education to pass the public entrance examinations. In New China, where doctrine insisted that Class Struggle was the key link, candidates for Party membership would be assessed on their personal class background - i.e. the social status of their family - and, supposedly, on the quality of their commitment to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought. The view in Beijing by 1978 was that this method of assessment had gone badly astray.

Li Tongming was around forty, and had grown up in a village of Shanxi Province, west of Beijing. Early in his childhood, his father had gone off to work in the industrial city of Datung - a grim, ill-kempt city of China's coal-mining midlands. Tongming and his two younger sisters stayed in the village with his mother, living mainly on the small amount of cash sent home by the absent father, supplemented by his mother's

scanty work-points income from the local co-operative which had just got under way.

The early fifties were heady times for a young schoolboy of secure proletarian origins. There were landlords to be 'struggled against' in public meetings - two of the local rich men were hung as 'exploiters', and a third ran away to Taiwan, leaving all his property to be confiscated. There was collectivisation, which suited Tongming's family just fine, as they had not owned any land beforehand and could now feel themselves as shareholders in their village. There was the Korean War, about which every Chinese schoolboy knew that the extreme courage of the heroic Peoples Volunteers had ignominiously routed all the combined forces of World Imperialism. Before the revolution, there had been some European Christian missionaries in the local county town, but the new revolutionary government there had squeezed them so hard that they soon ran away, too.

Young Li Tongming thoroughly enjoyed the mass demonstrations and the Young Pioneers marches, holding aloft hideous straw-stuffed effigies of the enemies of the time. He was also proving to be a keen and quick student at the village school, doing well at reading and writing, as well as having a keen mind for political education. His father would return home from Datung every few months or so, and would always tell his son Tongming of the great opportunities his generation were bound to have in the rebuilding of a great New China, which would bring comfort to the people and show the Imperialists a thing or two as well. Father had never liked the long-nosed foreigners in the county town, nor their fancy-dressed Chinese followers, aping foreign ways to the shame of China.

Tongming's ambition was kindled by these stories, and his hard study was rewarded when he gained admission to the county high school, the only student from his village in several years to do so. He went to the county town, as most of his classmates were going to work in the fields. Political currents were running even more strongly, and the familiar village collective was swept up in Chairman Mao's call for the Great

Leap Forward into the Peoples Communes. Communism, the Socialist Paradise, in one generation! Tongming knew it was unprecedented, but believed with all his heart in Chairman Mao and the might of the Chinese people, united under the Great Red Banners.

He kept his faith, and tried to be brave, as the following three years took a terrible toll on his village. He would return from the county school on Saturday afternoons, to spend Sundays helping his family scrabbling for edible roots and grasses in the hills behind the village, as crops failed, the seed grain was eaten, and the brisk young commune directors sent from the provincial capital seemed unable to explain to the villagers what had gone wrong. His grandmother and his youngest sister died one winter, and his father could not even get leave to return for the burials. The railways were on a campaign to save coal, and there was no space on the trains for sentimental journeys.

As Li Tongming concluded his high school years, Chairman Mao was less often to be heard, and it was President Liu Shaoqi whose directives, encouraging part-private production, were giving Li's village farmers the latitude they needed to restore their neglected fields and fruit trees. Li realised that the road to Communism would have many twists and turns. His teachers were encouraging him to sit the entrance exams for teachers' college, and his time away from home had expanded his view of the world. The school Party Secretary, a woman from Datung, told Li and his schoolmates repeatedly that, under the brilliant guidance of Chairman Mao, President Liu Shaoqi, and the Communist Party Central Committee, they held the future in the palm of their hands. She had particularly high expectations of Li Tongming, she told him. Perhaps thanks to this woman's strong political recommendation, Li was selected not just for the Datung Teachers College, which had been his aim, but for the new Peoples University in Beijing - set up by the Party specifically to train cadres for the continuing revolution.

Things started well at University, too. Peasant backgrounds like Li's were very much welcomed at the Peoples University,

unlike the bourgeois snobbery that could still be encountered at the older Beijing or Qinghua Universities, where children of the Communist elite and of the old educated classes studied under snooty foreign-educated professors. If students had airs at Peoples University, it was an excess of revolutionary zeal. Li Tongming became a Youth League activist, organising work parties of student volunteers to go out to the villages around Beijing at harvest time and 'participate in labour', according to the current examples of Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai and the rest of the leadership. He remembers well leading a party of students carrying baskets of stones on the Ming Tombs Reservoir construction site, on the day Premier Zhou paid his work visit and wielded a spade, with bus-loads of photographers in tow.

Li Tongming's career might have gone anywhere, but for Zimei. She was a very attractive and lively young woman, a leading light in the university Propaganda Troupe, who performed revolutionary songs and dances, on the Russian model, for the inspiration of their fellow students, and occasionally toured the villages with the student labour volunteers. Zimei's family were from the lower commercial class of Beijing itself, having run a small shop, and Zimei's class background was therefore not purely proletarian. But her zeal was apparently unquestionable, and she had been admitted to the university not just for her good looks, though she was no brilliant scholar. She saw something she liked in Tongming, and by graduation time it was agreed that they would be married.

Zimei had only one condition - that they stay in Beijing. With her residence registration there officially sanctioned, her husband would be able to obtain the prized Beijing registration as well. To the ambitious Li Tongming, this seemed no problem - after all, weren't the biggest jobs in China to be found in Beijing, and all the central government departments? Li was not yet a Party member, but with his record and his background it could only be a matter of time before his application was accepted.

The blow fell after graduation. When his official job

assignment was announced, Li had been assigned to a position in the Personnel Section of a large government department in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. It was a good position to begin a career, in the home province of Chairman Mao and many others of the top Party leaders - but it was hundreds of kilometres away from Beijing, in the Yangtze valley. It was also an extra two days' journey from his home village, and he was the only son of the family. Zimei, meanwhile, was assigned as a junior cadre to one of the big state performing troupes in Beijing.

After some thought, Li Tongming took the major step of turning down his assignment. His mentors shook their heads, warning him that they could not guarantee such a good opportunity in the future, and that his whole career could be clouded by this unwillingness to accept the all-wise Party's decision. It showed lack of confidence in the Party's leadership of the revolution.

Li was stubborn, perhaps over-confident that his rise, already so rapid from his humble origins, had a momentum that must, somehow, continue. It didn't. Whatever was written into Li Tongming's personal files at that time became a ball and chain on his career for ever. Nothing is ever erased from a personal file, in China. Li was reassigned, eventually, to join a large and lethargic staff in the Liaison Section of a minor ministry in Beijing, where he was still working when I met him. He had ridden out the shoals of the Cultural Revolution with ease, with his unimpeachable peasant background. He had fathered two daughters, on whom he doted. And from an ambitious peasant youth, fired with revolutionary zeal to serve his people, he had become a soured and querulous public servant, living from day to day.

Li's problem was that his work brought him into frequent contact with the most privileged sector of the Chinese people - the children and grandchildren of the Party powerful. Here was a thriving community of people who had given nothing to China, enjoying fine housing, the best of education, chauffeured cars, household servants, and seaside cottages, on the strength of their father or grandfather being an old

revolutionary. If they got into trouble with the police, charges would be dropped 'to protect the honour of the Communist Party'. Those who wanted to work could have the most plum jobs - in the movie industry, attached to the official media, or in non-combatant arms of the Peoples Liberation Army forces. Party membership could be virtually automatic, when sponsored by a friend of the old man.

To Li, now fretting as to whether or not his two daughters could make the grade for admission to a Key Primary school, the sight of such privilege was embittering. Though he never said so, I had the impression that his wife Zemin was also disappointed in the outcome of her husband's career, and gave him a hard time of it.

'A finger can't match a fist', was his resigned reply.

It was Li Tongming who introduced me to the realities of the Chinese welfare system, widely misunderstood by foreigners. Foreign visitors are often given briefings by travel guides or factory bosses to the effect that 'every worker gets free medical insurance'. What is seldom mentioned is that this 'insurance' is discretionary spending by the unit concerned, and often does not extend to members of the worker's family. In most Central Government organisations, the immediate family of a worker can get a fifty percent subsidy for medical treatment from the worker's unit.

Li was looking particularly glum on one occasion, and I asked a friend what was wrong with him.

'His mother is sick - she needs treatment. He is trying to get her into a hospital'.

As I pieced it together later from Li and others who knew him, Li Tongming's mother had been found to have a serious kidney disease. The local commune medical centre had been prepared to refer her up the line to the small county hospital, and the county in turn had referred her on to the provincial medical authorities in Datung. After days of travel and waiting in long out-patient queues with her sick mother, Li's sister was told that the only place that could do anything for her was the elite Capital Hospital in Beijing - formerly an American teaching hospital funded by the Rockefeller foundation. But it

was against government regulations to refer any old peasant woman for treatment up beyond provincial level hospitals. The family members were advised to make her as comfortable as possible and prepare for her death.

Li's sister was sure that her brilliantly successful brother in Beijing, still remembered with pride in the village, could do better, and she contacted him about the situation. It is written into Chinese law that younger family members must financially support the old and needy - state welfare depends on the wealth of the work unit concerned. Even without such a law, and leaving aside his own feelings for his mother, Li Tongming was bound by powerful sense of family obligation to do his utmost. As every Chinese would do in his situation, he went to *la guanxi* - 'pull the threads of relationship'. Through the help of an old fellow-student from Peoples University, who now worked as an administrator in the Capital Hospital, he was able somehow to gain her admission for treatment. As a peasant, his mother was not covered by welfare assistance for anything beyond the second level of treatment by the 'barefoot doctor' in her commune clinic. Everything at the Capital Hospital would cost money.

Li Tongming's friend very soon told him that his mother had no hope of recovery. The best they could do was to delay further deterioration of her kidneys, as long as she remained in the hospital. Li felt no choice but to leave her there, where she stayed for several weeks until his money ran out. Then she returned to her home town, by train and bus, and there she eventually died. Her illness had cost Li four hundred yuan, wiping out five years of his savings. It had been carefully scraped together for a trip he had planned, taking his daughters on a visit back to his home town, and to pay for the extra, private tuition all ambitious parents seek for their children, to give them the best chance of qualifying for a Key School education.

Li's career had paid a price for his refusal to be transferred, but others who accepted transfers paid at least an equal price. The concept of 'transferability' is part of the old idea of the cadre system, and obviously made a lot of sense when the

cadres concerned were underground guerrilla fighters. Too often since 1949, separation of spouses had been quite arbitrary, unnecessary, and perpetuated by deliberate callousness, mis-called 'revolutionary spirit'. One of China's favourite folk tales concerns the Cowherd and the Spinning Maid, a pair of lovers who, at the whim of the gods, are whisked up into the heavens to become stars - fixed in different constellations separated by the Milky Way. Once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh moon, a flock of magpies is said to fill up the Milky Way, creating a causeway by which the Spinning Maid may cross over to spend a single night with the Cowherd, her lover.

According to current official figures, half a million such couples had been separated by their cadre assignments in China for a period of more than five years - some of them for twenty years, with only the brief annual holidays together. In the context of China's strict birth control policies, these annual holidays, particularly the Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, represented an annual crisis. Not only separated cadre families, but millions of other temporary workers and military personnel spend those three or four holiday nights together, in an atmosphere of feasting and celebration, often fired by alcohol. The national media, for days beforehand, are full of stern warnings against carelessness in contraceptive precautions.

Transfers to bring the couples together might be held up for a variety of reasons. In many cases, one of the pair lives in an over-crowded urban centre, such as Beijing or Shanghai, to which migration of any kind is strictly controlled. Units in remote or provincial areas can be extremely reluctant to release and qualified personnel assigned to them, fearing they might never get an adequate replacement. In most cases, however, the separations could be easily ended by the stroke of a pen, given the will.

In 1980, an official change in personnel policy decreed that marital separation should, for the first time, be taken into account in determining cadre transfers. Those who had been separated for over five years were entitled to be reunited. In the following two years, over three hundred thousand transfers had

brought separated couples together - a proportion of them by means of the partner with the coveted urban residence status voluntarily surrendering it to join the spouse in the provinces. It had always been a major impediment to the careers of people of peasant origin that their wives, if peasants, could join them in the cities only with the greatest difficulty. Some went to the lengths of moving in illegally - which deprived them of many important citizenship rights, including ration tickets for many essential commodities. Such were known as 'black people'.

These personal miseries were simply shelved by the central policymakers for decades. Any cadre of policymaking rank was, in any case, in a position of sufficient influence not only to have his wife transferred in his wake, but to ensure that she, too, would have an appointment there of appropriate seniority. Ironically, senior cadres' wives seem frequently to work in Personnel Offices themselves. One woman from such an office was sentenced to eight years prison in 1981, after accumulating 12,000 yuan in bribes from separated junior cadres who were trying to obtain transfers to end family separations - Cowherds pining for their Spinning Maids.

The iron steam radiator against the peeling, whitewashed wall has taken the worst chill off the February evening, and the twenty people sitting on rows of wooden chairs in the bare room are relatively comfortable, each wrapped in his many layers of winter clothing. Some are so warm as to have unbuttoned their heavy cotton-padded overcoats. Men have chosen to sit on one side of the room, women on the other, on the chairs they occupy each week at this time. The two unmarried young women sit together in the front row, as does the Youth League activist. A cynical young man lounges towards the back, examining a hole in his padded cotton shoe, propped on the rail of the chair in front. Two grandmothers sit together as usual in the back row, knitting. This evening the topic for Political Study is interesting enough to preclude their usual whispered gossip, though not enough to rouse Old Wang from his inevitable after-dinner snooze.

Li Tongming sits on a chair facing them, in the pool of brighter light thrown by the bare bulb in its hanging enamel shade. For ten minutes, he has been reading aloud from the Peoples Daily Comrade Deng Xiaoping's speech to the Memorial Meeting for former President Liu Shaoqi in the Great Hall of the People. Having read it, he sums it up, emphasizing the points that Comrade Liu Shaoqi had in fact been the first person to describe Mao Zedong Thought as China's own unique ideology, and that the blame for Comrade Liu's disgrace and death lies with the Gang of Four. He asks if any others of the class have anything to say.

The Activist, as usual, is first to speak. He rambles for ten minutes through paraphrases of the official editorials and Party circulars which have been preparing the population for this momentous re-writing of history over the past six months and more. He confesses that branding President Liu Shaoqi as a Renegade and Capitalist Rouser was a serious error which he, along with many other comrades, had fallen into unwittingly under the pernicious influence of the Gang of Four. Comrade Deng Xiaoping and the Central Committee should be thanked for ridding China of the Gang of Four and restoring beloved Comrade Liu Shaoqi to his rightful place in the hearts of the labouring masses, as a brilliant star in the firmament of Communism.

He pauses for breath, and ploughs on conscientiously. Comrade Liu Shaoqi, in his book *How to be a Good Communist*, taught us much about the cultivation of proper socialist spirit, including the importance of public hygiene. Therefore, it is necessary to criticise Comrade Xing for dropping his melon-seed husks on the floor of the meeting-room. The middle-aged worker concerned, who has been dragging the dried, salty seeds from his deep coat-pocket and cracking them between his teeth throughout the meeting, formally thanks the Activist for his socialist-spirited criticism, and makes a gesture towards scraping up the scattered husks from around the feet of his chair. Someone hands him half a page from yesterday's Peoples' Daily to

wrap them in.

Others have their turn. All are practised at drawing out points from what has been established as Party policy, without challenging. Study classes these days are simple, almost enjoyable, compared to the endless horrors of the Cultural Revolution, when your best friend might pick up some careless remark to brand you as contaminated with bourgeois thinking. Everyone has learned not to question. The correct line would be made clear, and private doubts should be thoroughly suppressed, for the good of all.

Nobody asks why, if President Liu was such a good man, Chairman Mao had attacked him so frequently and bitterly as the 'Arch Capitalist Roader' and accused him of selling out the Chinese revolution.

When it had first become likely that a 'rehabilitation' of Liu Shaoqi was under way, I mentioned it once to Li Tongming in conversation.

'Rehabilitate Liu Shaoqi? That's impossible!', he scoffed.

'Liu Shaoqi is a renegade, traitor, and scab, who wormed himself into a position of power. It was quite correct that he was driven from the Party'.

I believe now that Li at that time already knew, better than I, that Liu's official evaluation would be reversed by the Party under Deng Xiaoping - who, after all, had been one of Liu Shaoqi's closest lieutenants and was busily restoring almost all of Liu's economic policies, word for word. Li's reaction was part of his general view that if foreigners wanted to learn about China, they should learn what the Chinese people were ready to tell them, not go prying into China's private affairs. It was a common feeling among all Chinese, and universal among Party members.

Keeping abreast of the changes in political doctrine through the years puts a tremendous strain on the integrity of a communist cadre, especially when most of the time it had to be managed without admitting that there had been any 'mistakes'.

The solution, on a national scale, was usually to find some kind of scapegoat, be it an individual or an entire social class, which could assume the blame for the wrong policy direction and leave aloft the hoardings, scattered throughout the length and breadth of China, saying 'Long Live the Great, Glorious, and Always Correct Communist Party of China'.

The cost was always high, of course. Apart from the chosen scapegoats, there were always a proportion of people whose integrity overcame their caution, and who insisted on reminding the Party powers of their collective errors. Many such people were themselves idealistic Party members, though their numbers dwindled rapidly through the Cultural Revolution. The final crisis was the second phase of the Cultural Revolution, from about 1973 to 1976, when Mao was in steep decline and the power of his wife, Jiang Qing, and a few close, fanatical cohorts came ever closer to achieving absolute power over the surviving rationalists, dependent on the prestige of the dying Premier Zhou Enlai and the obstinacy of a handful of the conservative regional military commanders.

Zhou's death in January 1976 gave what was then known as the Shanghai Clique their opportunity to push for complete power. Over a period of ten months, they were able to step up the appointment of their own nominees to powerful positions, and to have Deng Xiaoping dismissed from the acting Premiership which he otherwise would have inherited. Their progress, and their style, could be compared to the Nazi SS, though with less outward flamboyance. But rather than national or race war, they wrought destruction and chaos in the name of Class War, promoting their own class of fanatics and opportunists wherever they secured power.

It became clear to almost all experienced politicians in China that the economic disasters which would inevitably follow the Shanghai Clique's achievement of total power might very well provoke a civil war that would destroy the Communist Party altogether. Its institutional structures were already in tatters, replaced by a return to virtual warlordism in a deeply divided body politic. In the weeks that followed Chairman Mao's death, the plotting was thick and fast. The

Shanghai Clique attempted to have Jiang Qing, Mao's widow, installed in his place as Chairman of the Communist Party. Their propaganda writers, who had control of most of the national official press, began to publish veiled attacks on Hua Guofeng, whom they had accepted as a compromise Premier in place of Deng Xiaoping, but who, while by no means a friend of the conservatives, was refusing to play along with their factional ambitions.

On the night of October 6th, 1976, Jiang Qing was arrested, along with Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, Wang Hongwen, and another thirty of their closest associates. Hundreds more arrests of leftists allied with the Shanghai Clique followed in the weeks ahead, and a new name was coined for vilification - the Gang of Four, after the four arrested leaders. Jiang Qing had fired the imagination of a proportion of the younger romantics in China, with her fiery socialist rhetoric. But she was also a person the majority of Chinese would love to hate, and now they were given their chance. Chinese history is full of repetitions, and one of the most famous repeated stories is of the Imperial wife or concubine who usurps the power of the throne and brings disaster on the Empire. Jiang Qing, with her origins as a Shanghai actress and Mao's fourth wife, easily fitted the traditional mould. Her group had also denounced as 'bourgeois' almost every simple customary pleasure the Chinese held dear, and their removal was received with weeks of genuine joy, mixed with an orgy of official hatred and denunciation. In political study classes, where the previous week 'Comrade Jiang Qing' could only be mentioned with the greatest respect, no insult was now too great to heap upon her head and the heads of her supporters. By those arrests, the Communist regime was saved.

Inevitably, a new and dangerous game developed among the masses, as the official campaigns called for the 'weeding out' of hidden Gang of Four supporters. Personal enemies who had wielded their authority arbitrarily might be accused of 'Gang of Four-type behaviour'. It could be a time for revenge against the suffering imposed by doctrinaire Maoists or bullies over decades, so long as they could be denounced as Gang of Four

supporters. As some Japanese industrial workers are encouraged to work off their anger against the boss by beating up a straw dummy of him in a special room, so the torments of the whole Cultural Revolution were now being released in study classes and mass denunciation meetings upon the heads of the Gang of Four, while the names of Chairman Mao Zedong and the Great, Glorious and Always Correct Chinese Communist Party remained sacrosanct.

The campaign was still simmering when I arrived in China, twenty months later. But much else was beginning to change. Deng Xiaoping had been brought back into power as a Vice-Premier, and he, characteristically, made no bones about the fact that the radical changes of policy he had in mind went a great deal further than the engineers of the coup against the Gang of Four had intended. The principal figures Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian and others were, on the whole, supporters of the conventional Soviet-style centrally-directed economy, in which the exchange of goods and services supervised by centralised authorities would, ideally, make money itself almost redundant in the productive system. They presumed that the removal of the extreme leftists would simply mean a return to that system they had learned from Russian advisors in the fifties. Now here was Deng Xiaoping talking about devolving accounting responsibilities further and further down the pyramid of administration, and even of an economy of myriad independent enterprises, big and small, practising self-management in an economic environment in which only the essential policy directions were set by the central state. Deng's favoured economists were writing in the national press of a 'mixed economy' of state-owned, collectively-owned and privately-owned enterprises, competing against each other for efficiency and profit! If this was not the Capitalist Road, what was it?

Deng's answer, breathtaking in its boldness, was that this absolute reversal of policy was none other than Mao Zedong Thought in practice! The definition of Mao Zedong Thought itself was being changed, as Liu Shaoqi had attempted to change it even while Chairman Mao himself was alive. Deng,

like Liu, defined Mao Zedong Thought not as the words and works of one late, honoured individual named Mao Zedong, but rather as the combined wisdom of the Chinese people *throughout history* on the road to socialism. As Mao Zedong had developed upon the thoughts of Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin, and other Communists, so the great Chinese people would continue to develop and expand upon Mao Zedong Thought. The implication is that Mao's name, however great his contributions to a particular phase of Chinese Communism, will become increasingly coincidental to the pragmatic development of China's socialist road.

Li Tongming had seen many twists and turns on that road already, and was no longer interested in abstractions. He wanted to see his sister and her family in the Shanxi village able to make a fair reward for their labour and initiative, supported by the collective strength of the state, but no longer paralysed by the obsessive interference of incompetent theorists and ambitious self-seekers. When I raised Deng Xiaoping's proposals to him on one occasion, following a meeting of the National Peoples Congress which had endorsed many of them, he displayed the strongest positive emotion I ever saw on his otherwise rather soured countenance. He took two paces away from me, then swung round and returned with eyes flashing behind his horn-rimmed spectacles.

'At last, China is beginning to MOVE!', he breathed with suppressed vehemence, and smacked his right fist into the palm of his left hand so energetically that his glasses jumped half an inch down his nose.

The family and some of their neighbours from other rooms on the courtyard are glued to the Han family's television set, moved on top of a cupboard so that all in the crowded room can see it. Four years after their arrest, the Gang of Four have been brought to public trial as counter-revolutionary conspirators. There has been talk for two years of restoring the Rule of Law in China, after a decade of disorder. Those constructing a new legal system have seen fit to give it a grand opening with this major spectacle on national

television.

The past month has produced a parade of former tyrants, last seen apparently secure on the untouchable heights of Party eminence, now shaven-headed wrecks from four years of isolation and interrogation. Zhang Chunqiao has kept a disdainful silence since muttering, at his televised indictment, 'I do not recognise the legality of this procedure'. He has ignored both taunts and charges that he conspired to launch armed insurrection against the state.

Wang Hongwen, the young union organiser, has lost his handsome head of oiled hair, and is absolute in his confession to all charges, begging the forgiveness of the Chinese people. Yao Wenyuan, the propagandist, has attempted to defend himself, pleading lesser charges of error rather than conspiracy. He has been made to look despicable, blinking, babbling incoherently and shuffling pages of notes.

Tonight, Jiang Qing is to make her final appearance. A small portrait of her late husband, Chairman Mao, hangs in a fly-spotted frame on the wall near the television set, next to the framed certificate announcing the Han family as Model Neighbourhood Activists of 1977.

Jiang Qing has fought her trial with scorn. She has abused the prosecutors and questioned their authority. She has shouted down weeping witnesses as they accused her, with palpable hatred, of cruel persecutions going back to rivalries of youth. She has maintained that she has committed neither crimes nor errors, but simply acted in accordance with policies of the Party Central Committee, and authorised by Chairman Mao himself. Earlier television excerpts from the trial have shown her dragged from the court, shouting and struggling, after refusing to keep silence.

There is silence now in the watching families as the cameras show Jiang Qing led to the dock in handcuffs. She is identified as Prisoner Jiang Qing, and given her last opportunity to speak. Jiang Qing knows she is speaking to all China, and she repeats her assertions that it is she, not the

alleged victims, who is persecuted. All those writers and party hacks deserved what they got in the Cultural Revolution, they were all bourgeois criminals. The family mutter in amazement as the ageing actress pulls a manuscript from her jacket pocket, and begins to declaim a poem she says has taken her a year to write - a poem accusing the current regime of betraying the Chinese revolution, and of destroying its true heroes, the activists of the Cultural Revolution.

The court tolerates her poem impassively. Jiang Qing asks them how they can lay charges of counter-revolution against her, the wife of Chairman Mao for thirty-eight years, without accusing the Chairman of the same offences. The prosecutor replies that while Mao may be responsible for not seeing through her counter-revolutionary plotting, he is not responsible for the offences themselves. The family show no reaction to this. Jiang Ding's role as a scapegoat must be a tacit one.

The prosecutor is asking for the death sentence on Jiang Qing, for conspiring to split the nation in civil war and to undermine the authority of the Communist Party. Jiang Qing shouts from the dock: 'I wish I had many heads for you to chop off, one at a time, so that I might be a martyr many times over for the revolutionary ideals of Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution'. These stirring lines, familiar in the scripts of revolutionary propaganda movies, and here it is for real, with Jiang Qing is playing her final scenes.

As the trial telecast ends, neighbours return silently to their homes, only the children exclaiming gleefully, 'Will they chop off her head? Will they really?'

Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao were both sentenced to death with a year's reprieve - a final chance to repent. Jiang Qing's last words to her national television audience were the early Red Guard slogan: 'Rebellion is Correct'. Neither Jiang Qing nor Zhang Chunqiao repented, but neither were executed. The

others received stiff gaol sentences. But the trials were not judged to be the propaganda successes the regime had intended. A catharsis they may have been, useful in convincing those leftists lingering in the provinces that their day was over. But a demonstration of the Rule of Law they were not. On the one hand, the accused were publicly announced as 'counter-revolutionary criminals' months before the trials began. On the other hand, convicted of these supposedly monstrous crimes against the people, resulting in thousands of innocent deaths, they were given sentences more lenient than the death sentences handed out to ordinary workers convicted of a single, spontaneous outburst of personal violence.

In the interval between the final hearings and the court's reconvening for sentencing, I asked a worldly Chinese friend how free the chief judge Jiang Hua, China's most senior judge, would have in coming to a decision.

'He wouldn't even be allowed to sit at the table', my friend scoffed, with a scornful toss of the head.

As order was restored across the country, the extent to which local cadres at all levels had established personal fiefdoms, outside the law, became more and more evident. What had been persistent rumours of malpractice and corruption in isolated cases now became an avalanche of accusations and criminal prosecutions against corrupt cadres. The accused included opportunists who had build their fiefdoms under the banner of the Maoists, and also, at least as often, an older generation of cadres who had either lost their original idealism or had simply been careerists from the start.

There is something inherently corrupting in a social system which, on the one hand, offers a very low official level of personal rewards to its cadres, and simultaneously endows them with enormous, virtually unchallenged powers in their areas of control. Since the early fifties, there had been no independent legal system through which plaintiffs could lodge grievances or accusations against cadres. The ever-present Party structure linked every organ of the state into a single interdependent entity, as far as power and influence were concerned. Courts and police were bound to obey Party

secretaries at an appropriately high level, and could do nothing without their approval. Early manifestations of corruption among Party cadres were habitually concealed 'in the interests of protecting the prestige of the Party'. As Li Tongming put it, in the words of a classical saying,

'Magistrates can burn houses, while the common people are forbidden to light lamps'.

Add to this unchallengeable power structure an economic system in which money no longer defines real values of things, and the pressures increase. In a socialist economy, where money alone cannot buy you state-controlled items such as a house, a car, travel, or prestige, something else must take the place of money as the real currency in deciding who gets how much of the available cake. In China, the word is *quan* - authority. Senior cadres may have sufficient *quan* to do anything they want, or to obtain almost anything for somebody else, for that matter. At the other end of the scale, an individual worker may have only the *quan* over his own ration-tickets, but these ration-tickets for cloth or grain might be of greater value to somebody else (a peasant visiting the city, for instance) and thus a commodity tradeable for something the worker wants. Such trade is 'black', but almost universal, one way or another. And its prevalence begins the undermining of social morality that ultimately produces the spectacular cases of cadre corruption given so much attention in the Chinese press.

In 1981, the criminal law was amended to include the crime of Embezzlement among those earning the death penalty. This followed a number of well-publicised cases in which particular individuals, using the power of Party position, had gained control of the distribution of scarce commodities and extracted money and goods from those units who required them.

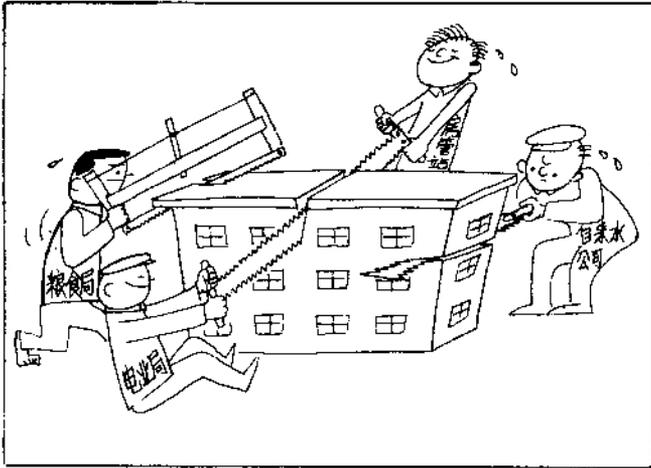
In 1979, on a film assignment in Heilongjiang province (Northern Manchuria), I was sumptuously entertained at a banquet by the local authorities of the timber town of Yichun. My purpose there was to film the young 'educated youth' who had been sent to live in this Siberian atmosphere, cutting logs in the snow-clad pine forest. The banquet included bears paw, Flying Dragon (which appears to be some kind of bird, served

in unrecognisable but delicious balls of lightly seasoned meat) and 'Nose of Not-like-four-things' (*sibuxiang*). This latter animal was impossible to define further at the time, but I am now of the belief I may have been eating the stewed nose of a kind of local elk. My hosts at the banquet were taciturn but co-operative, and the filming was a success.

I was intrigued to hear, some two years later, that they had all been sacked and arrested on charges of running a major timber racket, involving wholesale graft and corruption. The criminals were all members of a single extended family, and held the key posts in the town administration and Party branch as well as the local timber corporation. A similar, more widely publicised case in the same province, of a corrupt woman cadre who had gained control of another local Party branch and timber corporation, resulted in her eventual execution - the first embezzler to meet this fate since the Cultural Revolution.

Stories were printed in the press of the extraordinary number of bureaucratic negotiations required for a Beijing work unit to build a block of apartments for its workers. A materials supply corporation demanded one of the apartments as a condition of giving building materials. Similar demands came from the electricity and water-supply units. Then the elevator company and the municipal housing bureau each put in their claims. It got to the point where the original owners of the building would be lucky to retain two-thirds of it for their own members. Where goods have no absolute money values, but are 'assigned' by responsible cadres, these kinds of negotiation can be concluded with the stamp of an official seal.

This kind of practice, where each unit involved with the progress of some valuable project would attempt to exploit it for themselves, coined a special phrase: 'As the chicken runs by, everyone plucks a feather'. It happened that 1981 was the Year of the Cock in the Chinese traditional calendar - so the Beijing press dubbed 1981 Year of the Iron Cock, hoping that the cock would retain its traditional virtues of masculinity and diligence, but prove invulnerable to those reaching, plucking fingers on all sides.



From the Chinese press: Cadres of government bureaux and utilities carve up a new housing block for themselves in return for their co-operation in its construction.

There were grey areas as well, such as the prevalence of present-giving to anyone who might help you with a problem. This had roots in long Chinese custom, and could be construed as a gesture of respect, rather than a bribe. Either way, the edicts went out and the media campaigns went on and on, lashing the custom of giving and receiving presents for favours as out and out corruption, unworthy of a socialist state.

Deng Xiaoping's plans for the cadre corps went beyond catching criminals. It had become evident that a large proportion of them were simply not up to the responsibilities which the new economic system of local accountability would require. Many were too old, and must be retired. There would be major retrenchments in overstuffed government units, and retraining of close to two million cadres who were considered underqualified.

Resistance to the policy of retirements was enormous. The

older cadres knew all too well that not only their living standards, but their local standing and prestige, would melt away like magic once their *quan* was taken away and given to someone else. There was no precedent for this in the Peoples Republic. A compromise policy was announced from Beijing - the 'Three No-Changes' policy. Cadres who retired would suffer no change in living standards and would keep their full salaries until death, they would suffer no change in protocol rank, and they would be entitled to unchanged respect. These offers are more significant to Chinese cadres than they may sound to Western ears, as they touch on the all-important concept of Face. Cadres were justly alarmed that any who retired would be considered 'purged'.

Some were very depressed about this. A life-long Communist cadre from a village in Guangdong province shaved his head and joined a local Buddhist monastery when forced to retire from his position of Brigade Party Secretary - though this may say more about the ideological quality of many rural cadres than about the situation in Beijing. Others voiced bitterness and disillusionment with the ideals to which they had given their lives. A great gloom seemed to settle over a large body of the older cadre corps. Younger cadres like Li Tongming were scathing in their attitudes to them.

'In our ministry, there are fourteen Vice-Ministers, only two of whom ever do any work,' he said. 'They all have chauffeured cars at their disposal and big apartments, even for their children. In my department of the ministry there are eleven Vice-Directors, only three of whom play any active part in the work. Actually, the ones who stay away are better than the ones who insist on participating in the work. They are too old, they don't understand the new period, and they waste time for all of us. If Comrade Deng Xiaoping can persuade them all to retire, I don't care how much it costs the state, as long as they go!'

I dare say the log-jamming of Li's own career gave some of the heat to these sentiments. Many organisations had three separate categories of senior cadres they could afford to lose. First were those who were simply too old, who had been away for years during the Cultural Revolution and brought back

under Deng. Second were those, often not so old, who had aligned themselves with the Maoists sufficiently to be promoted rapidly over the bodies of their colleagues, but not sufficiently to be thrown out in disgrace when the new regime took over. And third were the retired military officers, guaranteed jobs on their early military retirements, and regularly inserted into other government departments at an 'appropriate level' whether they were needed or not, to the great frustration of younger career men within those departments.

Deng Xiaoping's protégé Zhao Ziyang, a brisk and businesslike man with an apolitical reputation, took over as Premier in September of 1980. He declared war on bureaucracy, announcing that the pruning of government offices would begin right at the top. The State Council, or Cabinet, was the first to shed members, and the process was still filtering down slowly, with less than impressive momentum, in 1985.

A few months later Hu Yaobang, a similarly energetic and businesslike protégé of Deng Xiaoping, was appointed Chairman of the Communist Party, completing the eclipse of Hua Guofeng, the moderate Maoist whose role in arresting the Gang of Four was the pinnacle of his career. Under Hu, the Party undertook two major tasks of self-examination, long overdue. The first was an official review of Party history and the role of Chairman Mao, to set a new standard of judgement and end the speculation as to how much blame Mao should carry for the Cultural Revolution. In June, 1981, that document was released, and amounted to a complete repudiation of the personality cult of Mao and its apotheosis in the Cultural Revolution. Fairly, the review acknowledged that all Party members shared blame for allowing the personality cult to develop, and committed the Party to a more democratic way of life in the future.

The Party history review also castigated the tendency of local Party officials to establish 'fiefdoms and principalities' in their areas of authority, and warned that Party authority should not be considered superior to State power. Most importantly, the review officially established the view the Marxism should not be regarded as a fixed doctrine, nor as containing all

wisdom. The future role of the Communist Party in China would be to lead the Chinese people in a continuing search for new truths, learned from their own experience.

The following Party Congress endorsed proposals for a second important review - that of the Party membership itself. Having grown to a strength of forty millions, with about half of the membership enrolled during periods of anarchy or of doctrine now held to be false, there was good reason for a progressive re-examination of every Party member's credentials. Those who were found to have abused their position, betrayed their ideals, or not to support the current policies, might be given twelve months to reform, and if still not up to the mark would be expelled.

Underlying this reform in the Party and cadre system was a basic change in the Party leadership's view of the Party's role in China. Some swallowed it quicker than others. It was a change from the 'war footing' of Maoism - principally Class War - to a priority on keeping a peaceful, productive atmosphere in which the major task would be national economic reconstruction. Dogma which interfered with this goal was to be discarded from Party life. Relations with any other nation or class would be developed to the extent that they supported the general aim of economic development - not excluding national security, of course.

The legal system of China, despite efforts in 1980-82 to establish its independence, cannot ultimately be separated from Party power. Judges always declare, when asked, that their primary responsibility is 'to carry out Party policy', rather than to treat the Party or the Government as *subjects* of the law. The Peoples Republic has a Constitution, but a Constitution that can be amended at any session of the National Peoples Congress, and hence no more enduring than Party policy of the day. But it can be taken as a kind of manifesto of the basic principles of the Party powers of the day, and as such the amended constitution of September 1982 was an important summary of the changes that had taken place since the death of Chairman Mao.

The Constitution dropped references to 'continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat' and threats to 'eliminate' the bourgeoisie. According to the 1982

Constitution, China will 'ultimately and inevitably advance into Communist society', through 'a long historical process'. It is a charter of evolution, not revolution, and the word 'gradually' appears five times in the first five pages of the nation's declared program of development.

A paragraph was inserted declaring that 'The Communist Party must conduct its activities within the limits permitted by the constitution and the state' - a caution to those tempted to over-reach their authority. In Paragraph 33, the Constitution redefines substantially the role of Party committees within enterprises and other institutions: The Party committee '...gives leadership in the work.. but refrains from substituting itself, or trying to take over from the administrative leaders... In Party or government offices at all levels, the branch party organisation shall not lead the work of these offices. Their task is to exercise supervision over members, including heads of offices who are Party members, with regard to the Party line.. They must encourage administrative cadres to overcome bureaucratic ways... and report shortcomings to higher Party organs.' Procedures are set out for ensuring that local members and branches are subject to proper discipline, each from the next highest level of the Party organisation.

A person raised on the stable assumptions of Common Law might sneer at the frailty of China's Constitution, but it is of great significance that those producing this particular revision paid so much attention to a framework of checks on Party power - on *quan*. It is a recognition that ideology does not always change human nature, and that a body of forty million Party members, plus at least as many non-party cadres, will remain as humanly corruptible as the proletariat they are set to govern.



Political Study Class – a first priority for suspect refugees from Vietnam.



Beijing's Dragon Altar Lake bird market. Jade drinking-cups are not too good for a favourite song-bird

CHAPTER THREE

THE UNIT'S PROLETARIAN

When people answer the telephone on business in China, the first question they ask the caller is not 'Who are you?', but rather 'Where are you from?' (*Ni nar de?*). They are not asking about a spot on the map, but to know the caller's *danwei*, or Unit, and it says a lot about the cellular structure of modern China. The Unit means everything to a Chinese worker, and controls almost all aspects of his life - not just his daily work and conditions, but political life, his housing, his ration coupons, his permit to travel, to marry, or to have a baby. A well-run, wealthy Unit can be a cosy and comfortable cocoon, giving its workers life-long security with a minimum of responsibilities. Poor or badly-run Units are a constant scourge on the lives of their workers, and the workers have no means of escape.

Few visitors to China ever realise how relatively limited the fully-socialised industrial and welfare system actually has been. State-owned, state-funded industries have never accounted for more than about ten percent of the Chinese work-force, though they represented more than thirty percent of capital investment. These include all public administration and utilities, the armed forces (including a whole military

construction and production system of its own), the railways (also with numerous ancillary arms), major heavy industries, higher technology, and the state distribution structures which, in themselves, almost outnumber in manpower those involved in actually making the goods. Under the system set up in the fifties, workers in state industries were paid by direct grant from the central treasury, on fixed scales and grades, irrespective of the particular role or performance of their Unit. Factories could be, and were, closed down for years at a time, or could simply cease to produce through mismanagement, and the workers' salaries flowed on regardless. Unit leaders would apply for additional direct state budget grants for any staff facilities, such as unit housing blocks, which came under the broad umbrella of unit responsibilities. The most powerful units, such as Capital Steel, might become almost states within states, with their own public transport, cinemas and theatres, schools, hospitals, sports grounds and public bath houses, for staff, all enclosed within a vast walled compound.

On the other hand, all revenue from those industries also went directly back up the bureaucratic line to the state treasury. Such industries would be given official production targets in the annual national economic plans. But, for most of the time, whether or not they met these, exceeded them, or ignored them altogether, would affect nothing but the number of congratulatory certificates hanging in the political study rooms. Production targets, anyway, were often quite unrealistic. In this highly artificial economy, some such units were huge money-spinners for the government, while others, the majority, were a huge drain on the national wealth, when the time came for true assessments to be made. Labour lay-offs were unheard of in state industries, where the full principles of socialism were supposed to be in operation.

The second level of industry was described as 'collective', and consisted mainly of those small and medium-scale industries which had been privately founded before the communist system was set up, and had later been forced into amalgamation under Party-appointed management. In theory, they were jointly and commonly owned by their workers, though this meant little in practice. Generally, they had a much

lower level of capital investment in proportion to the number of workers, and were expected to generate their own funds for workers' salaries and amenities. Salaries were paid, of course, according to the same strict gradings and guarantees as for state workers - except that collective industries could run out of money. In deference to national policy, however, funds for a broke collective's workers' wages would then be found from the state bureaux further up the line which supervised them. Collectives were common in retail, light industry and service trades, but there were also some major manufacturing operations around the country still with the status of 'collectives'.

Another feature of these collective industries was that they often included in their senior staff some of the original owners and managers of the private industries from which, on the whole, they had sprung. They tended to be more flexible and adventurous in their approach to management, given a chance, and thus more cost-effective. During the Maoist period, collectives were regarded with official disdain as semi-capitalist left-overs from the Old Society, which would eventually graduate into fully state-owned organs of New China's economy. The greatest disadvantage of the collectives was that they were able to offer far less in the way of housing or other welfare benefits to their workers. Collective workers often depended on the municipal governments, rather than their units, for such things.

The aim of the Maoists, pursued again with some heat during the final fling of the Gang of Four, was to eliminate private trade and industry altogether. Their principle was not just that state industry should be inherently more efficient, but that any vestige of capitalism was bound to have a corrupting effect on the socialist morality of any who came in contact with it. A few small scale peddlers and the odd shoe or bicycle repair man were all that remained at the height of their powers, as they even tried to ban the free produce markets which meant so much to the peasants.

It was thus the interest of every Chinese worker to get himself on the rolls of one of the bigger, state-owned

industries, where he would be set for life before the proverbial 'Iron Ricebowl' - unbreakable. Manpower policy, set at the top Party levels, was that China's massive workforce should be fully employed, men and women. If that meant five men doing the work that could be done by three, and five men sharing the rice that could be eaten by three, then that was Chinese socialism. Personnel bureaux in each locality would assign workers to plants year after year, whether there was any requirement for them or not. The point was, the workers had to belong to somebody. At the Capital Steelworks, on the outskirts of Beijing, the workforce climbed from 24,000 in 1966 to over 65,000 in 1976 - while productivity actually declined thirty five percent. Workforces all around China ballooned, and incentives to hard work or innovation declined, with the exception of those self-motivated individuals who threw themselves into Production Emulation Campaigns, perhaps seeking selection as Model Workers out of pure idealism, or as the first step in a political career.

Control of the cadres over the distribution of their unit's resources is of course crucial to the morale of the workers. Abuse of position provokes great resentment, and is never forgotten. A young man working in a central government unit told me how there were many young people in his department waiting to get married, but unable to do so because the unit did not have any housing to make available to them. At the same time, everybody in the unit knew that the unit Party Secretary was occupying three good apartments in one building. One he lived in, one for his son, away in the army, and a third for his daughter, who was away attending university. There was an incident when some children in the unit compound made mischief with some belongings of the Secretary left in the courtyard, and the man wrote a pious notice to all residents, blaming parents for not ensuring 'socialist morality' in their children. Many people passing this poster spat upon it, said my friend.

When I arrived in Beijing, the customary greeting between workers was the traditional *Chi fan le meiyou?* (Have you eaten ?), while the farewell was likely to be *Man man zou!* -

`Walk slowly!', or, more freely, `Take it easy!'. In the stillness of the two-hour midday siesta, the *xiuxi* enshrined in its own article of the Constitution, or in factories with sheds full of silent machinery while workers attended all-day political study sessions, it was hard to connect the realities of China's industry with the bold calls to catch up with the advanced industrial nations within twenty years. The only visible haste was in the scurrying crowds who rushed to form long queues at the state commercial stalls when a consignment of fruit, vegetables, or bean curd was rumoured likely to arrive. Things were to change greatly.

Old Kong had lived in Beijing since his childhood, and had seen it all.- seen the Nationalists holding an uncertain sway over the provincial war-lords, when the national capital was down south in Nanking, and Beijing, the ancient Imperial capital, was a backwater. He had lived under the Japanese occupation. He had been a teenager when the Nationalists returned, backed by American marines, and the old city was seething with underground revolutionary slogans. He had watched Chairman Mao's victorious army parade into Beijing, the Chairman himself standing a captured American jeep. He had seen the long, steady purging of the old city - its prostitutes and opium dealers disappearing, its effete Manchu aristocracy imprisoned for re-education, or already fled to Taiwan, its businessmen squeezed and squeezed, year by year, until compulsory acquisition of their property by the government was almost a relief.

He had seen its anti-Communist foreigners expelled, and thousands of Russians arrive via the trans-Siberian railroad to construct Soviet-style public buildings for the new Peoples Republic and a permanent colony for themselves, the Friendship Guest House with its own clubs and bars, on the northern fringe of the city. He had seen the Russian `Elder Brothers' retreating under a hail of abuse from their former apprentices, and had seen that generation of Chinese cadres, in their own turn, dragged down and spat upon by their children in the Cultural Revolution. Now Chairman Mao was dead and

his wife was in prison. As the Ming emperor had said, wives and concubines should refrain from meddling in politics. And so should the proletariat, in Old Kong's view, as long as things were tolerable. A poor man might have his own private principles, but 'the bamboo withstands a tempest by bending with the wind'.

Old Kong's parents had been beggars. In the devastation of civil wars and floods brought on by the neglect of the Yellow River dykes, they had both left their home villages as little more than children, begging their separate ways northwards. They had met on the road, and at the age of fourteen his mother had attached herself to his father, three years older. Formal marriage was then a luxury beyond reach of the poor. Kong's oldest brother was born before she was sixteen, and she bore ten children altogether, before she died of cervical cancer at the age of less than thirty.

Kong's father was a shrewd young man, and his long experience of gnawing hunger leant weight to an observation he made on his wanderings: that, wherever he went, he seldom saw a thin cook. By the time he and his wife and three children, including the infant who was to become Old Kong, made their way to Beijing, he had developed a special skill at making *jiaozi*, flavoursome envelopes of meat in a skin of dough like large ravioli, much loved by the people of North China. At first he worked in Beijing as a street vendor, with his wife steaming the dumplings over a coal brazier in the courtyard near the Flower Market where they rented two small dirt-floored rooms. It was a smart walk from there, with the covered rattan trays of spicy *jiaozi* trailing their enticing fragrance, to the busy entertainment quarters of Beijing, where there was usually a ready market for warm *jiaozi* with soy sauce, vinegar and chilli. Most days, father would return with enough cash to pay for the next day's ingredients, plus enough to feed the family, with not much left over. The children preferred the bad trading days, when, instead of cash, father would bring home more of the *jiaozi* to feed to his own family.

The young Kong had another source of regular treats. There was a small protestant mission church in a lane not far from

their house, where attendance at Sunday School was rewarded with a boiled sugar sweet, wrapped in coloured paper. Kong attended for some months before his parents found out, and forbade him to give his soul to the Foreign Devils. After that he joined the other group of urchins, who would hang about outside the little church singing insulting ditties about those inside.

'I didn't know what the foreigners were talking about', he protested to me in hindsight, 'but I did learn some of the songs, with one of the Yellow Hairs playing a harmonium'. Sometimes he and his playmates would run down to the Legation Quarter, against the great inner city wall by the Chong Wen gate-tower, to stare at the foreigners from the consulates there and in nearby western-style restaurants.

Kong's elder brother died of pneumonia one winter - the cost of medicine, beyond a tonic from the local herbalist, was out of the question. Several times babies were born, and died either within a few days or before they could learn to talk. He remembered his mother's sorrow becoming more silent with each death, but most of all he remembered the terrible month of his mother's own last illness, his father's round, usually red face white with what looked like fear, and the children's stomachs hungry as the family income went to buy opium as the only relief to their mother's pain. Only four of her children survived her.

After the mother's death, the father gave up his peddling and took a job as a *jiaozi* cook in a popular restaurant on Qian Men street. The pay was low, but he was able to live amply himself on the restaurant kitchen, and smuggle some scraps of meat home for the children as well. As had been his ambition, he began to put on weight. The two older girls found work - one as a domestic servant, and one in a sewing factory - but Kong, as the oldest son, was destined for higher things. Head shaved but for a small pigtail at the back, he was packed off to a local school, run privately by a poor descendant of a scholarly family.

After only two years, the cost of living rose, and Kong's father could no longer afford the fees. But, on the strength of

his bare literacy and basic arithmetic, his father found him an apprenticeship in a machine shop. The terms were no pay for the first year, and little thereafter, but he learned to use tools and to operate a lathe, rare skills and a certain meal-ticket in his generation in Beijing.

In the middle fifties, Kong watched the way things were going, and decided that the Army was the best foundation for any future career. He enlisted, and spent several years the machine shops of a military transport unit in various parts of North China. There were occasional counter-revolutionary rebellions in remote parts of the country, and, between times, PLA participation in road and railway construction. Towards the end of his enlistment, he spent some exciting months of 1959 in a forward transport base on the Qinghai plateau, bordering on Tibet, keeping rolling the convoys carrying troops, supplies, and road-builders forward into Tibet, to crush the Dalai Lama's rebellion and end Tibet's age-old isolation for ever. Kong is a man who takes people on their merits, and says he gained a respect, even friendship, for Tibetans he got to know personally in the pacified area where he worked.

Kong had married a friend's sister some years earlier. In the spirit, then encouraged by Chairman Mao himself, that more people would make a stronger China, they produced four children. By 1980 when I met him, Kong and his wife were preoccupied with the problems of their children, by then almost all grown up and facing the crucial, lifetime career junctions that would be irreversible. Two, both girls, had been sent out to the rural villages, to places where they were not wanted, and spent most of the year in fact skulking about Beijing hoping to find a means to return. In that year, the rustication programme was officially scrapped and their rural penance was ended, but there were few jobs to be found in Beijing.

China's net labour force increases by an average of two million per year, and in 1979-80 there was an extraordinary extra burden of almost twenty million such rusticated youths returning from exile to their home towns and cities. In 1979, in Shanghai, there were a number of serious civil disturbances by groups of youth demanding release from rustication.

Since the fall of the Gang of Four, Shanghai, once the home and power-base of their Maoist extremism, has shown its traditional speed in adjusting to a new political wind. Shop window displays were considered bourgeois by the Gang of Four, but in Shanghai now the shutters have come off after five years, and Shanghai will sell to anyone who brings money. The Shanghainese know that their teeming city of fourteen million rewards enterprise more than any other place in China. Millions of Shanghai's children have been sent to the western borders of China - to Xinjiang in the north and Yunnan in the south. Many have lived years of misery there, unwanted and useless. Scenting that their hometown's natural bloodstream, commerce, is returning to life, they want to come home.

Nanking Road is full as usual with a procession of Shanghai commercial traffic, puffs of grey-blue exhaust fumes spurting into the already dank air of late January. New grey paint half-covers the Maoist slogans splashed across facades of the great retail establishments on both sides of the street, built by foreign and Chinese capitalists long departed, many to Hong Kong and Taiwan. But one giant neon sign still flashes across the waterfront Bund and the barges on the Huangpu River: 'Long Live Chairman Mao Zedong'.

Above the continuous blare of truck and bus horns, the sound of shouting rises faintly from further down the street, where the International Hotel stands opposite the Peoples Park - what used to be the Race Course, of the old British concession. Slogans on banners held aloft between bamboo poles can be seen over the traffic, and a sea of bobbing blue caps and woollen headscarves comes into view behind them, touched with splashes of red. Shanghai has seen plenty of demonstrations over the past ten years, and has learned that they are best ignored, unless the shooting begins.

I follow the crowd of two thousand as they walk swiftly down the centre of the thoroughfare. Police on traffic duty do not try to stop them - they have long ago learned the futility

of resistance to a mob. Instead they stop cross-traffic, to minimise traffic congestion by speeding the progress of the marchers. The crowd wheels to the left at a crossroads, led by a hoarse young man with a megaphone. He and a shrill young woman alternate in calling the slogans, echoed with a roar like a breaking wave by the crowd behind them. I am close enough to make out what they are saying:

'We want freedom! We want work!'

They arrive at the iron gates to the Municipal Labour Bureau, where a large contingent of police passively bar the way. The crowd condenses, and some at the back seem inclined to force the issue, pushing the crowd from behind to break through the police line. There are some minutes of tension, but the police instructions on this occasion are to avoid violence, and the demonstration leaders agree. A delegation is admitted to present their demands to cadres of the Labour Bureau, and their colleagues blocking the street outside keep up their chanting:

'We want freedom! We want work!'

They range in age from barely twenty, to forty or more years. I find a bold young man to talk to, and a crowd of others press around the strange foreigner who speaks Chinese. Foreigners are still rare in Shanghai, though some sophisticated Shanghainese consider themselves more akin to the foreigners of the developed world than to the <i>tu baozi</i> (dirt dumplings) of China's own interior.

Some of these demonstrators have been assigned away from home for nearly twenty years, he tells me, and want to come back for the sake of their own children's prospects. Others have not yet taken up the remote village assignments they were given last year. All resent their lives being wasted where they can gain nothing for themselves and, they say, contribute little that is wanted by the locals.

It is the end of an early Spring Festival holiday season. Thousands of rusticated Shanghainese who got travel permits

to return home for the holiday have decided not to return to their assignments. It is mass disobedience, and they believe they will get away with it. Deng Xiaoping has said that the rustication programme is pointless. Here is his chance to do something about it right now. The chanting begins again.

The word 'unemployment' was not used in official descriptions, which used the term *dai ye* - 'awaiting assignment'. There were six hundred thousand such *dai ye* youth in Beijing to compete with Old Kong's daughters. It was a vast problem on a national scale, as economic planners had been directed to look for ways to make industries more cost-effective, including shedding unnecessary staff, while there was little prospect of alternative employment.

It had been a policy plank of the original planners of the Peoples Republic that everyone should work. Workers wages were pegged low on the principle that families would not depend on a single wage-earner. Wives, who traditionally in China worked only in dire necessity, must be made to join the workforce for their own good. It was a Marxist principle that 'participation in labour' helped to develop socialist spirit. It also ensured that most people were under supervision of some kind most of the time. The proportion of the urban population in full-time employment rose from only twenty percent in 1949 to between fifty and seventy percent, varying by city, in 1982.

By that year, many of China's economists were beginning to question whether that employment policy was sensible after all. Its result, after a generation, was that tens of millions of young parents incurred great expense to themselves and to the state, arranging day care for their children while both parents went to work. On the other hand, millions of young school-leavers were jobless. One economist wrote:

'If those who are incapable of doing complicated or heavy tasks are encouraged to do domestic labour, and give up their positions to the young, society would become more stable and orderly'.

The proposal was for a national system of five to ten years' extended maternity leave on reduced pay, which, the economist calculated, would liberate some two hundred million positions for employing young people over the next twenty years. For women in the lower grades of pay (as most young mothers are), the costs of child-care can be almost as much as the monthly wage, even in state-subsidised nurseries, which are available only to about one quarter of urban workers. Only those mothers with elderly relatives who can give child-care free of charge really gain much in living standards from their full-time work commitment. With a six-day week and long commuting times for many, housework becomes a real problem. Few have home refrigerators, so shopping for food must be done daily, and that can mean hours standing in queues. The problem, even for those who gained nothing from the work, has been that a job assignment is for life - and most would fear that if they resigned their position they would never get another one when the child-rearing phase ended. Family life on a single income is penury. As a result, many children, in fact, received inadequate care of any kind.

Other substantial revisions were being made to the whole economic system at this time, which began to alter the character of employment conditions. There was a national campaign to 'Smash the Iron Ricebowl', which had been held responsible for gross inefficiency throughout industry and commerce. State-owned units were to be empowered to retrench or sack excess workers. And there was a sustained campaign to boost the prestige, and to encourage the expansion, of collective and private commerce and industry as alternative avenues for employment.

The policy made nothing but sense, as China was so obviously saddled with gaping inadequacies in such labour-intensive fields as small-scale commerce and service trades, while suffering monstrous over-staffing in a few state industries, and swelling unemployment elsewhere. Most of this had been perpetuated by certain items of Maoist dogma regarding the nature of 'exploitation' of one man's labour by

another. Pedicabs, for instance had been banned from Beijing as 'humiliating', though they represented a highly efficient solution to public transport problems in Beijing's tortuous network of residential lanes and courtyards. Hiring home help was also considered exploitation, though it persisted blatantly in the homes of the powerful who were assigned servants by their units. As the labour policy reforms now progressed, these individual service trades were now redefined as 'division of labour' among the proletariat, rather than 'exploitation' of one class by another. For the books, this was achieved by saying that exploitation was no longer an issue because the former exploiting class, the bourgeoisie, had ceased to exist in China.

The low-wage system was also intended to keep the proportion of discretionary spending to a minimum, while a budget of ever-growing subsidies in kind, such as low public housing rentals and pegged prices on rationed items, helped to make the low cash income bearable. In 1981, the state subsidies bill for urban workers, covering food, clothing, medicine, housing, and recreation facilities, came to twenty-five billion yuan - equal to nearly twenty percent of total state revenue.

But the wage system also broke the relationship between work done and reward received. In my bureau in Beijing, the three local staff - a college-educated translator, a driver-messenger, and a housekeeper - each received almost the same monthly wage of around ninety yuan (forty dollars). It happened that seniority, in years of service, in each case evened out the substantial differences in their qualifications and basic gradings. And those differences were more than adequately recognised in the contract fees which the Australian Broadcasting Corporation was obliged to pay to the Diplomatic Service Bureau, which actually employed and supplied the staff. For the translator, we paid over seven hundred yuan per month, for the driver, over three hundred, and for the housekeeper, about two hundred yuan per month.

Deng Xiaoping's reforms brought significant change in wages policy, too. The Maoist slogan had been 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his *need*.' For the

new period of economic construction, said Deng Xiaoping, the basis of remuneration would be revised. The principle, now, would be 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his *work*'. This directive opened the way to restoration of piece-work incentives in factories, to rewards for innovations or personal skills, and, finally, to a restoration of the principle that anyone had the right to work to make himself rich, so long as he did so within the laws and regulations laid down, and so long as what he produced was beneficial to society. In this revolutionary new context, new collective and private enterprises were to be given every encouragement, and they did indeed begin to flourish, over the complaints and resistance of that privileged few who had benefited most from the old inequities of the ossified state-owned economy. Step by step, regulations were amended to allow a reviving private sector of the economy to employ staff and to accumulate its own capital. Debate raged in the correspondence columns of the press: 'Should individuals be allowed to become rich in a socialist society?'. The official answer was a clear 'Yes!', and a body-blow to the Maoist ideologues still intent on forcing the creation of a Socialist Man, defying human nature.

It is convenient in some ways for Chinese families if both husband and wife work for the same unit. In the military, for instance, it is almost universal, and one might see families on a Sunday outing in the park, mother, father, and two or three children all in military uniform. But most couples do work in different units, so even for families living in cheap, unit-supplied housing, it is likely that at least one partner will be living quite some distance from work. On the other hand, some people naturally would prefer the privacy of not living cheek by jowl with those in the work unit, with whom they have to spend all their working hours, anyway. But house-hunting in the capitalist way is out of the question. Private housing accounts for only about five percent of housing in Beijing, and only the wealthy can afford it. Rental housing is available only

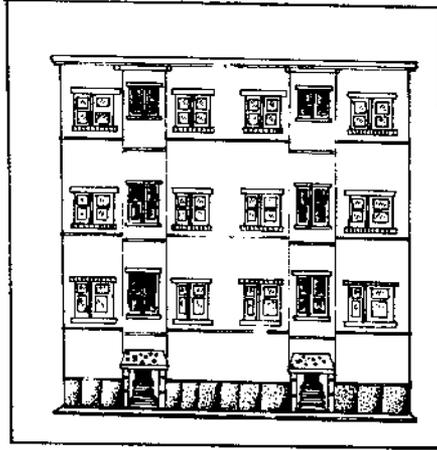
through work units or through the Municipal Housing authorities.

It used to be common to see small slips of paper pasted up on lamp-posts by bus-stops on commuter routes, asking if anyone with a three-room apartment in such-and-such a location would like to exchange for one larger, smaller, or on the other side of town. If exchange partners were agreeable, the units concerned would usually agree, subject to security requirements. In 1982, annual House-swapping Fairs were inaugurated. At the first, twelve thousand applicants for housing exchange swamped the nine hundred desks set up in an exhibition hall, and several thousand of these found their solution to years of frustration. Simple facilities like those make an enormous difference to the morale of a workforce which has been, for too long, made to feel totally powerless.

Chinese industrial workers are now accustomed to paying the very low, subsidised rentals for unit housing - as low as three or four yuan per month for a three-room apartment - but the penny is beginning to drop that such low returns on investment to the building owners, socialist though they be, discourages further construction, or even maintenance. Workers in one Beijing unit wrote to the press complaining that their leaders gain a merit award in a Civic Virtues campaign by lavishing funds on redecoration of their offices and reception rooms, while there was still no proper washing facility in the dormitory for a thousand workers. There is a slow movement towards privatisation of housing, with a proportion of apartments in Beijing being built for purchase by individuals on time payment or with bank mortgage loans. The wheel has turned yet further.

In Imperial Beijing, no-one was allowed to build high enough to look over the walls of the Forbidden City, but since 1981 there has been a rush into highrise apartment building, in

towers of up to twenty stories. The visual character of the city had been irrevocably altered, as a hastily-constructed rampart



From the Chinese press: “A strong wind last night”. Residents have repaired their own windows with panes from the common staircase.

of these nondescript and inconvenient tower blocks rose rapidly along what had been the site of Beijing's grand city walls, themselves short-sightedly demolished in the early sixties. By 1983, alarms were being raised by those few Beijing architects who care about the future of what is left of the ancient city. Many of the grand vistas can never be restored, and Beijing residents are beginning to discover for themselves the lessons learned in the past twenty years by western builders of highrise housing estates. Nothing could be more alien to the traditional lifestyle of Beijing.

Old Kong cycles slowly out of the *hutong* in south Beijing where his family share a courtyard in one of the oldest surviving neighbourhoods of the city. He and his wife moved

there when they married, sharing the redistribution of housing enforced by the municipal government upon those homeowners who still lived there. The courtyard then was, and in theory still is, the property of a foreign-trained doctor. Since the doctor had only a small family of his own, the neighbourhood committee had agreed with the Housing Bureau's assessment that four of the seven rooms about the courtyard were 'surplus to need', and two workers' families were moved in. They had the wings on east and west sides of the courtyard, while the doctor's family were allowed to keep the main rooms on the north wing, where the sun was best, and a small kitchen out-building behind them. For a time, a nominal rental was paid to the doctor, then, as the Cultural Revolution caught up, even that stopped. It was a long time before the doctor and his family were able to show a 'good attitude' to the sharing of their home, despite patient attention to their ideology on a weekly basis from articulate old women of the Neighbourhood Committee.

There had been two good shade trees in the courtyard - a locust and a willow - but the willow had died after a few years, some said from detergent in the washing water thrown out into the yard by the residents. There had also been plenty of open space, but now, with growing families in the workers' sections, the open space was disappearing under an accretion of shacks and lean-tos, a kitchen here, a storeroom there, added to the original eaved pavilions in whatever materials could be scrounged. In winter, horizontal smoke-pipes from the families' iron coal-stoves rooms leaked a heavy, sulphurous smoke into the yard, but it couldn't be helped. Everything was grey, anyway. Most such courtyards had doubled their populations since the distributions were made.

Old Kong takes a left turn, then a right, crosses a small open drain, and swings out onto the main road. On the metal

luggage rack over the back wheel is clamped a wicker bird-cage, covered in a blue cotton hood with a buttoned flap in it. Inside the cage rides Old Kong's pride and joy, his *huamei* ('painted eyebrows'), a large and powerful songbird of the thrush family. At six in the morning, stove-smoke has not yet overwhelmed the still, chill air, and it is time for man and bird to take physical and spiritual exercise. More male cyclists are heading the same way, some with covered cages swinging from each of their handlebars. Others stride along the dusty sidewalk, vigorously swinging bird-cages back and forth with the rhythm of their walk, inducing the feathered inmates to perform forced callisthenics on their perches.

Kong's old black bicycle, a heavy peasant model, bumps off the edge of the road and along a smooth sandy track through the trees of Long Tan Hu (Dragon Altar Lake) Park. Through the stillness of trees, dappled with low-angled, early light, comes a rising chorus of birdsong, and his own *huamei* stirs in the cage with a few experimental chirps. Scores of bird-fanciers gather here every morning that climate permits, in a congress of common interest.

Old Kong carefully dismounts and takes his bird from the luggage-rack, opening the cloth window in the cover. It's still too cool to expose the whole cage, and *huamei* easily become over-excited if they see too much of the world at once. He throws a weighted cord over a convenient bough of a tree, and hauls the bird aloft in its cage for its daily dose of nature. Other trees carry caged birds in their branches, and the birds vie with each other in song, an exercise and an education they would miss sadly if kept at home in the crowded courtyards and cement apartments where their masters live. On the dusty ground below, men stand around cages of canaries, finches and lesser birds, arguing merits and exchanging tips on care and nourishment. Part-time peddlers lay out their special wares for the bird-fanciers: ears

of millet, wild grains from the mountains, enamel bowls of live maggots (ten for five cents), live spiders, crickets, all part of the known lore for particular birds. A young man buys a fledgling sparrow to feed, live, to the hooded kestrel standing on his leather-gloved wrist. Not far away, more peddlers offer second-hand and antique cage furniture - tiny hand-painted porcelain food and drink containers, a small jade water-bowl, bronze swings and perches, ornate brass carrying-hooks for the cage itself.

Old Kong needs none of these, and goes into his morning *tai qi quan* routine beneath the trees, limbs moving slowly and gracefully through the gentle rhythm, as his *huamei* pipes heartily in the branches above.

Beijing is envied by other cities for its plentiful parks - most of them former Imperial gardens and reserves. Some of them surround former temples and altars with ceremonial functions in the rites of the imperial calendar, others were simply pleasure gardens or hunting reserves. These memorials to imperial whim, no doubt recklessly costly and resented by the local residents when they were established, are now a valuable legacy for the descendants of those ignored and excluded subjects. For a few cents, any peasant can wander through the Forbidden City, and even expectorate noisily, as I witnessed, on the floor of the highest imperial throne-room.

Old Kong's bicycle had been his largest personal investment, at about two months' wages - but he was hoping, one day, to buy a colour television set for around fourteen hundred yuan - ten months' wages for the two of them. For the time being this would be impossible, with four children still to support. But priorities in consumer spending were changing rapidly with the development of the economy. The former list of popular targets - wristwatch, radio, bicycle, sewing-machine - became out of date in Beijing during my years there, as the market became saturated, even with bicycles which had been previously so much in demand.

China produces over sixteen million bicycles per year, and in Beijing during 1982 sales reached forty thousand bicycles per month. Beijing's narrow lanes suit bicycles better than any other transport, and bus lines can never satisfy the needs for door-to-door personal transport. Light mopeds are an obvious next phase, and for a while in 1981 were a furiously growing market, until city authorities clamped down on the sale of many brands which were shoddy and dangerous to both rider and public. Policy decisions also made it difficult for moped owners to buy petrol, which is generally in short supply in China. Until this problem is solved, China's hundreds of millions of bicycles will continue to carry everything from infants to forty foot poles lashed vertically to fat pigs on the way to market. I hope I shall never see again one particular bicycle cargo I witnessed in a crowded south china city. A youth was weaving through crowded traffic with a large pane of unwrapped window-glass lashed across his back with flimsy hemp twine, exposed corners extending two feet either side of him, and the top edge of the naked pane already sawing at the neck of his shirt as he rode.

By 1983, most Beijing families had a black and white television set, and colour sets, Japanese models assembled in Beijing, were selling fast. Cassette players and electric fans were common. For most families, the targets ahead, but well within reach, were a basic-model washing machine and a refrigerator. Reservations were not as to whether the price could be afforded, in time, but whether the locally-made goods would stand the test of time, and whether the subsequent electricity bills would be too high. Remembering that China is, by government design, a low-cash society, such decisions in discretionary spending take on even greater proportional weight. A few yuan here or there can unbalance a month's budget irretrievably. Per capita incomes had risen since 1978 by over fifty percent, to an average of about five hundred yuan (then \$250) per capita in workers' families across China. The growth came from regular 'productivity bonuses' to most workers and an increase in the number of income-earners per family, as the development of collective and private enterprises

began to employ tens of thousands of *dai ye* youth. Prices had also risen, though, especially for food, as a direct result of policy decisions to increase incomes for the peasants who produced it.

In doing this, the Party recognised that since the early fifties pricing policies on a national scale had been squeezing the peasants to support the city - hardly the fulfilment of what had been promised in the days of guerrilla revolution. The government set its official purchasing prices for rural commodities unreasonably low, and it set its sale prices for manufactured goods unreasonably high, leaving the peasants in an impossible position to improve their lot. The arbitrary pricing also gave a completely false impression of the cost-effectiveness of urban industry. With the soviet-modelled ambition to develop heavy and manufacturing industries taking precedence, the Peoples Republic had for decades been squeezing eighty percent of its people, the peasants, to featherbed fifteen percent, the industrial workers. That so much of what had been squeezed from the peasants is now fully admitted to have been frittered away in bad management and ideological follies is just the beginnings of cold comfort for those peasants, only now seeing a real chance that they can make substantial improvement to their own living conditions



Harbin camera assembly line. Poor workmanship and marketing left thousands of these cameras unsold. Joint production deals with Japan and Hong Kong have more success.



Rusticated youths from the cities cut pine logs in the Manchurian forest near Yichun.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

Mao Zedong became the leader of China's Communist revolution by convincing a majority of his comrades of the time that China's revolution must be based on the peasants, not on the urban workers. Though obvious in hindsight, this was, in the 1930s, a major doctrinal battle among the Chinese Communists, or 'line struggle' as the Party describes it. Chinese Communists, in those days, took the Soviet Union very seriously as their model for revolution. The Communist International, based in Moscow and claiming the right to direct Communist revolutions throughout the world, solidly pushed the line that control of the industrial proletariat was the key to control of the nation. This may well have been their experience in Russia, but Mao proved that in China the peasants held the key.

It had always been so - peasant rebellions over the centuries had signalled the end of dynasties. Chinese Party historians might argue even today as to whether or not such peasant rebellions were 'progressive' in Marxist terms, but the example was that small bands of peasant guerrillas, or bandits for that matter, had frequently been able to cause great disruption to a

Chinese regime's internal trade and communications, and, in time of weak or unbearably oppressive government, to become an alternate focus of loyalty for that vast sea of working peasants.

Chinese government power was defensively based, in walled cities and towns, and enforced, when necessary, by punitive sorties of government troops. But those walled redoubts quickly became a starving prison for their masters when peasant rebels, often joined by disaffected elements of the military, controlled the surrounding country. Peasants could live indefinitely on the fruits of their own labour alone - but the urban dwellers could not live without the produce of the peasants. Peasants formed the bulk of the Communist guerrilla forces in the civil war, whilst underground Communists in cities held by the Nationalists worked to undermine resistance, preparing uprisings and shadow administrative structures for the day of 'Liberation'.

Since 1949, the peasants have continued to carry the greatest load in the Party's endeavour to reconstruct the world's largest nation. It was peasant labour that carried out the gargantuan civil engineering works on flood dykes and railroads, peasants, on the whole, who were shipped out to carve state farms from the wilderness in remote provinces, peasant soldiers who formed the Human Waves of the Korean War. It was even a high proportion of peasant labourers who made and carried the bricks to build ambitious civil works and heavy industries in the cities that China's new rulers wanted to transform into Soviet models of industrialisation.

Most of all, it was the ocean of the peasants who struggled to fulfil ever more ambitious production quotas forced upon them by a regime which, by the time of Mao's Great Leap Forward programme in 1958, sought to overturn the realities of peasant life with a mystical force of human willpower that would transcend all the laws of nature. As it failed, local cadres falsified records and compelled the peasants to send ever larger proportions of their shrinking yields to the state granaries, in pretence that they were meeting the absurd

production demands. It was only when there was no more grain to send that the tragic farce was called off. China's own population statistics covering the period show a dip in the population growth curve that implies at least twenty million deaths during that three year period of man-made disaster.

The vast majority were peasants.

Mao retreated then, but his followers were unrepentant. In 1978, whenever VIPs visited China, they were still being given glowing briefings on the Model Production Brigade called Dazhai. The twenty-five peasant families of Dazhai Brigade were held to have performed superhuman feats of improvement with their own hands to their meagre, infertile land in the stony hills of Shanxi province. 'Self-reliance' was the principle. Since 1964, peoples' communes across the country had been exhorted to 'Learn from Dazhai'. Pictures of Dazhai adorned the reception rooms of communes everywhere, its image was woven into gigantic tapestries for the foyers of public buildings, and elaborate scale models with flashing lights following the irrigation supply were erected in special exhibition halls across the country. The brigade leader, a peasant called Chen Yongui, became a national hero and was promoted, eventually, into the Olympian heights of the Party Politburo, where he was encouraged to continue wearing his rough clothes and peasant head-band as an inspiration to his former peers.

Not all was as it seemed, however. A few months after I arrived in Beijing, I was told by a cynical young worker that it was well-known Chen Yonggui had brought most of his own family to live in comparative luxury in Beijing. On the insistence of his wife, one of his sons was being taught to play the piano.

'A dirty old peasant playing the piano!', scoffed my informant, showing the traditional scorn of urbanites for their rural brothers. 'In Shanghai, we taught a panda to play the trumpet!'

But, as we spoke, the whole gamut of policy towards the peasants was being reviewed, and Chen Yonggui's days on the

politburo were numbered. By mid-1980, Dazhai had not only been removed from its status of National Model Brigade, but its leaders were charged with a long, sad history of falsifying grain production statistics, receiving secret subsidies, and plotting to divert, with upper-level connivance, the water resources of neighbouring brigades to their own territory.

'Self-reliance' and 'Take Grain as the Key Link' were the two rural slogans repeated ad nauseam in those early days, but they were mutually contradictory. Critics with official backing from Deng Xiaoping's strengthening clique soon began pointing out that emphasis on grain production, to the exclusion of all else, had been a disaster, especially for the peasants themselves. Most obviously, it meant that commodity after essential commodity, once plentiful, became almost unobtainable. In many places, under the misguided enthusiasm of local leaders 'Learning from Dazhai', timber forests, fruit trees and vines had been cut down to grow a few more bushels of wheat. Even more seriously, in the long run, millions of hectares of marginal, fragile land had been hastily put under the plough for grain production, causing massive and irrevocable degradation of soils with accompanying erosion and silting problems, all for a minimal increase in grain production.

For all its vast area of territory, China is chronically short of arable land. Each hectare of arable land in China must support fifteen people - more than twice the ratio applying in India, and eight times the ratio in the USA. In twenty years between 1957 and 1977, with urban encroachments and soil degradation, there was a net decline in the amount of available land by twenty million hectares, while the population increased by over a hundred million mouths.

Xian was once the greatest city in the world. Then known as Chang An, it was capital of the mighty Tang Empire of China, at a time when Mediterranean civilisation was at a low ebb and most other empires were in decline. Chang An was a cosmopolitan centre of trade, learning, and the arts, with communities of foreigners - political refugees or

craftsmen of a hundred kinds, and a hundred nationalities - supported by the court. In the eighth century AD, Chang An covered eighty-five square kilometres and had a population of a million citizens, ruling a huge contiguous empire.

Little remains of Chang An, and Xian is depressingly like most other provincial capitals - drab and conformist, aping on a smaller scale the plaster-bound civic designs of modern Beijing. Xian's centuries as an imperial capital have left Shaanxi province a legacy of denuded hills and exhausted soils, grudging even an average living to its peasants. In 1979, the province is also famous for the Maoist conservatism of its local government.

Returning from the sites of extravagant imperial tombs, in a comfortable official sedan, I notice peasants by the roadside in clothes more ragged than anything I have encountered in Beijing or the more fertile south of China. China's west has been short of rain for two years, and news is leaking through that some production teams have closed down altogether, lacking even seed grain. In the city itself, I am taken to a large, modern restaurant famous for its local dishes, and join a hundred or so Chinese in a large modern dining hall. Around the walls stand a fringe of ragged peasants. At first I think they are waiting for tables to become vacant, until I notice that they swoop like sparrows on the scraps left on the plates of departing diners. I feel grossly overfed.

At the end of my meal, I deliberately leave two or three *mantou* (steamed bread rolls) on my plate. As I stand up to leave, there is a scuffling behind me as chairs are pushed aside in a scramble for the food. Grubby hands have reached into the bowl before I am even properly on my feet. On normal protocol, my Chinese guide should have berated them for this display of desperation, shaming China in front of a Foreign Guest. But the guide is of peasant origin

himself, and has felt hunger, so he pretends not to notice. I have been inured to the sight of starvation in India, but this is my first encounter with Chinese reduced to beggary, and I feel strangely shaken by this contrast with the picture of universal welfare China has been giving to the world.

The eight hundred million Chinese peasants labour at the bottom of a very large administrative pyramid. A peasant's immediate unit is his Production Team - often a village, or a section of a large village - which may have around a hundred members. There are reckoned to be a million villages scattered across all of China. Next layer up is the Production Brigade, which might group several such teams together with some common resources or equipment. Above this, until they were abolished, were the People's Communes, which were generally based upon a large town. The original 1958 experiment with totally collectivised living in the communes was brief and disastrous, destroying morale and responsibility, and the communes steadily reverted to a role of political and economic supervision of the units below. Commune Party Secretaries, however, remained extremely powerful men in their locality, deciding careers, distributing resources, and settling disputes, so the quality of such officials could make or break the lives of those under them.

Still more layers remained - the County (often embracing two or three million residents overall), the Prefecture, the District, the twenty- nine Provinces and Regions (the largest with over a hundred million citizens), and then a great leap upward to Beijing itself. At each of these layers was both an administrative structure, and overlapping that a Communist Party structure - each level supposedly carrying out and passing on instructions from the level above. But this general structure covered a vast diversity in actual style and practice of administration at the local level. In remote areas, the titles of Team Leader or Party Secretary might be worn by the traditional clan headman, purely as a matter of form, whilst in the giant and highly developed communes close to the markets of the major cities, political life could be intense and

competitive for ambitious young men with an eye on that long ladder ahead of them.

The Four Modernisations policy for agriculture, even in late 1978, was for large-scale mechanisation through the existing structure - in other words, a top-down development. Grain was still to be the Key Link. Extravagant production targets for tractors were announced. But it soon became clear that the whole thing was unrealistic, hopelessly inappropriate to the actual resources and needs of Chinese agriculture. Deng Xiaoping's group in the policy circles began to argue strongly for agricultural reform that started from the bottom up. As they steadily prevailed over the grandiose dreamers, the organising principles of agriculture and land management were revised to emphasise balanced production of varied commodities, local specialisation according to resources, and a radical revision of the means to get goods from where they were produced to where they were needed.

In 1979, the peasants were unhappy with the way things were going. Many of them had expected that the fall of the Gang of Four would end their troubles with excessive political interference, but it had not yet turned out that way. In the second half of the year, thousands of the most aggrieved found their way to Beijing to lay long-standing complaints against local cadres directly to Comrade Deng Xiaoping. For a while, their processions, sit-ins and rough camps in some quarters of Beijing were tolerated, as part of what was then a general uncertainty in Beijing as to what constituted a proper degree of democracy for the Peoples' Republic. US Vice-President Walter Mondale in his official Red Flag limousine passed a demonstration of angry peasants squatting at the very gate of Zhong Nan Hai, the nearest thing to a Chinese White House, on Chang An boulevard in Beijing. A thousand cadres were assigned to deal with the flood of complaints, many of which dated back up through twenty years of Maoism.

Deng Xiaoping knew where he wanted to lead the Chinese nation, but he also knew the constraints. The Party was like an elephant, huge and powerful, basically obedient, but with a mind of its own and a long memory as well. The Maoists had

got it moving where they wanted for a time, with the prick of the goad and the commotion of drums - but the elephant, finally, had trampled them for their insolence. Deng now held a troubled and suspicious elephant at the end of a thin straw rope, and must try to lead it onto a new course. Pull too hard, and the rope would part in his hands. One step at a time, was the answer.

Except at the most hysterical heights of the Gang of Four period, the peasants had been allowed to cultivate a small proportion of the land in private plots. At times they were not allowed to sell the produce - it could only be for their own consumption. But most of the time there was a certain degree of permitted Free Market activity in local towns. Quite soon after the Gang of Four arrests, free markets on a small commercial scale were permitted, not only for the peasants to exchange privately-produced goods among themselves, but also to sell them to urban dwellers. Maintaining the distinction with the state economy, such goods were called 'Sideline production'. Small quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables began to re-appear in Beijing, brought in on the backs of bicycles by peasants from the outskirts. At first there were many restrictions, but, point by point, the markets became freer and freer.

Important points of principle were breached. Suppose five families in a production team each had ten kilos of extra potatoes from their private gardens, which they wished to sell in the city, twenty kilometres away. The fifty kilos made one good bicycle load, and one man could take the lot in, sell them, and distribute the proceeds, with a small commission for his efforts. That breached the principle of each person selling his own produce, but it was soon permitted. At the next watershed, the same man could make it his daily business to do the rounds of his team, collect whatever was available for sale from each private family plot, pay the families better than government purchase price for them, take them to town on a horse-dray 'rented' from the team, and sell them at a profit in the free market. Was he now a 'speculator', or a 'middleman' - both criminal types under the prevailing rules? The rules were

changed.

Horse carts and tractor-hauled goods drays without permits were restricted entry to Beijing. So, as the flow of private produce burgeoned, informal depots grew up at the fringe of the city where the rural 'middleman' with his horse dray would sell his produce, wholesale, to urban peddlers with rented tricycle carts who would trundle them off to retail for a profit in the city. There were prosecutions and confiscations for this 'speculation', and bitter complaints from the Municipal Vegetable Marketing Authority which was being undercut. But eventually this rampart of socialism, too, was breached, and private commerce was reborn for the peasants in China.

'The peasants have suffered too long. As long as they fulfil their quotas of state production, we must allow them to get rich by their own efforts', was the judgement in Peoples Daily editorials. By the Spring Festival of 1980, Beijing residents were already complaining that they were being crowded out of the shopping lines for prized consumer goods by the numbers of urban-fringe peasants come to town to spend their new wealth. Conservatives of the Party grumbled aloud that years of effort to inculcate the peasants with Socialist Spirit were being thrown out the window, as personal greed was now condoned. But the peasants knew that it had been their own unrewarded labour, year after year, that had paid the salaries and the central heating bills of those high-minded cadres in their fine suits and leather shoes. Deng Xiaoping was a popular man in the countryside.

Hong Qiao (Red Bridge) free market straggles in a thin strip under the trees against the wall of the Altar of Heaven park, where the emperor would come once a year to intercede with Heaven for a good harvest. Fruits of the harvest now lie in rows along the ground, or on trestles hired from the market supervisor's office. Attendants hand out wooden tags at the entrance to the roped-off bicycle park.

Bags of grain, heaps of the best vegetables, tables of fragrant herbs and spices under cotton awnings. Chickens tethered by the leg or squatting moodily in wicker baskets. A man

pushing a bicycle through the stalls buys a chicken, ties its legs together with string, and hangs it by the feet from his handlebars. Boys systematically visit each peasant selling peanuts from an open sack, and ask to sample one or two. They never buy, weathering the occasional shouted insult from the producer.

Someone is selling one of the family dogs. There is its pelt, next to it the internal organs, good medicine, and the meat itself butchered in neat cuts laid out in a row. Plump live frogs are drawn from a basket of wet leaves and beheaded on a block as they are bought. Live freshwater crabs are tied in stacks with home-made hemp string, claws and legs waving and tangling, crusty mouths bubbling in the warm sun.

A thin man offers a selection of small fish laid out on an oil-cloth: a large eel, a small eel, some carp, a couple of crabs, baby turtles in an enamel bowl. Three live freshwater crayfish under six inches constantly break ranks and are replaced in their place on the oil-cloth. I comment that they look rather small to be eaten. 'They'll grow bigger', I'm assured, but I don't buy.

Two overseas-Chinese women, visitors to Beijing, pick their way through the bustle, looking over the local produce with expert eyes. From the sea of old blue cotton and goat-skin overcoats, an old peasant regards their fashionable clothes and made-up faces quizzically.

'Do you work in the circus?', he enquires politely.

As the prosperity of the free markets attracted more and more peasant labour, it became evident that the 'collective' part of their responsibilities was often suffering. In some communes near Beijing, team leaders could not muster enough labour to get their grain production quota harvested and the next crop planted. Everyone was too busy cultivating private plots or travelling to market to bother with the collective labour, for which the reward in work-point income was delayed,

unpredictable, and meagre. Collective labour did not pay cash. Work-points for hours contributed were totalled for the year, and when all other commitments of the Brigade had been met, a decision would be made by the leaders as to how much should be distributed as cash income. That was then divided according to accumulated work-points. But if the Brigade decided to invest more of its money in capital works or other projects, or to subsidise poorer teams of the Brigade, each work-point would be worth proportionally less. Not surprisingly, most peasants preferred cash-in-hand from the free market. Faced with this, rural cadres had a difficult task. But instead of chasing the peasants back into the collective fields, the central policymakers went in the opposite direction.

Once the right to one's own labour was established, the next step was to encourage peasants, individually or in voluntary collectives, to sell their labour and their personal skills on a contract basis, where the relationship between the work and the reward was defined in advance. Units had been able to contract their labour to other units - roadworks for instance - but now the labourers themselves could take the initiative. It was obvious that there was pool of labour available in the rural areas far in excess of agricultural requirements. The Party should now encourage brigades, teams, and even individuals, to break out of the rigid relationships of the Peoples Commune idea where the collective 'owned' the man. Now the collective, the unit, should instead serve the individual, while of course guarding the collective interest and that of the state, and strictly adhering to government policy of the day.

This was not revolution, but devolution, and the whole massive shift in state ideology of labour came under the overall title of the Responsibility System. In detail, it would mean different things in different places, but the fundamental principle was that the millions of peasants would be restored to personal responsibility for the management of that part of the national resources under their particular care. The better their management, the greater their personal reward. For most, it would mean a family lease over certain fields, owing a set

rental in kind to the team or brigade, and keeping the surplus. To others, it would mean a forestry lease, charge of the team's herd of pigs, management of fish-breeding ponds, a new enterprise in beekeeping, or even full-time commerce as a wholesaler of other team members' produce. Most importantly, the system would be flexible.

In Guangxi province, in western South China, the landscape opens out into wide, flat valleys between abrupt limestone hills, sometimes taking on that fantastically craggy aspect loved by Chinese painters, with a twisted tree clinging to a high crevice. The air is sub-tropical, the red soil fertile when it is not abused by over-cropping. By the rivers, huge bamboo water-wheels turn slowly in the stream, lifting water in dripping bamboo troughs to feed irrigation channels. Population density is low by Chinese standards, and gravel roads run for miles at a time through the brilliant green paddy-fields from hamlet to thatched hamlet, hidden in clumps of giant bamboo.

The foreigner's car roars noisily through this idyllic landscape, scattering gravel to the verges as the local chauffeur does his best to show that Chinese drivers lack nothing in courage. Every few miles we pass road-graders repairing the damage - stolid ponies hauling a simple buggy that drags an angled wooden plank along the verge, smoothing the gravel back to the carriageway. The fast traffic is provincial transport brigade lorries, the occasional bus, and perhaps once a day a military convoy - the Vietnam border is not far away. Two-wheeled hand-tractors, with their thundering one-cylinder diesel engines, drag small overladen trailers slowly along on market errands, but the majority of the local traffic is horsedrawn, and the evidence is spotted all the way along the tarmac. Here we encounter the Guangxi Lancers - lone rangers of peasant enterprise. Horse manure is not to be sniffed at as fertilizer for private gardens, but neither is time to be wasted. Guangxi Lancers ride the highways and the byways on a sturdy bicycle - panniers lashed behind, and an extra-long handled shovel

held at the ready. Pedalling up to the target, the shovel is lowered with careful aim like the lance of a tent-pegging hussar, there's a scrape and a flip, and the rich prize sails into the air and over the shoulder to plop neatly into the creaking pannier basket.

At the other end of the spectrum, some kinds of agriculture obviously benefited from economies of scale. Large scale mechanised farms or cotton plantations in the border regions are almost invariably State Farms anyway, where the workers are already fixed-wage employees, with no personal rights of ownership, so the applying the Responsibility System there never broached principles of ownership. Another category where little change took place was in those communes closest to big-city markets, such as Beijing and Shanghai, where long-term contracts with the city's commercial purchasing departments had already converted these once-peasant collectives into large-scale agribusiness. Famous communes such as the Evergreen Commune on Beijing's northern fringe, much visited by foreign tourists, had received considerable capital assistance from Beijing in the early days, but by 1983 was a thriving food producing and processing conglomerate which supplied ten percent of all urban Beijing's vegetables. It could offer its forty thousand 'peasant' members cash incomes six times higher than the national average for peasants, and welfare benefits better than most state enterprises.

The only pressing problem for communes like Evergreen was to find employment for their children, whose rural registration did not permit them to get city industrial jobs. But with its huge cash flow and proximity to city markets, it was not too difficult for the commune managers to set up new collective enterprises either making light industrial products on their own account, processing some of the commune's own produce, or processing materials on contract for urban industrial units.

To support its expansion, Evergreen needed more professional expertise than could be supplied by its own

members. It broke new ground by advertising in the Beijing press for agricultural scientists and engineers. They received over two hundred applications - almost unheard of - from people of whom over a hundred were already in secure urban employment. A 46 year-old engineer from a research institute who took up one of the positions, said the commune had offered him better pay, accommodation and conditions than his government job, as well as offering jobs to his two unemployed sons.

In this context, it was clearly in the interests of most of the commune members to stick to the centralised organisation of work - in fact, under the rural reform programme, Evergreen actually increased its degree of centralisation under expert commercial management. In smaller communes, private individual expanded rapidly into the private ownership of agricultural machinery. By the end of 1983, there were a million tractors in private ownership in rural China. But at Evergreen commune, all the tractors formerly owned by various Brigades of the commune had been gathered into a single Machinery Service Brigade, which could deploy a total of five hundred machines according to the overall needs of the commune.

Some other urban-fringe communes became quite aggressive in their hunt for labour contracts in the cities, to the extent that in 1982 Beijing's city government was forced to call a halt. Construction firms had been hiring contract labour gangs from the communes in preference to taking on new employees from among Beijing's own unemployed youth. By the time the practice was banned, there were forty thousand such peasant labourers on building sites around the Beijing, with other cities similarly under siege.

The real propaganda heroes of the period were those individual peasants who used skill or enterprise to make themselves rich - an extraordinary turnaround since the days of Chairman Mao. From the stories printed in the official press, none of the old socialist principles on 'public ownership of the means of production' seemed to be sacred, apart from a firm tenet that land itself always belongs to the collective, no

matter to whom it is entrusted on contract. 'Responsibility' and 'ownership' were not to be confused, though they were not far apart in practical terms. The collective could terminate responsibility contracts, however, if laws were broken or serious mismanagement threatened the land itself.

Two main categories of newly-rich peasants emerged rapidly - those who were able to use existing skills (such as expertise with grape-growing or chicken-raising) to take over management of collective resources at a handsome profit to themselves, and those who found neglected areas of production or service which they were able to fill (such as medicinal herb-growing, or the two brothers who built their own small hydro-electric scheme and sold power to the whole village). These new entrepreneurs were accustomed to a very frugal lifestyle, and were able to build up their own capital very rapidly in two or three profitable years. Twenty families in a remote Central China village got tired of waiting for the local authorities to build them a theatre, so they collected together thirty thousand dollars from the profits of their private farming to build their own. In their first year of operation, they showed ninety movies hired from the state distribution bureau, hired seventy live performing groups from neighbouring towns and cities, and turned a profit of twenty percent on their collective investment. The story was publicised to encourage further private investment in fields such as this, so as to relieve the demands on state funds for these relatively low-priority projects.

Stone Buddha Temple Brigade crouches right against the Great Wall, at the top of the Ba Da Ling pass, forty kilometres north-west of Beijing. Just that modest distance, combined with its shortage of water, means that Stone Buddha Temple has not shared the prosperity of the suburban 'agribusiness' communes. Yanqing county is famous for its sweet, crisp apples, but they don't appear in the open Beijing market. They are bought up by the capital's food wholesale corporation and stored for supply to priority customers: government banquets, and hotels serving foreign tourists.

Ba Da Ling pass is the main route out of Beijing, across its northern horseshoe of sheltering hills, towards Mongolia and the west. Through the centuries, the pass has seen mighty armies clank back and forth: Genghis Khan, the Manchu banners, the Japanese invaders, and finally the Communist armies themselves, completing their mastery of the North China plain.

At Stone Buddha Temple Brigade, the temple no longer exists. It was an early victim of the Cultural Revolution, and future archaeologists may look for its stones and timbers in the walls of neighbouring cottages. The stone Sakyamuni Buddha itself squats, lotus position, next to the pigsty of a tumbledown farmhouse.

The Great Wall, where it hangs over the brigade, is a Ming dynasty construction, part of a series of fortifications, garrisons and customs stations spread the length of the steep, winding pass. Like a modern-day nuclear arsenal, the Wall seems to have served more as a psychological deterrent than a practical defence against determined attack. But who can say what barbarian raids might have taken place if the Wall had not been there to make an attack on Beijing at least marginally more difficult? The mere sight of the Wall at Ba Da Ling, draped, as the Chinese say, 'like a resting dragon' across crag and ravine, is a salutary reminder to any upstart barbarian, even today, of the massive force of sheer manpower which, at the Emperor's disposal, constructed this preposterous monument. As with modern defence programmes, the defensive value of the Wall was hotly debated by court officials even as it was being built, and the costs of construction brought bitter protests from taxpayers and feudal lords obliged to pour their own wealth and productive manpower into the grand but dubious project. Tens of thousands of human lives were expended, with no memorial but the Wall itself.

Stone Buddha Temple Brigade is small by average standards. Units generally are smaller where the life is harder. The brigade's four hamlets are scattered up a steep, winding valley, the houses clinging to the northern slope, where they

can catch the most of the sun before it drops early behind the high western crags.

Xiao Sung is one of the hundred and fifty people in the valley, forty-five families in all. She's not yet old enough to be married (twenty), so lives with her father, her married brother and her married older sister in a new six-room house of the traditional design. There's no room on the hillsides for the spacious south-facing courtyards popular on the plain, so their six rooms all sit side by side under one long roof along the mountain slope. For the time being, brush fences define a narrow yard in front of the long house, where, later, the pigsty, chicken coop, fuel store and so on will be added as budget allows. With six able-bodied earners in the family, their new house boasts square lattice windows of glass, rather than the traditional white paper, needing replacement every year.

The family built the house themselves, buying timber, bricks, lime and joinery from the commune headquarters, and supplementing this with adobe from their team's own land. A few years ago, building your own house was a crime: peasants were supposed to wait until the commune was rich enough to re-house them all in those uniform cement barracks beloved of the Party model-makers. Now brigades make their own rules, and almost everyone prefers the traditional style: a frame of trimmed logs for pillars and beams, adobe or tile roof, adobe or brick walls, with windows and doors filling all the southern exposure. Right across North China, the same general pattern is found in buildings from pigsties to the Forbidden City of the emperors.

Xiao Sung shares her father's two rooms and looks after him. She'll leave when she marries. Like the other women of Stone Buddha Temple, her day is divided between housework and fieldwork. The day begins early in summer, the peak season for fieldwork, and starts with a breakfast of millet porridge and maize-bread. Rice is not part of her diet. Though the brigade has only twenty acres of land flat enough for crops, each year they get one wheat crop, one coarse grain (millet, maize or sorghum), and possibly a crop of potatoes as well out of the better irrigated fields in the valley bottom. Even so, the fields

alone cannot support the population of the brigade.

For the long years in which Mao's slogan 'Take grain as the key link' was being enforced, mountain villages like Stone Buddha Temple faced demands from literal-minded cadres for impossible annual increases in grain production, and a ban on the proper development of the meagre non-grain crops their land could support. After the absurdity of that policy had finally been acknowledged, Stone Buddha Temple was able to return to the diversified land use which, from the beginning, had been its only realistic hope of prosperity. The fields now use less than half the labour power of the brigade, and a majority of the female labour is split between the crop fields and the private vegetable gardens.

Xiao Sung takes her turn when a collective project such as road-mending or building a new well demands labour contributions from each family. She may also tend her family's share of the fruit trees scattered through sheltered and watered spots on the stony hillsides: apple, pear, crab-apple and walnut. In spring, the blossoms make bright patches of white and pink on the grey-brown native brush of the mountains.

In mountain villages like Stone Buddha Temple, where grain is short, chicken-raising is a personal luxury rather than a business. Xiao Sung's family keep only one or two chickens for their eggs: any more would only eat grain otherwise destined for the family's own bellies, and they live too far from the markets to make any profit from selling the eggs there. For meat, rabbits are a better proposition than chicken, and are gaining popularity. Their feed can be gathered freely from the hillsides rather than subtracted from the family grain store, and their skins can be sown into snug linings for winter clothing, or taken for sale in the township.

'Town' for Xiao Sung is Yanqing, the seat of the county government, about ten kilometres through the pass. Nankou, at the foot of the pass, is just as close, but the road to Yanqing takes less climbing - a big factor when you are carrying heavy goods on foot or on a borrowed bicycle. It is in Yanqing that Xiao Sung buys her cotton smock jackets and trousers.. a little more form-fitting now than in previous years, but still loose

enough not to set prudish tongues wagging in her tiny community. The general store and hardware department there supply all her normal requirements- a few pins, a new pair of scissors, a new plastic waterbottle to take to the fields on hot days. Yanqing Photography Studio has its stamp on all the small black and white portraits of family members assembled in the glass frame that takes pride of place on the wall of her room.

Beijing is quite accessible, should she want to go shopping for something special, or simply to see the sights. The commune headquarters has a truck going to Beijing on some errand or other several times per week, and she can get permission to perch on top of the load, or, as a woman, may have the luxury of squeezing with several others into the cabin. Failing that, there's the public bus, or for more money again, the train.

Trains pass right through Stone Buddha Temple Brigade. The main line from Beijing to Mongolia, Siberia, and even Europe, bursts from a tunnel just at the end of the village, leaps the river-bed on a short bridge of hand-cut local stone, and disappears into a second tunnel on the other side. International passengers on the train can glimpse the village for perhaps ten seconds. In summer, the mental snapshot would be idyllic: leafy poplar and beech by a rippling stream, green terraced fields against hillsides dotted with walnut trees and wild roses, cottages overgrown with flowering melon-vines and surrounded by tall nodding sunflowers. An old man might be snoozing over a herd of goats up on the hill, and a young woman coming down the valley, shouldering a pole with wooden water-buckets swinging at either end. The young woman could be Xiao Sung, and that could be her eighth trip for the day to fill the household water-vats. She could be wishing she were on that train herself, heading for heaven knows where with money in her pocket and a mug of tea chattering in its saucer on the table in front of her.

After an autumn of brilliant reds and golds, winter at the pass is cold and unforgiving. Temperatures from December to late February are seldom above freezing, and the nights

regularly plunge more than twenty degrees below. The same Siberian winds that chap the lips in Beijing have even more bite up here, where the hills take away the low, weak sun by three in the afternoon and funnel the wind fiercely down the valleys. Then, only evergreen pine and spruce on the hillsides break the uniform grey of the valley. The stream freezes, snow falls, but the arctic airstream is so arid that the air catches at the throat and seems to suck body moisture greedily through any exposed skin. Men and women wrap up in heavy goat-skin coats, over five or six layers of padded cotton and wool knitwear. Carters trudge the hard roads beside their steaming horses rather than ride on the shafts, to keep some heat moving in their blood.

There's little point in fighting the extreme cold: Xiao Sung and her family stay indoors for the worst of it, sitting or lying on the *kang*, the brick platform heated by a charcoal fire, which serves as bed, table, and chair together in peasant homes. They make and mend clothes and cotton shoes, listen to the radio, visit friends, or take their shopping trips to town.

Children, who do a share of field work at peak seasons, spend the winter in their cramped little school-room, three primary classes together reciting their three different lessons simultaneously at the top of their voices. The school runs with assistance from the collective funds of the commune, but no central government support. Teaching method is traditional, consisting mainly of wrote learning set texts and some basic arithmetic, but those who complete the primary school course will have at least basic literacy. If Xiao Sung's little cousin wants secondary education, she will have to go to the county town. Few parents other to encourage this, as there are very few jobs for middle-school graduates even in the county towns, and the smarter, better-connected town children seem to get them all.

In milder weather, the family begin venturing out to work on maintenance and building projects before Spring starts the crops shooting and agricultural tasks begin. At Stone Buddha Temple, the railway provides work at these times, giving local contracts for track maintenance which significantly boost the

village's cash income. Others of the men work a small quarrying operation on the local granite, cutting and shaping stone building blocks by hand, for sale to the commune or to other villages. In rural China, hand-cut granite can be cheaper for building than bricks, since brick-making burns expensive fuel, while stone-cutting burns only cheap, renewable human labour.

In 1983, the peasants of Stone Buddha Temple Brigade had an unexpected bonus. They were chosen by the central government to be among recipients of a small-scale Australian aid project, sponsored personally by the Australian Ambassador to China, Hugh Dunn, to bring reticulated drinking water to poor villages. Pipes reached most of the homes by summer of 1983, ending Xiao Sung's daily trudge to the spring. Annual income of the villagers in that year had been a hundred and fifty yuan per head.. less than seven dollars per month. And that had been a fifty percent improvement over the previous year.

In the hamlet itself, the mountain stream has undermined the Great Wall where it crosses the narrow valley floor. A watchtower has crumbled into the sandy alluvium, to expose a cross-section of the wall's insides: massive fine-cut stone foundations, facings of huge grey bricks, and a filling of earth and rubble penetrated by a drainage channel. Around the edges are abundant signs that human erosion has also played a part.. a few bricks here, a few bricks there, windfalls, as it were, for any local man planning to bridge a ditch or extend a pigsty. Peasants have always tended to consider ruins as a resource to be mined, and the stimulus of the Responsibility System has created a stronger demand for building materials. Stern prohibitions against 'Eating our Cultural Heritage' issued by the State Council have not fully solved the problem, especially in remote areas.

The increase in rural wealth also created a change in the market for consumer durables, which many peasants were now able to afford. Sales of wristwatches, sewing machines and bicycles would continue to boom, of course, but now more and more peasant villages were wanting to join the twenty percent

of Chinese who receive the national television service. Travelling on a train between Beijing and Heilongjiang (Northern Manchuria) one time, I looked out the window into a dark shelter which had been thrown up by a gang of local labourers working on the line. Flickering in the gloom was a small black and white television set, which happened to be showing a satellite news broadcast of European Grand Prix motor racing. I had to wonder what they made of it, but of course never found out.

The television revolution is just beginning to make its mark in the more prosperous rural communities. But manufacturers have found they need to adopt special strategies to overcome an unusual cause of buyer resistance. It's not the quality of the programming that makes Chinese peasants think twice about buying a TV, though the single government-controlled channel available in most areas would not get far in a western ratings game. Market surveys carried out by a TV factory in north China revealed that many families who could well afford to buy TV refrained from doing so out of fear that they would be swamped by neighbours keen to share the viewing. Respect for privacy is low in the scale of proletarian social values.

The factory managers decided that the best way to keep the neighbours away was to give them TV sets of their own. In consultation with local authorities, they began setting up what they call 'TV villages', in which the prices of the sets are specially discounted for a bulk sale, and to make sure each family can view free of neighbours pestering. After-sales service, a sad rarity in China, is also thrown in for the TV villages. Hundreds of these TV villages have now been installed, in a good example of the commercial freedoms now revitalising Chinese industry. But while a minority of prosperous families are buying over two million sets per year, the price of a set still represents three or four times the average yearly income for a Chinese peasant.

During 1981, there was a massive movement of rural workers away from collective field labour and into the 'rural enterprises' which were being set up at local levels with the encouragement of the new central policy. Over a million such

non-farming businesses were set up, employing over thirty million people. The trend continued, and by 1983 there were over a hundred million peasants, or one in every eight, working in jobs other than farming, including a million peasant families employed fulltime on reafforestation projects.

With such rapid development, there were bound to be a few loose ends, and indeed there were plenty. Most rural cadres had been used to a Command Economy, in which their prime responsibility was to carry out instructions from above. The new collective and co-operative industries seemed to be outside of that known command structure. Faced with a reluctance on the part of many cadres to make public resources available to collectives, some of their agents resorted to bribery and corruption of various kinds, which was often an easy matter, given the sudden acceleration in rural cash flow. The central government estimated that over a billion yuan in enterprise taxes was evaded in 1981, due to lack of efficient or experienced tax inspectors. One enterprise manager convicted of corruption in Henan province boasted that he could secure the co-operation of any commune Party Secretary for one thousand yuan, while most problems could be smoothed with ten packets of good cigarettes or two bottles of good grain spirit.

Peasants on the fringes of Shanghai developed a lucrative racket involving grain ration coupons. The state purchase price paid to peasants for grain was in fact higher than the subsidised price at which city consumers bought it - and the monthly ration allowance was higher than many city consumers required. The racket involved selling eggs in the streets, not for money, but for surplus grain ration coupons - about one kilo's value of coupons per egg. The peddlers could then in turn sell their accumulated grain coupons to a grain dealer, at a profit, and he could use them to buy subsidised grain, and resell it to the state purchasing bureau for full price.

Many of the problems, however, did not arise from any criminal intent. In the summer of 1982, a large number of students from universities in Beijing were asked to return to their home villages and report on the implementation of the

Responsibility System there. A hundred and fifty-seven reports covered twenty-seven provinces - almost the whole country - and there were some alarming trends to report. Serious damage was being done in many places to local forest resources which had been divided up, as the persons given responsibility sought quick profits with no eye to the future. Land in some areas had been subdivided into uneconomically small units. Most seriously, the infrastructure of roads, irrigation, pumping stations and other common capital works, nominally the responsibility of the Team or Brigade, were being starved of funds and maintenance as everyone concentrated on their own plot of land. Capital construction works for the common good had come to a standstill. Welfare funds were also dangerously running down in many units. There was a serious upsurge in encroachment on arable lands to build housing, as more money encouraged marriages and family expansions.

A little further up the scale, all was not well with the commercial system, either. Beijing had taken the decisions, very costly in national budget terms, to raise the official state purchase prices of rural produce and to suspend a wide range of rural taxation for a period. Both measures were intended to give the battered peasant economy a chance to re-establish itself profitably under the Responsibility System. But soon the State Council had to issue stern reminders that the Responsibility System required people, first, to fulfil state purchasing quotas in essential commodities, before going off on their own more profitable pursuits. Reliable state purchase of grain was absolutely essential to the national plan, but there had been a disturbing decline in the acreage of grain being cultivated, as farmer after farmer chose to plant his assigned fields with more profitable cash crops, like tobacco and rapeseed. One county had a glut of fifty thousand pigs more than the butcheries could handle. In another province, forty different local units decided to set up factories to build washing machines, then a hot market item, but most of their products were unsaleable. After decades of commodity shortages, the peasants had grown used to the idea that the

State commercial bureaux were bound to purchase whatever they might produce, but they were no longer producing what the State wanted them to produce.

Loosening of the economic reins inevitably led to a decline in power and prestige of local cadres, with an upsurge, disturbing to the Party, of old customs and practices which the Party had long said were dying out. With their money, peasant families and villages in parts of the country rebuilt old Buddhist and Taoist temples, conducted expensive traditional weddings and funerals, patronised soothsayers and exorcists, and generally behaved as if the Cultural Revolution had never happened. Ancient clan rivalries suppressed, or transmogrified, under Communist Party authority, arose again with displays of wealth sometimes erupting into violence. In Hunan, the very heart of Mao country, two villages populated by the Chen clan held a joint ceremonial dinner. Residents of the nearby Deng family village chose to take offence at not being invited, waylaid the visiting party on its way home and attacked the festive Chens with pitchforks and threshing flails. Hostilities lasted eleven days, until county police could be brought in.

Hunan province, anyway, had been thrown into some ideological confusion by the developments which cast a shadow over the reputation of their favourite son, Chairman Mao Zedong.

Coming from the dusty plains of North China, the lush green landscapes of the province make a tonic for the eyes.

Hunan's rich rice-growing river valleys now push higher and higher up into the hills, where, following the steepening contours of the landscape, the paddy terraces become steeper and smaller, eventually disappearing altogether. In the remote southern mountains, my jeep bumps slowly along unsealed roads lined by forests of pine, spruce and native deciduous trees, their strong vertical lines in sharp perpendicular to the horizontal contour lines of the paddy terraces. Here, people live in spacious timber cottages propped up on wooden stilts, much more graceful than the squat mud and brick farmhouses of the lowlands. In tiny

villages, I see these timber cottages still daubed with Cultural Revolution slogans five and ten years old. Possibly the slogan paint is the only paint these timber walls will ever bear, but they show that provincial authorities have felt no urgency to erase the slogans of Maoism as they have been so thoroughly erased, by 1981, almost everywhere else in the land. My jeep rolls down from the hills and through county towns where 'Long Live the Great Leader Chairman Mao Zedong' still flashes out on electric hoardings over municipal buildings.

I am not surprised to find the greatest loyalty remaining in Mao's own home town, Shaoshan, seventy kilometres from the provincial capital of Changsha. Half the district population are related to the Mao clan, of whom Mao Zedong's father was a comparatively prosperous member - farmer, rice merchant and money-lender. At the high tide of Mao-worship in the late sixties, Shaoshan was receiving up to sixty thousand pilgrims per day, and a special double-track railway line was built to carry them there from Changsha. A museum commemorating Mao's revolutionary relatives, as well as himself, was so popular that it had to be duplicated, in exact detail, to cope with the flow. Exhibits include the actual sword with which a hated local land-lord's head was lopped off by a revolutionary throng. Hotels, restaurants, and souvenir stalls all flourished on the Mao trade. The provincial Party Secretary, none other than Hua Guofeng, pushed through a massive irrigation scheme designed to make the area around Shaoshan a model of agricultural prosperity for all of China. There were plans, apparently approved by Chairman Mao, to upgrade the village school to the status of a university! Then Chairman Mao died.

My guide reports that as cautious, then bolder and bolder criticisms of Mao began to appear, obviously with high Party approval, the number of pilgrims to Shaoshan had plunged dramatically. Visits were no longer *bao shiao* (chargeable to one's Unit). The museums were closed. It was

only with the publication of the Party's revised history, in July 1981, confirming that Mao, for all his faults, was a Great Revolutionary Hero, that a trickle of pilgrims began again - mostly loyal and local Hunanese schoolchildren.

We wander through a replica of Mao's thatched peasant home, built in the fifties, and gaze thoughtfully at the pond where the child Mao had threatened to drown himself, during a fight with his father. I wonder how different China might have been had he carried out his threat.

The museum has re-opened the door of one of its twin parallel exhibitions, but only those rooms dealing with Mao Zedong up until 1950. In Shaoshan, as everywhere in China, the rooms dealing with Mao in power are closed for revision.

A disturbing side-effect of the Responsibility System was a widespread withdrawal of rural children from the primary schools. All family labour was now directly profitable, so many parents simply saw no point in their children wasting good productive hours in school, when, in almost every case, they had absolutely no chance of ever getting a job outside of their home village. An eleven year old girl wrote to the Youth Newspaper:

'In our brigade, the twenty-five girls in the school have one after the other been taken out of school to mind cattle, grow rice, gather firewood and look after brothers and sisters, because our parents regard men as superior to women. My parents are like the rest, and want me to leave school, mind our cows, work in our contract fields, and let my younger brother go to school. When I asked to keep on studying, they said "Sooner or later girls belong to others. A few words of knowledge is all they need to know". I cried, but what is the use of crying. Are our schools only for boys?'

In other areas, hostility to schooling was such that schools closed down altogether. Official media carried a string of reports over a period of months in 1982, detailing how teachers were hounded, beaten and persecuted till they left the village, school buildings were vandalised or taken over for other

purposes, and school furnishings taken away by the peasants. Under the system of collective responsibility, most rural schools actually belong to the team or brigade, not to the state, and all expenses of running the school, including teachers salary, must be born by the collective. Peasants thus considered it their right under the Responsibility System to close the schools down, when they failed to see the point of what was being taught in them. In one Hunan county surveyed, two hundred and fifty primary and secondary schools had been thus closed in one year - forty percent of all the schools.

In the summer of 1982, a national conference of rural teachers was called in Beijing to look for solutions to this serious development. Once teachers were consulted, it became very clear that the peasants had good reason to be dissatisfied with the education their children were being offered. Under the ambitious pressures of local cadres, secondary schools seemed to concentrate almost solely on trying to urge a few favoured students through to higher institutions. One county government had tried to boost its record by arranging for all its candidates for college entrance examination to see the test papers in advance. They were exposed in a great national scandal. By rule of thumb in China, one such scandal given national publicity can be taken to represent dozens more which are never publicized.

Rural secondary education offered little in the way of vocational training for that vast majority of pupils who would live all their lives within twenty-five kilometres of the school door. Pupils whose family obligations required them to take time off for peak season labour in the fields tended to be the ones with the weaker foundation in primary education as well, and to become rapidly disillusioned as they dropped further behind and the teachers concentrated on those few with hopes of higher graduation. A complete reorganisation of the rural curriculum is the only real solution.

China remains unchallenged as the world's largest nation, with its population now officially reckoned by United Nations-sponsored national census to be well over one thousand million. The government has set a target population of twelve

hundred million for the year 2000.. a twenty percent increase over today's population, to be achieved by keeping the annual increase to one point two percent per year. At a United Nations conference on population issues in Beijing in 1981, China claimed it had achieved this comparatively low growth figure in 1980 - but since then government officials have admitted to higher figures. Earlier, World Bank officials had estimated from their own researches that a figure closer to two percent seemed likely, considering the still-high birth rates in the rural areas.

Life expectancy has almost doubled in the last thirty years with improvements in basic housing, nutrition and hygiene which have especially reduced infant mortality. As well, the result of an earlier Maoist period of uncontrolled population growth is that a baby-boom of young people are reaching marriageable age at the rate of more than one hundred million per year until 1990, with a resulting likelihood of a second-wave baby boom leading into next century.

Already, despite impressive growth figures in some areas of the economy, China is little better off per capita in the basic areas of grain and housing than it was twenty years ago. Chinese economists say that unless population growth restraint is successful, no improvement in overall living standards can be expected in the foreseeable future. But attempts to achieve birth control by education and propaganda have been least successful in the place that matters most...among the rural peasants. The policies making families responsible for their own productivity and income, combined with the high tide of marriages, have produced a sudden spurt of rural population growth that has prompted tougher measures from the central government.

Official policies were decreed in 1979 to set the single-child family as the norm, backed up with economic rewards such as direct subsidies, preferential entry to schools, and free health care. Second children would not only miss out on the benefits, but would suffer official discrimination on the same matters, in favour of children bearing the only-child certificate. The policy was quite effective in the cities, where only those families

determined, for instance, to have a son after a first daughter, would take the deliberate decision to launch a second-class citizen on the world. In rural areas, where state benefits anyway were marginal, the majority of families seem to have taken the view that more children, and particularly more sons, could not possibly be a bad thing in the long run.

Later decrees strengthened the demands on rural officials to enforce birth-control regulations, which, in many cases, they had been reluctant to do because local feeling was so strong. At the same time the levels of economic penalties for the second child were raised, and it was declared an offence against the state to have a third child. Local cadres have the power to enforce the abortion of third pregnancies, or even second pregnancies which have not had prior approval under the few special clauses, such as the first child being handicapped or dying. No pregnancy at all is supposed to be undertaken without a planning approval from the parents' unit, and young couples wanting to have their single quota-child may be expected to wait several years until their turn comes around.

Reliable contraception procedures are a problem everywhere in the Third World, and no less so in China. Contraceptive devices and medications are supposed to be available freely to all married persons, but this creates a new problem. Particularly with the reintroduction of the profit motive into the retail and manufacturing sector of China, people in rural areas began to complain that the factories could not be bothered making, nor the stores stocking, these contraceptive items which brought them no sales profit. Whether this very serious problem has been resolved or not I do not know. What I do know is that the rate of abortion is enormous, and abortion is legal, even enforced, into the eighth month of pregnancy.

It's difficult not to sympathise with the view of the state planners that population growth control is vital, and cannot be delayed if China is to make any substantial long-term improvement in standards of living. But the One-child Family policy runs against some of the deepest traditions of Chinese peasants. In peasant China, children have traditionally been the only guarantee of support in old age. In the Peoples

Republic, the elderly and infirm are supposed to have 'Five Guarantees' of support from their unit, but the history of the Peoples Republic's first thirty years has not given the peasants much confidence that promises made today will be honoured in thirty or forty years' time. Governments may change policies at will, but children are always children, bound by filial loyalty beyond politics. In many minds, the Responsibility System re-emphasises this by throwing so much economic security back on the family. All around them, peasant parents see families with less children, less labour power, struggling with the tasks of their fields or having to hire extra help, while the larger families handle their field work with labour to spare for profitable sidelines.

Even those who can be convinced to accept the public necessity to limit families to one child can be extremely reluctant to adhere to the policy if their own child happens to be a girl. According to traditional attitudes, still very deep in the villages, girls leave home at marriage and become part of their husband's family. Parents of single girls may fear deeply that they will be left without family support when their daughter marries. And apart from this very practical concern, the whole thrust of traditional Confucian family values emphasized the necessity of sons to carry forward the family name. Chinese may feel quite obsessively that they have dishonoured their own ancestors if they have not generated a son to continue their line into the future.

Female infanticide has, regrettably, been a traditional feature of Chinese rural life. Historians have noted it as the most reliable form of population control, practised throughout Chinese history at periods of population stress. Now it has surfaced again, under the twin pressures of strict family limitation and the desperate desire of many parents to have a son. In the northern city of Harbin, I was out one morning on a film assignment, filming steam trains from a snowy railway bridge. We noticed a knot of passers-by staring over the parapet, and when we looked, I saw the frozen, naked body of a girl child of perhaps two years, lying on a cotton quilt on a bank of snow under the bridge, where she had apparently been

left by parents to die.

According to the official reportage in the Chinese press, female infanticide is most common in two kinds of areas - where life is so hard that an extra female mouth is considered simply a burden, and in prosperous, densely populated areas where the one-child family rules are most strictly enforced. Stories are gruesome and horrible, of buckets of water kept handy in the village delivery-rooms to drown the child if it should be female. In a county of Anhwei province, every female infant born in 1981 died within twenty-four hours, while every male survived. In two counties of Guangdong province, very close to Hong Kong, where strong campaigns are in force to combat China's highest population growth rate, over two hundred female infants were known to have been murdered in one year. On those two examples alone, one could safely calculate that the incidents of female infanticide throughout China would number in the thousands each year.

In the cities, where births take place in supervised conditions, matters are not so crude. The economic advantages of a son are not so pronounced, and people, on the whole, are better educated. None the less, there are many cases reported of persecution, divorce, and even murder of a wife who has failed to produce a son. Medical facts to the contrary, most Chinese insist on blaming the wife for the sex of the child. Among the more sophisticated urban residents determined to have a son, a practice has grown up of seeking a sex-prediction from amniotic fluid analysis, then having the pregnancy aborted if the foetus proves to be female.

The truth appears to be that official attitudes to female infanticide are ambiguous. The national press condemns it strongly, as brutal and reflecting 'feudal' social values. But local officials are most likely to condone or turn a blind eye to the practice, if they are not forced to take notice, in some cases by a grieving mother of the dead child. Of the many reported cases I noted in the press, only one (a father who threw his sleeping four-year-old daughter down a well and smoked a cigarette as she drowned) received a sentence greater than four years in prison. In a country where embezzlers and rapists are

shot, and a man can get fifteen years gaol for expressing anti-Communist sentiments, such penalties for what is clearly premeditated murder cannot be seen as a serious deterrent. Many peasants would consider it a cheap price to pay for a son.

Successful population control will determine the future of China, and individual human lives are not the priority in the planning of the Party. But one local newspaper cheerfully reported on a phenomenally fecund mother of fifty-nine children in Heilongjiang, who had born six sets of triplets, fourteen sets of twins, thirteen single children, and was pregnant again. Few would match that act of policy sabotage, but the chances of meeting the target nationally are very slim. Apart from anything else, most of the peasants have very little entertainment, and go to bed early every night. It has been seriously suggested that China should accelerate its investment in communications satellites so as to bring television as quickly as possible to every remote village. Not only would this offer a medium for birth-control propaganda, but it might also keep the peasants out of bed until they are ready for sleep.

At Spring Festival, peasants customarily replace the printed calendars and mottoes that have decorated their walls and doorposts for the previous year. In Cultural Revolutionary years, these were restricted to tableaux of revolutionary heroics, but traditional themes bounced back quickly after the fall of the Gang of Four. Production is vast - 650 million posters sold each year - and themes combine the traditional folk tales and legends with modern ideology. In 1979, my favourite poster depicted seven classical fairy maidens floating down from the clouds into an idealised landscape of socialist development, replete with regimented fields, tractors, jet fighters, an atomic power station, and with the slogan below: 'Better on earth than in heaven'. But by 1983 the bombast was no longer in fashion, and peasants in their millions bought posters bearing the revived traditional icons of prosperity: the silver carp, sheaves of corn, and large, plump, male babies.



Peasants take over the road for their rice harvest. Passing traffic wheels provide the threshing power.



Village transport in south China. Going to town for millions of Chinese takes several bumpy hours in the back of a truck.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMRADES IN LOVE

Chinese, both men and women, go into marriage with more modest expectations in some respects than Westerners. The idea of marriage in China is far from the Western notion of marriage based on mere individual feelings of attraction. The role of an intermediary, for instance, is so much a part of any marriage contract that, in cases where the match happens to be fully spontaneous, an honorary `match-maker' will usually be called in for ceremonial purposes, to restore the proper symmetry. Simply falling in love, while it does happen, is not the way most Chinese, even today, expect to get married. The right *duxiang* (matching pair) should be found first by cool assessment of suitability, in which family and other opinions should be sought, after which love will follow naturally upon the commitment.

There are some proponents of Free Love, but in a society where accommodation is so dense, and privacy practically unobtainable for the majority, it makes undeniable sense to most young people to be sure in advance that their mate will be compatible with the family and with the work unit. If things don't work out in either of these respects, it can't simply be

solved by moving to the other side of town or changing your job... you and your partner are locked in, right where you happen to be, in most cases for life.

Courtship is expected to be a serious business from the start. The casual, experimental relationships conducted by most Western teenagers are looked on as highly improper in China, where the very first invitation to a girl is taken as a definite overture to a potential marriage. Casual dating is growing among the faster-living types, such as the stage performers, musicians, and artists, but the social penalties for a reputation as 'free', especially for a girl, are heavy.

Early on in my time in Beijing, I asked a local man what would happen if a young man asked a casual acquaintance to go to the movies with him. He looked shocked, then said the question would never arise. I soon learned that not everyone was as conservative as he, but the norms are, none the less, very strict.

As with many aspects of life in China, there are big differences here between life in the cities and life in the villages, where conservative values are stronger, but at the same time life is more spacious and temporary privacy is possible for the determined young peasant. City slickers tend to wink knowingly when asked about sex-life in the villages.

An absurd notion became current in the outside world during the Cultural Revolution, and persists in many places outside China today, that the Chinese people were somehow less interested in the opposite sex than other peoples. Learned explanations referred to dietary deficiencies, the discouraging effects of unisex clothing and female emancipation, or the sublimation of erotic drives into ideological passion. Of course all these factors were present, but the personal stories now being told of life during those years suggest that sexual passion, frustration, and joy were as important to every Chinese then as they ever had been. Perhaps more so, there being so few joys of any kind to be had in that period. Under the puritanical phase of Maoism, love was branded a bourgeois emotion - but there was an upswing, not a decline, in the national birth-rate.

Many foreigners even now are struck by the lack of sexual

demonstrativeness among Chinese. Its not unusual to hear a foreigner in China describe Chinese men, in particular, as 'sexless', or 'like a piece of wood'. The frank Chinese reply to this, as offered by a local friend not long after I arrived, draws for its analogy on that number one symbol of modern living in China... the omnipresent vacuum flask: 'Like the vacuum flask, Chinese men seem cool on the outside, but they're hot on the inside.'

Instances of that heat being revealed in public are still relatively rare, but the ethos has changed markedly in the few years since the fall of the Gang of Four. Under Maoist extremism, young men and women were exhorted to ignore 'bourgeois affection or love', concentrating all their energies and attention on Revolution and production for as long as possible. It was even the fashion in some units for the Party committee to assign suitable couples to each other as 'comrades in arms', short-circuiting premarital romance altogether. This practice still continues in individual cases and in some fields, such as the scientific professions and the military, with a degree of compliance astonishing to a child of Western liberal values. These days, though, such pairings are made more by suggestion than by coercion.

In the April dusk, Xiao Hong and Xiao Wei move cardboard cut-out figures around, trying to get them to stand up straight in the gusts of dusty wind that blow into the courtyard. The buildings are an institutional variant on the typical Beijing housing courtyard. But here, the side wings are of grey-fired brick with steel-framed windows, rather than the plastered rubble or redbrick of the older single-storied courtyards. The main building at the head of the courtyard is older, with extended red-painted eaves and a central double door between symmetrically placed wooden windows, suggesting it may once have been a small temple, designed for dignity. This faces the open end of the courtyard, where a tall wrought-iron double gate, emblazoned with big rusty red tin stars, leans half open. Outside this gate the usual small

crowd of children, youths, and two or three old men are assembled to *kan renao*, 'watch the stir', an apparently inalienable Chinese citizens' right. Gruff injunctions to disperse, from the white-jacketed policeman sallying forth from his nearby booth, affect them no more than those gritty puffs of wind that bring a momentary squint.

This is the Workers Club in Beijing's Chong Wen (Upholding Culture) district, named for the Chong Wen Gate in the old city wall, now demolished, in whose shadow the suburb used to lie. The animal cut-outs are games to help the guests, soon to arrive, to relax. All the guests have registered their urgent desire for marriage partners, and each will be hoping to find one at the party that evening.

In a room of the side wing, Meng Kunlung sits across the bare wooden table nursing his tea-mug. The Chong Wen marriage introduction service has been set up by co-operation of the district government, the local branches of the Communist Youth League and the Women's Federation, and a local knitting factory with a predominantly female workforce. It is one of four in Beijing Municipality, whose total enrolments are already in the many thousands, after only six months of operation.

'Young people who come here feel there is a lack of social opportunities to meet suitable partners', he says. 'When we register them here, we can try to find a suitable match from our files and arrange a meeting, but sometimes, especially before a public holiday, we set up something like this where people can meet and arrange to see each other again during the holiday if they want to'.

Through his office's direct introduction, five hundred meetings have been arranged by this time, one hundred couples are still seeing each other, and three have already married. But for most candidates, the problems remain great.

Outside, it is past seven, darkness has come down on those parts of the courtyard not reached by the two naked electric light-bulbs hanging from a pole in the centre, and the guests are arriving. On some, especially the girls, the sheen of self-consciousness is almost palpable. They cluster defensively in dimmer corners of the courtyard. Music issues with a clang from the metallic loudspeaker horn, installed years ago to relay militant political harangues. Now it disgorges light music: selections from a braying local tenor and from the softer sounds of Teresa Teng, chief crooner of the much admired Hong Kong style of sentimental love songs, richly overlaid with swirling electronic organ and artificial echo effects.

The music bounces around the bare courtyard pavement, but nobody dances. Last year the six Beijing marriage bureaux organised a collective dance, but some of the male candidates became over-excited and turned over the supper tables. No more dances have been arranged.

There is no refreshment. Only shift-workers have not eaten by seven in Beijing. A group of young men playing noisily with the cardboard cut-outs are discovered to be interlopers and asked to leave. Children still hang around the open gateway, watching for some action in this strange adult game. Meng the organiser is himself only thirty, and has been put in charge of administering the marriage bureau only a few weeks after his own wedding.

'Of course, we do have older people to help with making the matches,' he tells me. 'Mostly, the people who come to us are between twenty-five and thirty-five, but we do have quite a few women over fifty, and one man of seventy looking for a wife. I don't think he's coming tonight'.

'Just look at them,' says Lu Cai, her voice acid. 'There's not one you could consider seriously'. She is a tall woman of

thirty with perfunctorily curled hair, conservative drab trousers and a light grey jacket, neat and shapeless. Her face is intelligent but plain, half hidden by spectacles. It is not enhanced by the present expression of grim mortification. She stands close to the gate, along with a timid looking girl who does not leave her side all night and says nothing.

`There's no hope for people like me. We spent all of our youth serving the country as we were taught to, not thinking of our own future, and by the time we did get to thinking about marriage, nobody wanted us. Now everybody's on at me...my family, my work unit.. to get married. They're making me believe there's something wrong with me. And I end up in a place like this!'

She casts a withering glance at a pathetic little man in his late twenties who has lacquered his hair up into preposterous spikes in a vain effort to look taller than his very meagre height.

`I'm quite happy to marry an ordinary worker. I'm not fussy. But he's got to have at least something going for him'.

She turns her back on a shy man who has been shuffling his feet nearby for several minutes, trying to get up courage for an approach.

Meng admit that educated women over thirty are the hardest cases.

`Men and women are pretty well in proportion over the whole age range, but generally the men want a wife a few years younger, and they often prefer a woman of slightly lower educational or work status. So there are always some women left over at the top of the range'.

In fact the party guests show a heavy majority of men, though a number of them, like Spiky-hair, were clearly going to have problems in any open competition for a mate. The

organisers acknowledge that the less socially-confident girls simply stay at home, more sensitive to the potential humiliation of this marriage bazaar. Formal introductions are one thing, but introducing oneself is still thought scandalous for a girl in most average, conservative families.

Looking around the courtyard, I see a few groups where one or two of the youngest and prettiest girls are under siege from mobs of eight or ten young men at a time. All the men press tightly around the one who had successfully opened a conversation, showing a complete absence of sensitivity about personal space. Others' chins hang, literally, on a young man's two shoulders, as he attempts to initiate a courtship. After a few minutes the petrified girls inevitably break away from the mob, retreating to other girl-friends for moral support.

'I want to find a girl from an educated family', announces a young man with steel-rimmed spectacles and a nervy smile. Like so many, he is about thirty. He wears standard 'labour' blue workclothes, the jacket swinging open over a rumpled white shirt.

A woman about the same age cocks her ears and asks him what his own education has been. The grin tightens over his gums and he speaks out his life's central bitterness.

'I have no education. My parents were intellectuals, and for that reason I was denied education by the state. I have read by myself. That's why I said I want someone from an educated family, not necessarily an educated person'.

The young woman turns on her heel. They could not be less compatible. She is a teacher of ideology in a Communist Party Training School, who could not possibly marry anyone but a committed Communist, probably a Party member. She admits frankly that, at over thirty, she has little hope of

finding someone who will not be intimidated by her education and Party status.

By eight-thirty, the cut-outs and the other party games are completely ignored. Many of the no-hopers have already drifted off. None of the atmosphere a Westerner might regard as conducive to fruitful courtship can be found in that bare brick courtyard, still invaded by dusty gusts.

But couples have formed. The stakes are clear: everyone wants to get married. Here and there are urgent conversations, addresses being exchanged.. even some couples leaving together. By nine, even the ideology teacher has been buttonholed by an earnest-looking man of forty in a Mao-suit, and seems not wholly uninterested in him.

Lao Li from the District Government Liaison Office is well-dressed and expansive. He evidently enjoys his role as a 'fixer', an organiser of deals between departments, with its occasional personal windfalls. He offers a premium brand of imported cigarettes.

'It's the old rule here. In partners, the girls look for career, the boys go for looks and a sweet nature. I've got two boys of my own, doing pretty well. College graduates. You wouldn't find them in a place like this.'

His expression shows clearly that to need to have recourse to one of the newly-organised marriage bureaux is seen as evidence of social failure, regardless of the factors which have gone into putting the lonely individual on the shelf, or in fear of ending on the shelf.

Marriage bureaux like the one in Chong Wen District mushroomed suddenly in 1980, as a collection of different factors precipitated a virtual marriage stampede in the bigger Chinese cities. The basic factor was the ripening, to

marriageable age, of China's Mao-fostered baby boom of the late fifties and early sixties.. a ten year long official encouragement for all loyal Chinese to multiply to their hearts content. Mao believed that human beings under the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought could be nothing but an asset to the earth, and the more the merrier. Like others of his visions, that one has been discredited by those who have had to deal with the actual results, but meanwhile the demographic bulge produced by those ten years of abandon will be felt through at least two generations. Chinese newspapers note grimly that if present policies of restraint on population growth had been introduced twenty years earlier, China might today have an almost manageable population of 700 million, rather than the one billion it must now feed, clothe and shelter, before thinking of other things on which to spend national resources.

A second factor was the mass return to their home cities of millions of youth who had been sent down to the villages to 'learn from the peasants'. The Maoist policy had intended that the majority of these rusticated youth would settle permanently in the villages and county towns where they were sent, absorbing the innately superior ideological values of their peasant hosts, while contributing the benefits of their secondary education to raise cultural and scientific levels in the villages. For many of those sent down from relatively fast-moving cities the boredom was intense, and marriage, either to local peasant offspring or to a fellow exile, was a strong temptation. Marriage to a local peasant also had a powerful political attraction in those days: it could convert a person, labelled as a member of one of the Enemy classes, into a member of the 'politically advanced' worker-peasant-soldier superclass.

This could have many advantages, not the least being some relief from the endless 're-education' administered by political activists to whomever they could identify as having bad class backgrounds. The catch was that marriage constituted a commitment to permanent settlement in the countryside, and finished all hope of gaining the coveted transfer papers back to the home city. A country furlough could become a life

sentence, when one's papers described one as Commune Member, and one's home-town registration was lost for ever.

There were many, in this political climate, who avoided marriage for years, hoping against the day that good luck, a good political record, and good connections in the bureaucracy might drop a return ticket in their lap.

Xiao Tan and Xiao Lin were two such girls, who in the aftermath of the great Red Guard debacle in 1968 had been sent with the rest of their classmates from Beijing to join a railway construction corps in Inner Mongolia. They were neither of them particularly deep thinkers, their family backgrounds were simple and politically safe, and both would be judged plain by Chinese standards of female beauty. They had participated cautiously in the rallies, struggle meetings, and endless debates of the Cultural Revolution, avoiding the excesses that brought disgrace to other Red Guard activists, and generally following the majority in a sincere attempt to make contributions to China's progress. Both had initially welcomed the compulsory move to the remote countryside, enjoying the new experiences, the fresh air, the camaraderie of the construction camp, and seeing their feeble labour contributing, however minutely, to the national construction in which they strongly believed.

Winter followed that first summer. The novelty was forgotten, political slogans jaded, and camaraderie cracked as cliques and favouritism developed in the dispensation of such small privileges as were available in that remote district: allotment of lighter duties, leave passes, better accommodation, extra ration coupons. The two girls kept out of trouble. They took a moderately active part in local propaganda work (amateur political theatricals), and in the Communist Youth League when it was revived. They heeded the Party's call for politically advanced citizens to marry late. Ten years passed.

When the rustication policy began to crumble, in 1978, Tan and Lin were not in the first group to depart back to their home towns. People with better family connections were on the first trains back, jobs already arranged for them by obliging friends

or relatives in positions of influence. Others who had married, of whom there were many, tried hard to find loopholes for themselves to return home. If couples were both originally from the same city, it might just be arranged if the right strings could be reached and pulled hard enough. If one partner in a marriage was a local, the best that could be hoped for would be a job in the city for the city-bred partner, and a life of separation as Cowherd and Spinning Maid.

In the end, Tan and Lin's patience and political caution paid off. They were transferred, together, to a unit where political credentials were carefully scrutinised - a unit dealing regularly with foreigners. But the game then changed. Staking their futures on a transfer back to the city, they had laid down the ten years during which most young Chinese meet and marry their partners. They were now back in the ring, but time was running out, and many of the eligible men were looking for one of the new generation of town girls, just growing up, who had not had to roughen their hands with labour, darken their skins with exposure, and suppress their feelings for ten hard years.

Of the two, Tan was the better looking. Slimmer, finer-featured, she looked trim and capable. An underlying diffidence showed through only when she spoke, in tenseness of the mouth and a habit of unnecessary shrill laughter. Lin was shorter, with a snub nose, spectacles, and a prominent, wide mouth which she often left open when regarding the foreigners she met in the course of her duties. She frequently claimed to be stupid, which was an exaggeration. But her comically naive countenance may have helped her in the smart capture of her man...a full-time organiser of the Communist Youth League. When I last saw them, Lin was married and showing off a fat new baby. Tan was two years older and still looking for a husband. She had not yet registered at a Marriage Bureau, but the bureaux lists are full of women in just her position.

The Philosophy Department at Beijing University undertook

a survey of women between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-four registered at a Marriage Bureau near the campus. The survey found a consistent pattern of women whose late teens and early twenties had been spent in remote rural areas, but it also identified many who had been heavily influenced by the prevailing ideology of that period. A cult, promoted by and centred upon Jiang Qing, pushed for what is now regarded as an 'excessive emancipation' of Chinese women, exhorting them to be 'heroines who would supersede men, despise family life, and serve socialism while ignoring personal emotions'. Like Lu Cai at the Chong Wen Bureau, many came back to the cities with a low opinion of the men of their own age-group, who, in their turn, took the un-emancipated attitude of preferring less challenging female companions. In this land of female oil-riggers and locomotive drivers, there remains among men, on the personal level, strong adherence to the classical view that 'without ability, women become virtuous'.

The third group of those suddenly swelling the marriageable ranks were those tens of thousands who were politically rehabilitated during 1978 and 1979. Official labels such as Rightist, Capitalist Roader, Revisionist, Anti-Party person and Bad Element had been applied to hundreds of thousands of ordinary law-abiding citizens during the campaigns of the Cultural Revolution. Sometimes the labels were accurate (at least in reflection of the political values then being applied), but very often they were applied out of spite, personal malice, or the simple need to fulfil local quotas of Class Enemies identified and neutralised. Chairman Mao had said that 'ninety-five percent of the people are good, or capable of reform'. The corollary of this, seized upon by local activists, was that five percent, or one in twenty of the Chinese people, were bad and incapable of reform: the Class Enemies, lurking in the most innocent of guises. Stories abound of the selection of sacrificial lambs by groups of colleagues, to satisfy the hungry maw of Revolution.

As the mass revision of these cases proceeded, tens of

thousands of political detainees were released from Labour Education and Labour Reform institutions, to try to pick up where life had been suspended years previously. Many times more this number, though, were released from the conditions of political labelling in which they had been suspended from many social and economic rights, without being actually imprisoned. Conditions such as 'Under Investigation' or 'Under the Supervision of the Masses' effectively made a person a social pariah, unable to get a job, and virtually unmarriageable.

In the country, children and grandchildren of long-buried former landlords were officially released from a similar pariah status which had barred them from full citizenship. Many of these political walking wounded, men and women, had been divorced by their spouses under political pressure during the campaigns, to avoid the shadow of political stigma falling on themselves and, most cruelly, their children. Official rehabilitation removed the formal obstacles to their seeking matrimony, but did not necessarily make them attractive as spouses.

With the great modern marriage wave rising, marriage became a hot topic in the press and political classes of 1979. Should marriage be completely free? What rights should families have in the decision? What should be the role of the work unit? What constitutes a legal marriage, and what recourse should there be for jilted lovers? Through it all ran one theme.. how much of China's traditional marriage customs should be branded 'feudal' and cast aside.

Its safe to say that among all the Chinese I have known of all classes, from adolescents to grandparents, the essentiality of marriage as a basic element of any person's life has been questioned only by the wildest eccentrics. Amongst the great stewpot of social ideas plastered across the Democracy Wall in its heyday, I do remember one libertarian charter questioning monogamous marriage, on the grounds that such marriages

created too great a pressure on each couple to produce many children, to secure their own future support. It suggested that abolition of marriage and substitution of free sex would go a long way to solving China's population problem. Comments pencilled on the margins of this particular poster were numerous, ranging from the scatological to the morally outraged, but none more positive than one neat note thanking the author for 'stimulating theoretical discussion'.

But with the post-Gang moves towards emancipation of minds, Romantic Love, as a value, made a big comeback, sweeping a new generation of 'vacuum flasks' off their shelves with a clatter and a cloud of steam. By late 1980, no movie, novel, or magazine seemed to be complete without a romantic love theme. On tens of thousands of cinema screens, impassioned pledges of devotion would be exchanged by couples of all ages, often leaping high barriers of class distinction or political history, with a joint commitment to advancing the Four Modernisations. Many such inspired celluloid couples would be seen running in slow motion towards each other, through woodlands, across golden sands or flowery meadows, finally to meet and grasp each other climactically... at arms length.

The first screen kisses, in 1981, (though coyly hidden by umbrellas, silk scarves, or tree trunks) provoked storms of correspondence in the press and anxious reconsideration in the halls of the Ministry of Culture. Eventually, the loudest voices cried for relief from this often gratuitous intrusion of romantic themes into otherwise orthodox films, and the wave of screen passion subsided. But millions of 'vacuum flasks' had by then already had their stoppers popped, and were not about to be corked up again. Romance had been rehabilitated as a legitimate part of life, and had been seized upon with enthusiasm.

China does not lag behind other cultures in its own traditions of romance, and indeed lechery, though some contemporary propagandists would have us attribute all the renewed active interest in romance by Chinese youth to 'the corrupting influence of foreign bourgeois culture seeping into China'.

China's great heritage of lyrical love poetry, romantic novels, and frankly erotic literature, attest to as full an appreciation of sexual relations, in all their dimensions, as could be found in any other culture.

The great eighteenth century novel *Hung Lo Meng* (A Dream of Red Mansions), and many others up to the present time, chronicle intense romantic love affairs, set against demanding family or social obligations, with the most common outcome of all such novels being final tragedy. Frequently, the tragedy is precipitated by a marriage arranged by the family without the consent of the son or daughter concerned.

In a social climate of bureaucratic feudalism, marriage became an instrument for securing stability and aggrandisement of property or influence, too important in family survival to be left to youth, whim, or the excitement of unpredictable hormones. In this system it was the women who came off worst, being traded off, bought and sold without any legal protection, and frequently to men forty years their senior or twenty years their junior, if it suited family transactions. This system applied across all class lines. Rich men had recourse to concubines or sing-song girls if unsatisfied with their arranged wives, while the poorest men could not afford a wife at all. A majority of the scholarly love poems of the past two thousand years were in fact addressed to such secondary love-objects, while the True Wife was expected merely to bear sons, manage the household, and behave decorously.

Just how a proper courtship should be conducted is still a live issue for the town-dwellers. The long process of experimental pairing that most Western youth experience, before ever seriously considering marriage, is still strongly discouraged in China. What society expects, and most people follow, is that young people will preoccupy themselves with study, work, and 'healthy' group recreational activities until they reach at least twenty, when they may legitimately begin looking for a mate.

Even at that point, there is no real intermediate status of 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' in which pairs of young people can court, experimentally, with any degree of freedom.

The parental ideal is that two young people are introduced by mutual friends or relatives, or meet in the course of 'healthy' organised youth activities. After formal 'introductions', they may meet several times in the company of others, or may get straight down to business with an appointment for a chaste walk in a park, during which the first tentative assessments of compatibility can be made. Shilly-shallying is viewed sternly. If the first appointment leads to further walks in the park, the couple are very soon regarded as being in the state of *tan lien ai* (discussing love), which amounts to a serious intention to marry, and is quite difficult to withdraw from. Any girl, especially, who will *tan lien ai* with more than one partner in her life is thought 'fast', regardless of her physical chastity, and will be viewed with suspicion by the mothers and fathers of any future prospective husbands.

This social and family pressure is very strong, and has been a source of anguish to a number of my own acquaintances. A typical case is that of a student who had earlier established a *tan lien ai* relationship in his own home town, approved by both families. Later, transferred alone to study in another city, he fell in love with a fellow student, but was afraid to break off with the original 'intended' for fear of what people would say.

Many of the university students of 1977-82 were people who had spent long years rusticated in communes or other remote postings. Their adolescence took place under the shadow of extraordinary social stress, even violence, and their first loves seem often to have had the character of wartime romances. Individuals cut adrift from their normal sphere of life and family support developed close, dependent attachments to fellow-passengers on their flimsy, perilous craft. Away from the traditional family supervision, these relationships often progressed to a degree of intimacy not previously experienced. It's not difficult to understand how such people, returning to the relative affluence and sophistication of the major cities and universities, or to the suffocating ambit of their family's plans

and ambitions, could find themselves drifting away again from these former soul-mates. Traditional and official China, however, do not look on it this way. Comments on such cases in the press invariably come down on the side of loyalty to the first love.

It is usually assumed that the reason for the switch in affections is a change in status - for instance, the student from a country town who finds a college girlfriend more appropriate a partner to his future status as an 'intellectual', and throws over the simple down-home girl. The rejected one is described as having been 'cheated', and with some reason, because her earlier declared loyalty to the fickle lover will certainly damage her chances for finding another husband. Not that it's by any means a one-way male chauvinist street. There are just as many cases where the girl does the throwing-over, as for instance one cry of 'foul' from a soldier, writing to the Youth Daily, who said he had scrimped his tiny wages and neglected supporting his own parents in order to help his girlfriend get to college, only to have her jilt him for a fellow student.

It's not unusual for young people caught between family and social pressures, on the one hand, and their own changing affections on the other, to suffer breakdowns, dropping out of college or work, and sometimes contracting double suicides. That's not to say that the tragedies of the love-lorn are restricted to students and intellectuals. The literary folk tradition of lovers driven to suicide by parental opposition is tragically re-enacted in the villages of China to today all too frequently, to judge solely from the reports of Party-controlled newspapers which are not inclined to exaggerate what the Party loftily calls 'negative phenomena'.

I was travelling in the provinces with an official from Beijing when the conversation, after many hours on other topics, drifted towards sex. He was keen to understand contemporary Western attitudes to sex, and I attempted to explain simply the common view that sex and love could be separated. The conversation petered out, but after a few minutes gazing thoughtfully out the train window, he turned to me and said conspiratorially: 'You know, before we get

married, we Chinese make love, secretly.'

His blunt confession was surprising, and I suspect motivated by the desire to correct any impression that Chinese men might be lacking in manhood (which had not been my impression anyway). But the 'secrecy' he acknowledged was not surprising. The intense social pressures on most young Chinese, living in crowded, tightly supervised neighbourhoods or industrial dormitories, ensure that what we would regard as normal privacy is enjoyable only by subterfuge. To preserve at least some freedom to withdraw from the early stages of a new courtship before it becomes a social *fait accompli*, most couples will elect to make their first rendezvous in some park or other public place far away from their own home and work neighbourhoods, hoping to avoid the local busybodies.

To the world-wide vocabulary of courtship body-languages, Chinese lovers add the unspoken Bicycle Code. Two bicycles leaning together before a bush warn that the spot is occupied. On early meetings, a couple, standing may lean towards each other with a bicycle frame firmly between them, while hands creep cautiously along the handlebars towards their first physical contacts. Later moves will be to stand together on the same side of the bicycle, and then abandon it (with its unspoken 'I was just leaving'), for park bench or the bushes. As matters progress, couples can be seen cycling home side by side, the girl coasting in the saddle, propelled by her boyfriend's chivalrous hand in the small of her back, as he navigates his own machine one-handed. This is China's 'lift home', in a society where only chauffeurs drive cars.

Love in China is not for adolescents. The romantic movie boom of 1980 sent its shockwaves down through the high-schools, and for a time bold school-age couples could be spied holding hands. The reaction from on high was outrage, and the national Youth Daily made clear in replies to readers' letters that love between school-pupils or trade apprentices (who can be up to twenty years old) is definitely banned. Advice is offered to young girls on how to repel inappropriate or precocious advances without either being too insulting, or making the boys even more excited. Some new books offering

rudimentary sexual education (a number of them translations from Western books, with significant amendments by Chinese doctors) have been published, aiming to redress the legacy of almost universal ignorance on this delicate subject among the unmarried.

I was once at a zoo with an unmarried woman of thirty, a Party member with a good job, who had earned her proletarian credentials by working five years on a farm in Manchuria. We were looking at a pair of handsome Manchurian tigers (the world's largest and most magnificent species of tiger), and I made some chance remark about the male.

'How do you know its the male?', she asked me.

The beast in question was proportioned like a half-ton tomcat, and the relevant details loomed large enough on his furry hindquarters to seem more than obvious to me, but I pointed them out to her none the less. She seemed struck with wonder, and after a pause said thoughtfully:

'I see! Just like the pigs on the farm!'

I restrained myself from pursuing the analogy further, as she clearly was not capable of doing so herself. It happened that I met her again after a year, during which time she had herself got married, in the approved way, to a young cadre. She had changed visibly, which was not surprising, and I guessed she remembered our earlier conversation, as she blushed when I mentioned the tigers.

Standard educational procedure has been to present couples with a slim volume on 'marital hygiene' as they register their marriage - a marxified variant of the 'pillow-books' traditionally offered to Chinese brides by their mothers, but with the stress, today, firmly on avoidance of unplanned pregnancy. 'Restraint' is highly recommended, and the perils to health and sanity of over-indulgence are luridly described.

There is also public debate as to whether or not it is necessary to report your love-affairs to the commissars of your work-unit. It's not a 'legal' obligation, but the Youth Daily acknowledges that many work units demand such reporting 'for your own good', and the Youth League recommends young lovers to comply. Doing so will enable the unit to investigate

your lover's background for potential unsuitable factors, such as a family with a bad political record, previous liaisons (indicating an immoral character), congenital disease in the family, or unsuitable residence registration. In any case, no marriage can proceed without the signed agreement of the work units of both parties, so early compliance may be easier than risking last-minute disappointment. 'Dubious' couples are often kept waiting for months, as papers shuffle up and down party hierarchies and in and out of five different 'security' offices.

Housing is another crucial problem. Some units will not agree to a marriage until the couple can prove they have somewhere to live.. at least a single room to themselves. But other units will not allocate an apartment from their own blocks before the marriage has been registered. As a result, many urban marriages split into two episodes, registration and cohabitation, which can be months or even years apart. To overcome this bureaucratic contradiction some would-be bridegrooms obtain false marriage certificates, sometimes legally 'marrying' a person they claim is 'too busy' to come to the registration office, and then using the certificate so obtained to apply for housing from their unit. Once suitable married-quarters housing has been allocated, they throw over their original brides (who in some cases have not even been aware they had been 'married' for two years) by a legal annulment, and are able to get a genuine marriage licence for their real fiancée. The physical form of marriage certificates was changed in mid-1982 to include photographs and embossed seals, in an effort to eliminate these marriages of convenience.

It's a curious phenomenon, that taken for granted in urban China today, that, in finding a *duxiang*, it is the female who takes the initiative. Popular literature and the movies, almost without exception, show the young woman coyly or brashly pursuing her chosen man, while he appears initially oblivious to her interest. His ultimate surrender is usually bashful and fumbling, while she radiates glee.

Small cameos from this general scene can be observed in quiet corners of Beijing's parks, mostly former Imperial

gardens whose wooden benches and grassy banks afford the nearest thing to privacy that most couples can expect. The tableaux in which the more advanced couples arrange themselves across the benches generally suggest the triumph of female initiative over male reticence. In the popular fiction, the young man who actively pursues a girl is usually of questionable morals, if not fully a *liumang* (delinquent). On the other hand, it is accepted in families of all classes that the good daughter's priority in life, once she reaches twenty or so, is to 'find' a husband, in a very active sense of the word. The methods and stratagems adopted by the daughters of China, of course, reflect all the diversity of class, culture, and personality to be expected in a nation of such size and complexity.

One of the more unusual practices, flowing from the difficulties many people have in finding a suitable spouse, is the large numbers of girls who volunteer, in groups, to marry young men in unpopular categories. Coal-miners, because of China's poor safety conditions for miners, are regarded as very short on *tiaozhen*... but every year there are well-publicised reports of groups of girls shipping out from an industrial city somewhere to 'marry a miner' in a brief blaze of glory. In the Manchurian industrial city of Shenyang, 470 low-status street-sweepers achieved marriage in the year 1981, following 'political education' in the ranks of the city's other workers who had snubbed them as inferior. Girls write in to newspapers offering to marry legless soldiers or other wounded heroes who would have little chance of marrying on the open market. These blind marriage offers illustrate the radically different attitude towards marriage among Chinese. Love happens, sometimes with overwhelming passion, but not necessarily before the commitment to a joint life in marriage. Chinese girls believe they can 'love' whomever they commit themselves to, though love may not be the origin of that commitment. I heard one Chinese girl say at her wedding, of the man she had decided, cautiously, to marry:

'He has been a good and sincere friend who has taken good care of me. I believe he is a good man and ideal partner with whom to share the rest of my days. I pledge to be loyal, loving, considerate, and to work hard to make the marriage a long and

happy one.'

She did *not* say she loved him already, and felt under no obligation to say so, as a Western bride would probably feel. In the more conservative rural villages, marriage must indeed be a carefully calculated transaction, with the bride evaluated as an economic acquisition by the groom's family. If the girl is a good worker with a proven ability to bring in plenty of collective work-points to her husband's family, or has special skills that will enable her to earn well in private sideline work, a substantial cash compensation may be expected by the family that have bred and raised her, only to lose her productive return.

The exaction of 'bride price' is officially frowned on by Beijing, and is in fact illegal, but it makes such unarguable economic sense to peasants, who have to count every kilo of their annual grain ration, and who will have to depend on their children in old age, that rural authorities are extremely reluctant to clamp down. In fact, they predict that as the population control drive to limit the size of families to one child gains momentum, the 'bride price' compensation will loom ever more important as there are more and more families for whom an only daughter is the sole prop for the future.

Well-founded worries about lack of a son pose a serious challenge to the One-child Family policy in the villages. The propaganda authorities therefore try hard to promote a break from the tradition that only a son can be relied on for old-age support. The result has been much positive publicity for young men who, upon their marriage, have undertaken to become part of their *bride's* family, instead of taking her away, as is traditional, to join their own. The Peoples Daily reported on a remote mountain commune in Shandong where a large number of families had produced only daughters. 'Following long, patient educational work by commune leaders' some seventy bridegrooms had agreed to move in with their bride's parents and support them. The confidence this had induced had helped reduce the local birth rate by half, according to the official report. True or not, it illustrates the point.

It was evident in newspaper reports from all over the country, that the peasants were not heeding official directives

on mercenary marriage. Frustrated young men like Chen Bosung wrote bitterly that they could not meet the financial demands of their prospective in-laws. Before consenting to the match, his girlfriend's family had demanded the following: ten yuan in 'rearing costs' for each year of the girl's age, six large jars of expensive preserved wine to 'show respect to the parents', eight sets of clothing for the girl, of which at least three must be expensive wool or rayon, a gold ring and a pair of gold ear-pendants, a house, furnished to parental specifications, all expenses of a large wedding feast for two hundred guests, and last but not least a large sum of money as a present to the girl's grandmother, whom he suspected of masterminding the whole deal.

Other impoverished swains told of even more devious impositions demanded by parents of desirable daughters: an 'introduction fee', a supplementary fee for 'good looks', a 'milk fee' and a 'labour pains compensation fee' for the girl's mother.

The Peoples Daily commented that this marriage market had been a heavy financial and emotional burden on the nation's bachelors, leading many in despair to marry someone they did not love, but could afford, resulting in unhappy marriages and social disruption. Some Chinese writers have acknowledged the problem, but defended the necessity, in delicately balanced rural family economies, for some fair compensation to be arrived at, though not necessarily as a lump sum 'bride price' which can leave a young man and his family deep in debt for years. It has also been pointed out that while free choice of partners may be ideal, in many Chinese villages with static populations it is in the interests of genetic health that marriages be arranged over as long a distance as possible. Most villages in China, anyway, share only a handful of surnames among several hundred people, and inbreeding is a very real factor to consider. Even in traditional China, marriage between people sharing the same surname was taboo. But where few men have the mobility or leisure to seek brides far afield, a network of enthusiastic village matchmakers (usually older women) can serve a perfectly honourable function, so long as the matchmaker's own mercenary considerations are restricted. Marriage has always been a customary, rather than religious or

legal matter in China. There was not even such a thing as a marriage law until the Peoples Republic introduced one in 1950 to give women some legal rights.

The bride is no longer borne to her husband's house in a sedan chair, weeping ostentatiously (and often sincerely), but new rituals have taken the place of the old. A good friend described attending a relative's wedding in the country. The family were middle-class by village standards, some members holding local government posts and thus having cash salaries as well as their share of collective farm produce. In keeping with their status, they entertained 300 guests over three days: bride's family on the first day, groom's family on the second, and non-family friends and acquaintances the third day. They borrowed five hundred yuan for the catering, confident that they would get back all or most of it in the 'Red Packet' wedding gifts of the guests. Money is the normal wedding gift, and by a disarming Chinese custom, each guest registers in a large book at the door just how much money he is giving an effective spur to generosity.

All the women in the family went to the nearest town and had their hair waved in the current style derived from dimly-remembered Hollywood movies of the 1940s. In place of a sedan chair, two taxis were hired and decorated with silk rosettes, and a jeep was borrowed from a government office in repayment of several outstanding favours of an equally informal nature. Bride and groom both wore Western-style suits made by a local tailor, and were looking forward to the large hand-tinted wedding portrait photograph they had sat for in the county town studio, the bride wearing, for the portrait only, a rented Western-style bridal gown belonging to the photographer. It happened that the couple had known each other all their lives, and had fallen discreetly in love some years previously, before they had reached the approved age for marriage. Though the marriage law up to September 1980 said women could wed at age eighteen and men at twenty, this had long been superseded, as is so common in China, by 'policy directives' to local Party authorities not to approve marriages until couples were considerably older: twenty five for women and often twenty-eight for men. The couple's tacit

understanding could only become acknowledged after they had reached the currently approved age and had been 'introduced' by a respected senior member of the village Production Team.

These two were luckier than others whose love affairs ran into parental interference. Many peasant parents draw no clear line between their rights to advise their children, as supported by the Communist Party, and the absolute authority of the Confucian tradition. Newspapers still report suicides, beatings, and even forced marriage by kidnapping and rape, resulting from parental interference in marriages. Sometimes these incidents are with the connivance of the local Party authorities, who at village level do not always distinguish between Party policies and Confucian notions of filial obedience.

Today's marriage registration ceremonies remain minimal, as I know from personal experience. Handled by the District Civil Affairs Bureau, the marriage requires simple presentation of documents of identity, accompanied by the permissions to marry from respective work units, or, in the case of foreigners, from our respective embassies. Chinese couples are offered a brief homily on morality and family planning by the officer in charge. As foreigners, we were offered a mug of hot water and no sermon, while the clerk carefully brushed the Chinese versions of our names onto the large pink certificates (one for each partner) and sealed them with a smudgy red rubber stamp. We were married.

Chinese, however, still tend to view this registration procedure as something like the exchange of contracts under the old system: it seals the legal side, but does not make you *socially* married. For that, there are still proper forms to be observed. Very few modern Chinese go through the traditional wedding rituals of bowing, tying the pair together with a red silk ribbon, and walking round in circles. But parents and neighbours of all classes still regard it as highly improper for a young couple to set up house together without a full round of 'paying respects' to the family elders, and a formal entertainment to 'warm the house'. Traditionally, family and friends would often invade the bridal chamber and tease the bashful couple to distraction. These days the 'chamber' is likely to be all there is to the residence, or it may often be a room just

borrowed for the occasion before bride and groom return to separate dormitories. Even so, some entertainment *must* be offered before married life can begin.

There are stories of some unit leaders criticising publicly, as 'immoral', legally married couples, who have commenced their married life without first inviting the Party Secretary and other appropriate dignitaries to a house-warming. Beyond this minimal level, most families still expect to give large-scale hospitality to the extent of their financial resources, and beyond. Guests are numbered by 'tables' of ten, and there is much neighbourhood rivalry as to which family invited twenty 'tables' of guests while another invited only fifteen.

For reasons which seem more derived from principle than from real economics, the Party press has railed against elaborate weddings ever louder at each of the four favoured wedding seasons: New Year, Spring Festival (Lunar New Year), May 1st (Labour Day) and October 1st (National Day). As an antidote to 'feudal' extravagant wedding spending, all appropriate front organisations such as the Youth League, the Trade Unions, and the Women's Federation organise 'mass weddings'.

Of the 40,000 couples who married in Beijing during the Spring Festival of 1982, only 5,000 opted for the mass weddings. Their motives ranged from practical cash savings, through dislike of family crowds, to a desire to demonstrate political progressiveness. The biggest reception brought together seventy couples at the Beijing Labouring Peoples Cultural Palace, formerly the Imperial Hall of Ancestral Worship attached to the Forbidden City. A deputy mayor of Beijing presided. Couples each paid twenty yuan for a table seating twelve guests. Refreshments were limited to tea and candies. Professional entertainers and Party politicians offered uplifting songs and speeches on the benefits of the one-child family. Most couples blushed modestly.

'It's more meaningful this way in front of our leaders than if we got married separately', said one bridegroom, his uniform blue tunic embellished with a small red silk flower.

Social notes in the Chinese press, for mass weddings as for other occasions, have a flavour distinct from their Western

counterparts. Brides and grooms picked out for note included orphans, Youth League activists, and `Shi Yuhua, daughter of the late National Model Nightsoil Remover Shi Chuanxiang (persecuted to death by the Gang of Four)'.

Honeymoons were previously only for the rich and Westernised, but, as modern prosperity grows, mass weddings can now be followed by mass honeymoons. Twenty-one couples from the staff of the Beijing Hotel took such a mass honeymoon to the seaside resort of Beidaihe, where the hotel rooms had been specially redecorated with `double happiness' posters and `fresh plastic flowers'. Hotel staff have an advantage anyway when it comes to access to privacy. A young Shanghai worker reported after his mass honeymoon trip to the southern lake resort of Hangzhou: `I was delighted to find on arrival that couples each had a room of their own, so brides and grooms did not have to sleep in segregated dormitories', as he apparently had expected.

But many more serious hurdles must be survived before a young bridegroom need worry about his honeymoon. Men and women alike, often with firm parental insistence, put a certain price on themselves, which potential suitors must match before the relationship can get very far. For the lists of conditions of acceptability, a word is borrowed from political jargon: *tiaozhen*, meaning broadly `pre-conditions'. The blatant materialism of these lists of *tiaozhen* can seem quite shocking to those who hold a idealistic candle for romantic love. They are the modern form of the traditional mercenary marriage contracts, but, once again, they make more sense to today's Chinese, scrounging what they can from a reluctant social system, than to Westerners with more diverse opportunities to better themselves materially.

Tiaozhen cover the whole spectrum of significant factors in a Chinese livelihood: family political status, connections, work situation, personal wealth, and appearance. Few girls from a well-connected military family, for instance, would throw themselves away on a mere college professor if his family had political records as `rightists'. the stain would cloud the entire future.. unless of course the professor in question had plenty of overseas relatives . Class stratifications are carefully noted in

marriage *tiaozhen*, though, as elsewhere, an attractive woman has better chances of 'marrying upwards' than an ordinary working man. The reason Class remains so important is not purely a question of snobbery (though that does come into it), but rather an acknowledgement that modern Chinese society runs on a system which insists on classifying people by ideological criteria that, once established, are very hard to shake off.

Among people of the same class, various work-units offer greatly varying attractions to a potential spouse. A man who works in a state-owned bicycle factory or an electrical repair workshop may find it much easier to get a mate than his equivalent in a steel mill or a coal mine. The potential to trade work-related favours with other people in the future may be weighed against the 'fixed assets' of another unit which has a well-developed housing and child-care set up. The small benefits of marrying an 'intellectual' would certainly be counted against the strong possibility of being assigned for life to teach school in a remote township where one's own children will be permanently classified as 'peasants' and denied urban careers.

At the crudest level, *tiaozhen* come down to a simple list of household furnishings and appliances which must be presented (to the bride) before the marriage can proceed. These listed items are generally so predictable that they are referred to in common speech by numerical slang: 'The Seventy-two Legs' (a full set of bedroom and livingroom furniture), 'The Four Wheels' (bicycle, sewing machine, wristwatch and electric fan), and, for high-fliers, 'The Four Modernisations' (television set, radio-cassette recorder, washing machine, and refrigerator), a play on the economic slogan. After all these demands have been met, the suitor will still have to find the cash for a wedding feast of appropriate extravagance, one thousand yuan being the respectable minimum. Considering the average wage of fifty yuan per month, the strain on the budget is heavy.

Many tales are told of the comic or tragic situations that develop when swains of small resources seek to meet the demands of their beloved. A wedding reception in Shanghai

that followed a six-year courtship turned into a clan brawl when the bride's party complained that the groom had not turned on a car for the bride to parade in, and the noodles were not up to standard. The two sides were at each other with bamboo sticks when the militia made a timely intervention.

On the eve of the Spring Festival one year, China's national television carried several true-life cautionary tales on the theme 'Gaoled at the Bridal Threshold'. Hai Yuli, a 24 year-old technician with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, received a 13-year sentence for his 'three-point plan' of shop burglaries to satisfy the demand of his girlfriend for modern appliances. Ying Fang, a university student from poverty-stricken Anhwei province studying in Shanghai had contracted a mercenary marriage with a Shanghai girl so that he could achieve Shanghai resident status rather than returning to his provincial home-town. To satisfy her *tiaozhen*, Ying got deeply into debt and later robbed a railway booking office, killing a cashier with a sharpened three-cornered file. He was sentenced to immediate execution.

The final case report showed a repentant father sitting in a bare prison cell after he had broken up his daughter's engagement because the groom could not afford a lavish wedding. Technically, this is an offence under the new Marriage Law, but the father, a prosperous peasant, seemed lugubriously aware he had been set up as an example to millions more of his generation throughout the country.

Parental control over marriage has been officially outlawed since 1950, when China's first ever formal Marriage Law was promulgated. It gave Chinese women, for the first time, the legal right to resist arranged marriage, to obtain divorce, and to re-marry if widowed. It even had to specify that they could continue to use their own personal name after marriage. Under the old custom a woman's name 'lapsed' entirely when she was married, and she would be known henceforth only by her husband's name and family title, e.g. 'Third Son Hu's wife'. Prostitution, concubinage, forced marriage and bride price payments were all formally outlawed, to the outrage of traditionalists who saw the law, correctly, as an attack on the whole system of Confucian male-oriented morality.

An argument of sorts, though, could well be put for forms of polygamy (such as concubinage) in the old China where war, famine and disease ensured that life for the majority was nasty, brutish and short. Impoverished families were often more than happy to see their daughters taken into more prosperous houses as maids or concubines, with the possibility of some spin-off benefits for the family. Few Chinese today, however, would dispute that abuses of women far outweighed these considerations. The change in women's rights was great, though customary attitudes still persist strongly.

Chinese custom brought forth, and still commends, a judiciously practical approach to marriage. But Communist social planners are now very worried that, with the new freedoms of the Marriage Law, this practicality is spreading rapidly to a light attitude to divorce, as well as marriage.

In the past divorce was practically impossible to obtain for a woman, but easy for a man, who could either simply send an unwanted wife back to her family (a great loss of family Face for which she would likely suffer the rest of her life), or if low in the social ladder he could sell her to someone else as concubine, wife or maidservant. Divorces figured often in traditional literature and ballads, but seldom with anything but a tragic outcome for the woman concerned.

The first Marriage Law of the Peoples Republic released a brief flood of female-initiated divorces from women married off by their parents against their will, or forced to endure the humiliation of their husband's entirely legal indulgence in younger concubines. Once the Communist administration was well established, however, the policy on divorce tightened. The law itself was not changed (that has seldom been necessary in modern China), but the Party-appointed judges were instructed to allow divorce only when both parties were determined not to live together, and all avenues of mediation had failed.

The Mediation Committees were often composed of neighbours, as part of the Neighbourhood Committee's general social responsibility, so patchy results were only to be expected. One ground for divorce discouraged, from the beginning, was the ground of separation, in those cases where separation was due to government work assignments. The

Revised Marriage Law of 1980 even contained a special provision banning divorce upon the unilateral request of a spouse of a serving member of the armed forces. Members of the various arms of the PLA can be away from home for years at a time without home leave, so the importance of this clause for PLA morale apparently warranted its inclusion in the law.

The new law established the basic grounds for divorce as being 'complete alienation of mutual affection', apparently opening the way to a far freer approach to divorce generally. For the first time, it seemed that a Chinese marriage could be ended on the request of just one of the partners. Other questions poured in to the newspapers: 'My marriage was arranged by my parents. Is that in itself grounds for a divorce?'

'Will the partner who applies for the divorce be discriminated against in the settlement of property and children?'

'My marriage was a customary village one and has never been registered. Do I need a divorce or can I just leave?'

'During the Cultural Revolution I lived together with a fellow-exile in a village for seven years. We have a child. Can he just leave me now, without a divorce?'

The law remains the law, but the policies for interpreting it were very soon clarified, after a wave of conservative social protest against the 'easy' divorces. Articles in youth and women's magazines made it clear that divorces 'caused by third parties' would be viewed with a stern eye, and the courts would have the power to order such a third party to stay away if the court decided the original marriage should be preserved. A person who establishes a relation with a third party after his or her marriage has already lost its meaning will be 'criticised and educated', but the divorce normally will be granted. If the third party is judged to be the actual initiator of the trouble in the marriage, the matter will be treated much more seriously, and the courts will insist at least upon long-term 'trial reunion' of the married party before reluctantly conceding to a triumph of immorality. The new couple will probably have to guarantee support for the abandoned partner and children if any, and pay a cash compensation as well for the 'emotional injury' caused. There is a school of opinion which has agitated for

'interference in a marriage' to be entered as an offence under the national criminal code.

The joint family system, in which both children and grandparents are often dependent on a single working couple, makes family stability an important economic factor for the government, aside from all purely moral considerations. A divorce will not be considered purely on the relationship of the couple... the potential effect of a divorce on the children and grandparents may also need to be assessed.

The divorce court judges say, though, that they do not intend to refuse someone a divorce simply in order to punish him for his profligacy. It was, after all, Confucius himself who said:

'I have never yet seen a man whose love of virtue exceeded his love of woman'.



**The Chaoyang District Marriage Bureau.
Male hopefuls crowd the windows, as an embarrassed female
registers her particulars inside.
Privacy is not generally considered an issue in China.**

CHAPTER SIX

TAILS OF CAPITALISM

By the end of 1982, China had approximately three million privately-owned businesses back in commission, with more registering almost as fast as the new Individual Trade sections of the local Commerce and Trade Administrations could handle them. The national director of the Administration was not satisfied, comparing this number to the 8.3 million private traders registered in China in 1953, before the Party's programme of 'Socialist Transformation' began to take everything over, closing all private shops and amalgamating existing co-operatives into large conglomerates. By 1978, before the radical reversal of policy towards private commerce, there were only one twentieth as many retail outlets in Beijing as there had been in 1953. The main streets had formerly been lined with shops of all kinds, some big, but mainly small family businesses. Now they were nothing but row after row of shuttered shopfronts, falling into disrepair or converted to store-rooms and living quarters. Not surprisingly, the limited number of large, state-owned stores in Beijing and every other city of China were quite unable to give satisfactory retail service to the population, even with the limited range of goods

that the industrial chaos of the time was able to produce.

Would-be urban entrepreneurs in the new climate were likely to find things no easier than their country cousins. A man from the fringes of Beijing who bought a second-hand three-wheeled truck from a commune, to start a local transport business, found quickly that the meagre quarterly ration of diesel oil he got from the cadres in charge of fuel allocation would last him only one month. His business was highly profitable, however, and he admitted frankly that he bought the other two-thirds of his fuel requirements on the black market.

Wang Xinren, a former rural team leader from a commune in Sichuan Province, arranged to take over a small abandoned coal mine, made it profitable, and rapidly expanded into ownership of two grain mills and a truck. With assets worth 40,000 yuan, he became a target for local cadre investigation as a 'Capitalist exploiter', but the charges did not stick - more senior officials held that he had built up the capital through his own labour and exploited nobody. A student from Nanking astounded his family and friends by spending a year on the intensive study of scientific poultry farming, then going out to the village where he had been rusticated during the Cultural Revolution and setting himself up to raise quail and superior grades of chicken for the city markets. His assigned work unit in the city, where he claimed he had nothing to do, tried to charge him with 'breach of organisational discipline'. Nobody had considered moving to the countryside as anything but a penance, but the man proved he was right with an income that started at a high 1000 yuan in the first year and shot up ten times in the second. Provincial authorities upheld his right to do so.

Others who went into the transport business found themselves facing arbitrary confiscation of their vehicles by cadres who simply felt that there was 'something wrong' with people getting rich - it had been classed as a sin for so long. Peddlers and retailers in the cities were often persecuted, then reprieved after appeals to higher authorities. The Director of Beijing's Private Enterprise Administration department, a veteran woman cadre named Zhou Yinlan, admitted that the

new line represented a 180-degree change of view for people such as herself, who had spent most of their careers working to eliminate the 'tails of Capitalism', as individual businessmen were called. She admitted to having been 're-educated' to the new line by observing the thousands of jobs private trade had created for the young, who would never have found state employment, and by the big improvement in available services to the people. About half the private traders were retailers, about twenty percent were in convenience catering, ten percent in small handicrafts production and a further ten percent in local transportation services. All of these trades contributed directly to the quality of life for citizens, and exploited nobody.

There were also crooks, of course. Some of the fruit and vegetable peddlers offering fresh country produce had in fact got up early to snap up the best fruits on offer at the fixed-price state vegetable stores, and were re-selling them at a premium in another part of the city. One could argue that they worked for their profit by making the selection and transporting the produce to a more convenient location for buyers - but under the Chinese system they were still classed as 'speculators'. On Wangfu Jing street, the high-class shopping area of Beijing, certain young men made a living buying out shop stocks of the fashionable leather shoes most in demand, then offering them outside on the pavement, one pair at a time, like ticket scalpers, to late-coming shoppers who had missed out.

It was not only in commerce that private employment was growing. Professionals, also, were gradually permitted to offer their services to the public for a fee, subject to government licensing. Doctors, accountants, tailors and other skilled persons began to hang up the painted board outside their own front door. A number of these were people already at retirement age, or people who, under political persecution, had been out of the government employment system anyway. Some were among the tens of thousands who during this period were being released from labour camps or from rural exile, as political charges and 'labels', laid against them years before in old campaigns, were dropped. But others chose voluntarily to drop out of the system, and were given permission to do so.

An engineer in a Shanghai technical institute undertook a spare-time job as a technical advisor to a small rubber factory, and was rewarded with a handsome bonus of 1200 yuan when his work saved the factory from bankruptcy. His own employers, however, were outraged, and had him charged with 'serious economic crime'. Courts supported their charge, the engineer was demoted and his reward confiscated. The Shanghai Party Committee, however, thought otherwise. They judged his work to be socially useful, and his example a good one for the new campaign, and therefore ordered the Court to return his money, and the Institute to restore his promotion. This case, incidentally, is an interesting example of the casual authority of local Party committees over the legal machinery of state.

Private vocational schools also began to open, and were extremely popular, both with the unemployed youth looking for extra qualifications, and with some people already in employment, but wanting to boost chances for promotion, as skill was now promised to prevail over seniority. Many of this second category were of the so-called Lost Generation, who had received very inadequate secondary education during the years of the Cultural Revolution. The Long March School of Accounting, in Beijing, operated after hours in classrooms rented from a local primary school. Run by an elderly accountant trained long before the revolution, it charged pupils about ten cents per hour for classes, and paid its teachers more than double what they would get as government teachers. Soon, ten thousand private pupils were in such schools around Beijing, and the state was benefiting from that many extra vocationally-qualified people, at no public investment.

The revival of genuine commerce in China drew attention to the fact that there was very little in the way of commercial law to govern it. Laws and regulations of contract, foreign investment, copyright and patent, truth in advertising, industrial safety and workers compensation insurance, all had to be re-invented. Experts in these fields from all over the world were invited to China, and much head-scratching went on in the offices of the State Council and its ministries, which

had worked so long in the past to eliminate all these vestiges of Capitalism. All domestic insurance business, for instance, had been cancelled in China in 1958 and was not revived until 1979.

In the rebuilding of its commercial structures, China turned for advice, once more, to one of the most interesting of its political groupings, the so-called Patriotic Capitalists. Not all the Capitalists of China had been obdurate in opposing the Communists during the civil war, and when the Communists won in 1949, there were some who elected to stay and co-operate, rather than get out with whatever they could transfer to Taiwan or Hong Kong. The Peoples Republic began, in any case, as a United Front of the Communists with a range of small, middle class parties, and the Communists encouraged Chinese Capitalists to believe that they had a future in China, so long as they did not oppose the Party. In this context, it was hardly surprising that even many of the big industrialist families who fled communism left at least one member of the family on the mainland, to retain ownership of the family's immovable investments, and to make what he could of the uncertain new system.

A number of such scions of Chinese Capitalism had already established credentials as supporters of the Communist Party, either secretly or openly, and these were treated relatively well from the start. Others made rapid conversions, as they witnessed die-hard Capitalist resisters around them ground into the dust, sooner or later. Those who survived the transition were eventually marshalled together, for administrative and supervisory purposes, in the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce and in the China National Democratic Construction Association - a registered 'political party' with a group of delegates on the large national advisory council known as the Chinese Peoples Political Consultative Congress. As the Party's new regime became more firmly established and gained confidence, the power of these men over the assets they nominally owned drained away, until, during the Cultural Revolution, all the deals and guarantees that had been made with them by the Party were repudiated, and they all suffered

the same kinds of persecution and deprivation as senior people in every other field. A special hatred had always been nourished in the Party's extreme left for these silvertail socialists in their decaying Shanghai or Beijing mansions, and many of the older men and women died.

Zhao Meiling had grown up in the ambiguous atmosphere of such a Shanghai mansion - a European-style two story house with four bedrooms, several servants, and a large walled garden in the fashionable former French Concession area of Shanghai. Her father, an engineer educated in America, had swallowed the bitter pill of accepting Party-appointed officials to run the large electrical manufacturing business he had inherited from his father. That is to say, they ran the staff and the political education, and went to the meetings where production targets were announced and merit awards given to Model Workers. When it came to actual production of the goods, Zhao's father, under the diminished title of Deputy Chief Engineer, continued to be the only man who knew the business.

He had conscientiously tried to train a couple of likely young workers to succeed him in this, but his plans were dashed by the Cultural Revolution. His two apprentices were the ones selected by the Party faction to lead the struggle meeting at the factory at which Zhao's father was repeatedly bashed over the head, accused of being a spy (because he had written a few letters to his brothers in Hong Kong) and of 'fawning on all things foreign', because his brothers had bought him subscriptions to some British and American technical publications relevant to the business. From there, it was easy for the Struggle Group to conclude that he was an unrepentant Capitalist renegade plotting counter-revolution to re-establish feudal- Capitalism in China and sell out to Imperialism. He was locked for two weeks in an outdoor lavatory, close to starvation, until he wrote a 'confession' that satisfied the Red Guards on all these points. Then they 'sentenced' him to further beatings, and he died of internal injuries.

Zhao Meiling was fourteen and her elder brother sixteen

when, during this period, a mob of Red Guards stormed their home compound and ransacked the house for 'evidence'. Everything of value was taken, floors were ripped up, furniture destroyed in the hunt for concealed riches. A small amount of the family's gold, hidden years ago, remained undiscovered, but the events were too much for Meiling's mother, a wilful, spoiled daughter of the old Shanghai bourgeoisie. She killed herself by swallowing insecticide. Meiling's brother had never been able to challenge his mother's formidable will, and was now incapable of taking charge.

At fourteen, Zhao Meiling became head of the family. With tears, bullying, and by using contacts of her father in the Shanghai elite, she was able to ensure a survival pension for her brother and herself. Other families were moved into all but two rooms of their house, and sheds were built in their garden by a neighbouring clothing factory. Zhao Meiling never lost her will. When the wheel turned, and the compensation policies were announced, Meiling, now twenty-five, went to work like a terrier on the Shanghai bureaucracy. Many Capitalist families, in their terror, had destroyed all evidence of their former wealth and status in hopes to avoid further persecution. Meiling had carefully kept all documents, and obtained signed statements from people concerning her parents' deaths. Within a few months, she had been paid substantial sums of compensation, with promises of much more over a period. She had recovered more rooms of their house, though some of the new tenants were proving difficult to move, as they had high connections of their own to bring to bear. The sheds, however, were removed from the garden.

Meiling's brother had become completely dependent upon her, and she had grown to despise him. With money now to spend, he did nothing but lounge around with other such children of the old Capitalists, sipping the deplorable coffee of the 'Western-style' cafes, exchanging cassettes of Hong Kong and Taiwan popular music idols like Deng Lijun, chasing starlets of the local movie industry and talking big about plans to make a fortune in private trade.

Meiling decided that she could do no more in China, and

began working on plans to get out. She found a friend of her family to teach her English, and made rapid progress. The bureaucratic contacts and practice of the past ten years did not let her down, and I met her after her successful exit to Hong Kong, a tall, lean, uncompromising woman with a tendency to talk more than listen. Six months later, she was back in Beijing, possessor of the prized Hong Kong re-entry card, and representative of a busy international trading company. I had no doubt she would do well.

With the watershed of the fall of the Gang of Four, the Patriotic Capitalists were among those to be dragged back up from the mud where they had been cast, scrubbed down and set back upon their shelves. In the case of the Patriotic Capitalists, things were even better than for others such as academics, due to the policy of restitution of all property and income which had been confiscated during the Cultural Revolution in breach of earlier agreements. For those who had once been owners of vast industrial empires, even the laughably low rate of compensation they had been obliged to accept from the government under its 'buying out' programme of the fifties amounted to quite large sums of money. With the restitution, China overnight restored a few dozen personal millionaires. Grand houses and furniture, if they had not been destroyed, were also returned. The only catch was that all monies were in the non-convertible local currency, *renminbi*, and could not be exported or spent overseas.

Andrew Yang smoothes back his silver hair and adjusts the horn-rimmed spectacles on his nose. Pipe clamped between his teeth, he glances briefly over my shoulder into the distance, like a tweedy English schoolmaster at a cricket match. The finely tailored grey wool lounge suit sits comfortably on his slim Shanghaiese frame, and he wears a discreet necktie with more aplomb than any Chinese I have met on the mainland. His English is better than most overseas-educated Chinese, reflecting the years in St John's College, Shanghai, and decades of fraternisation with the foreign elite there, before the revolution. Andrew Yang

could have chosen to live anywhere in the world, and he has chosen to stay in China.

'Yes, I spent a few years down on the farm', he tells me, with a wry laugh. 'Things are much better now. We old Capitalists want to help China, and the Party leaders these days seem to want to let us do it, so we can agree on quite a lot!'

The farm years had been tough, as he laboured in the fields where, before the revolution, peasant families had struggled to survive on the low prices paid by purchasing agents from his family's mills. He doesn't want to dwell on that.

'We prefer to look to the future, now, and I think I can say that China's future now looks brighter to me than it ever did!'

Mr Yang now plays no part in the industries that once belonged to him. He has been paid out in renminbi, millions of yuan in the Peoples Bank of China and in the Shanghai International Trust and Investment Corporation set up as a vehicle to mobilise funds such as his in constructive projects.

'We'll be putting up some housing blocks for overseas Chinese to buy for their local relatives, if they wish. There are some joint ventures we're looking at, but nothing definite yet. Perhaps a hotel or something like that!'

Nothing about him is typical of China, and I wonder if he feels himself to be something of an alien in Peoples China. Even in the old days, many Shanghainese considered themselves apart from the hinterland.

'My family are all over the place', he says. 'I have children living in the United States, relatives in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Even in Australia. I visited them all last year. There's no problem for me in travelling overseas, I've plenty of foreign exchange in family overseas accounts, and the

government now lets me go when I want to. But we've got our old house in Shanghai, and a lot of money here, and somebody's got to spend it, so I always come back.'

He laughs, acknowledging that we both know his answer is not complete. We walk across some new stone paving to a balustrade, and both look down into the cement pond with fresh lily plantings in the water. He finishes his answer.

'And of course, I am a Chinese. This is my home, and this is where I want to be. I wondered if I had made a mistake, sometimes, when we were all thrown out on the scrap-heap. But now I know I am doing the right thing'.

Like all the big mercantile families of Shanghai, the Yangs are now distributed all over the trading world. Where they do not have family members, they have trusted friends. We are on the site of a joint venture project between a Chinese unit and a foreign contact of Andrew Yang's, in which he has no personal investment, but is acting as a consultant and occasional facilitator in Shanghai. He is not paid for this work, but there is a *quid pro quo*. The foreign investor has imported a large Mercedes into China, customs duties paid, for use in connection with the project. For most of the year, the car lives in the garage of Andrew Yang's large Shanghai residence, and is at his disposal. Mr Yang is quietly more than pleased with this deal, as his millions of yuan can only buy him an old-fashioned Shanghai sedan or huge Red Flag limousine, inconvenient for Shanghai's busy and narrow streets. Ownership, anyway, is not the point - to be seen around Shanghai in a new Mercedes is excellent *Face*.

As we part, he gives me his business card, up to date typography clearly printed in Hong Kong.

'Andrew Yang, Director, Shanghai International Trust and Investment Corporation. Business and Trade Consultant' .

Trust and Investment corporations have been set up on similar lines in other major industrial cities of China, based on the same resources of restored private capital, supplemented by credit facilities with the Peoples Bank of China and its foreign banking arm, the Bank of China. They are managed by boards of these Patriotic Capitalists, under a broad charter of trade and development financing. As in Shanghai, these large trusts have devoted a good part of their resources to developing joint-ventures with foreign firms wishing to participate in Chinese manufacturing industry. The admission of joint venture and wholly-owned foreign investment to China was another policy shift which caused ideological trauma to a generation of cadres brought up to believe that Capitalists and Imperialists were, by definition, exploiters of Chinese labour.

Many of the earlier foreign joint venture partners found that their Chinese partners were taking the view that any profit the foreign partner took out of the country was a net loss to China, and should be kept to an absolute minimum. I know personally of cases, for instance, when foreign joint venture partners found that their Chinese partners were conniving to pay exorbitant prices to local materials suppliers, so as to maximise the overall Chinese profit at the expense of the foreign joint venture partner. The problem was so common that potential joint-venture partners began to shy away, and stern instructions had to be issued to Chinese partners to make sure the foreign investment inflow was not sabotaged. A national economic monthly the World Economic Herald, deemed it 'wrong to haggle over the profits foreigners will make. While guaranteeing that China's sovereign rights will not be impaired, the joint ventures must be profitable to foreign shareholders. How else can foreign funds be attracted?'

To be fair, the obstructions usually arose through the intervention of cadres in the Party stream of the administration, not from people like the Patriotic Capitalists, who understood very well the principles of Capitalist investment and the profit motive. The Chinese Capitalist trusts have also provided funds for new medium and high-technology plants being set up

outside the state-owned industrial sector, or as joint ventures between state and private (i.e. Trust) investment. To take things even further down the Capitalist Road, the Trusts began raising extra capital by public issues of fixed term, fixed interest debentures (unheard of since 1949), and later advising industrial units who wished to raise private capital by the same means. It was only a matter of time before even that supreme symbol of Capitalism, the stock market, would be discussed as a necessary development for China's mixed 'Socialist Road' economy.

Shanghai was built up on trade and commerce, from a small trading town to a metropolis of eleven million people in little more than a hundred years. Its people have always had an eye for the main chance, and also loved a gamble. Even its local branch of the state-owned Peoples Bank decided to use this gambling urge for the national good. In 1982, at a time when the state economists were worried about the excess of cash floating around in their reflatd economy, the Shanghai bank branch instituted a savings lottery system, offering large cash prizes on a monthly draw at five yuan per ticket. On the results of the first few months, the bank reckoned they would be adding over 280 million yuan to their deposits annually. In a Capitalist society this would raise no eyebrows, but it drew concerned editorial comment from Party conservatives, worried that this was altogether too obscene an exploitation of sheer human greed.

The broader organisation, the China Democratic National Construction Association, and another even looser grouping called the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, can martial a hundred thousand former managers and owners of small to medium sized businesses, as well as the major industrialists. These associations have become active in providing management consultancies to collectives or private businesses, and have started a number of regular training courses in 'management for profit', which attract long-serving staff from government organisations as well as the hopeful new generation of entrepreneurs. One textile factory in Anhui province raised ten million yuan for an expansion programme

with a debenture issue of two kinds - the first simple large-denomination bond for sale to institutions with spare capital, and the second a three thousand yuan bond for sale to individuals or families, and which carried with each certificate the right to nominate one qualified worker to a job in the new factory.

Again in Shanghai, the municipal housing bureau began to raise capital for new developments by selling off existing homes to their occupants. In fact, only a few individuals (either with overseas relatives or recipients of lump sum compensation from the Cultural Revolution) could afford to buy houses - but sales were still brisk, with the major purchasers being other work units who found it simpler to buy than run the bureaucratic gauntlet of trying to construct their own accommodation for workers.

Without doubt, the prince of China's Capitalists is Wang Guangying, the 65 year-old chairman of the Everbright Industrial Corporation. Wang inherited his father's large chemical manufacturing business in Tianjin in 1949, and co-operated early with the Communists. Zhou Enlai nick-named him the Red Capitalist, and his sister, Wang Guangmei, a radical student who had joined the Communists in Yanan and became English interpreter to the Party elite, later married President Liu Shaoqi. He could hardly be better connected than that, but inevitably fell almost as far as Liu Shaoqi himself did in the Cultural Revolution.

Wang Guangying returned to prominence immediately upon the posthumous 'rehabilitation' of Liu and his economic policies in 1980. He became a leading figure of the Tianjin International Trust and Investment Corporation, but even greater things were in store. The policymakers were impressed by the huge profits being made by Hong Kong trading and investment companies, based firmly on the huge flow of commodity trade to and from mainland China. The issue of the future of Hong Kong, and its 1997 re-integration with the Peoples Republic, was to require very delicate handling if the golden goose of Hong Kong, earning more than one third of China's total foreign exchange, was not to be killed

prematurely. A solution would be for the Peoples Republic to increase its own overt trading and investment profile in the British-administered enclave, both to shore up local and foreign confidence in the Capitalist future of the place, and also to participate in the steady transfer of Hong Kong's tangible and intangible assets to Chinese hands, as the foreign trading houses, inevitably, wound down their involvement there. Wang Guangying would be the man to head this, under the umbrella of the Everbright Corporation.

In the months before September 1984, while the British government slowly came to accept the inevitability of agreeing to almost every significant Chinese condition regarding the transfer, the Everbright Corporation seemed to make daily headlines in Hong Kong, where Wang Guangying had set up an expensive corporate headquarters, a lavish residence in the millionaires' row of Victoria Peak, and a pipeline to apparently limitless capital funding from the mainland. Anti-Communists were ready to see Everbright Corporation as a Trojan Horse for Hong Kong, but most investors were simply happy to find that there was a new major capital source around to support the extremely shaky confidence of the colony's property market and exchange rate.

Nominally, Everbright is a private, non-government corporation, and its capital funding is either drawn from the various Trust and Investment corporations of 'former Capitalists' or borrowed at market rates. By the time the agreement on Hong Kong's 1997 transfer was settled by British and Chinese governments in September 1984, Everbright's total investment in Hong Kong had risen to an estimated four billion dollars - very big money even in terms of China's annual national budget - and the 'private' label on Everbright Industrial Corporation was beginning to wear a little thin.

Everbright's corporate brief includes setting up markets for Chinese exports, attracting joint venture capital into China, and securing licences to advanced manufacturing technology. Wang Guangying said in an interview with foreign correspondents that his corporation was prepared to 'do business with foreign firms shunned by government

corporations - for instance, firms based in countries with which China does not have diplomatic relations.' These could include Israel, Saudi Arabia or even South Africa, one suspects, if there was money to be made without dragging China's foreign policy overtly into the dust. But what matters, ultimately, is that Everbright is expected to behave like a private corporation, as a talisman for the future of Hong Kong and, in the much longer term, Taiwan. China's rehabilitated Capitalists are charged with the duty not just of making money for China, but of refurbishing the links of blood, friendship, and hopefully 'patriotic feeling' with their brother Chinese Capitalists outside of the Peoples Republic.

Shanghai is unchallenged as the home of industrial Capitalism in China. Placed at the mouth of China's economic heartland, the vast Yangtze River basin, it was in an ideal position to develop as entrepot and processing centre for the raw materials of the inland, and for imports from the outside world - a role filled, by default, by Hong Kong since 1949. Shanghai had been a moderate-sized port and local cotton-weaving centre when it was taken by the British Navy in the Opium War of 1842. With the establishment of the Foreign Concessions there (small enclaves where Chinese law was not allowed to apply) and the expansion of foreign trade, Shanghai grew at a furious pace, soon sprouting its own prosperous middle-class and wealthy Capitalists as well as the mass of workers and unemployed attracted to the city from the overcrowded hinterland. Among them developed the most Westernised of Chinese, as well as some of those with the most burning hatred of the airs and oppressions perpetrated by arrogant foreigners on Chinese soil.

Candlelight glints on rich red carpet and cedar panelling in the former French Club of Shanghai - now the Jin Jiang Club. The dining room offers starched linen, heavy silver service, a menu out of any European club of the early 1950s, and a standard of willing service from the staff unmatched anywhere in China. Nobody knows why, but Shanghai is the

only place in China where almost everyone seems to take some pride in their work, even table service.

Chairman Mao took over this club as his own residence while he planned the Cultural Revolution. Five-metre high walls protect the ample French gardens, the swimming pool, tennis courts, and elegant Edwardian arbours, from the busy traffic of surrounding streets. Now it has been handed back to foreigners, under Chinese management, and everything costs foreign currency. Squawking video-game machines fill one of the card-rooms, where foreign residents of the concessions used to sit over the green baize tables with their elegant Chinese and white-Russian mistresses. Billiards are still available upstairs. Foreign residents of Beijing look forward to trips to Shanghai just for the pleasure of eating here, knowing the roast beef and potatoes will at least taste right.

The band has been frozen in time. They feel their way gingerly through renditions of popular tunes of the 1940s, when foreigners last ate and danced in these rooms. Hoagy Carmichael's 'Starlight Melody', 'Sweet Georgia Brown', Cole Porter's 'Begin the Beguine', on piano, one-finger guitar, quavering saxophone, and a confident trumpet leading the solos. For a gesture to the modern, a tense rendition of Paul McCartney's 'Michelle'.

I happen to enjoy the music intensely, as if meeting an old acquaintance in a remote and unlikely travellers' hostel. I question the band on their history. Most of them played in this and other Shanghai foreign clubs in the forties, and into the fifties, before their music was declared 'decadent'. Since then, they have been on the payroll of the Shanghai Film Studio, drawing salaries, but only playing their swing in a few revolutionary movies, for those ever-popular dancing, drinking scenes of pre-revolutionary decadence. Now, they

admit, they are too old to learn new music. In any case, the Authorities would not encourage importation of Western popular music, which is still considered dangerously decadent. So they play the music they know and enjoy, as long as they are asked to.

The Foreign Concessions endured until 1948, but by no means every little businessman in the concessions of Shanghai was a 'running dog of Capitalist-Imperialism', as they were later labelled. Shanghai had everything, and room for every kind of person. Getting away from the nineteenth and twentieth century thoroughfares of redbrick and European neo-classic facades, the old walled Chinese Town still feels different to other Chinese cities of the Yangtze basin. It has an openness, an expectancy, an eye open for opportunity, and a quickness of step in the inhabitants which make a Westerner feel slightly less foreign.

Upstairs in a small, two-storey house in the old town, the Ying family is watching TV. Anna Karenina moves through flowery English meadows, attends an English country racecourse, in Russian period costumes of brilliant colour. Speaking perfectly dubbed Mandarin, she plays out her abandonment of social morals to follow personal emotion, and dies before their eyes. The BBC production, in translation, makes a very Chinese tale.

The colour TV is an anomaly in this house, a gift from a sister-in-law who has lived thirty years in the United States, and returned last year for a visit to her old home. A large walnut veneer dresser along one wall, under the movie-star calendar, is the only reminder of the comfortable life Ying and his family once enjoyed. Now three couples - the parents and two married sons - share the two rooms with two grandchildren. Makeshift partitions and an attic sleeping-loft have disfigured the living room beyond recognition. The

shop below, and the rooms behind it, were given to another family during the Cultural Revolution. A back balcony serves as kitchen, and the toilet, Shanghai fashion, is a *ma tong* - a wooden bucket with a lid, left outside the door for emptying once a day, and kept on a window-ledge over the back lane when not in use in the living quarters.

Ying had been a young man with a future. He was an accountant, who became manager of a music store at the poorer end of Nanking Road. He formed a District Ukulele Band from his customers, and boosted sales of the handy, cheap instrument so much that he became distributor for a major American ukulele manufacturer, to all of China. Business looked very good. That was when he bought the shop-house in which the family now live, and the walnut veneer furniture of which the cabinet is the only piece left. Photographs he pulls from it show him, dapper in a Western suit, at the centre of a group of forty ukulele players.

Could I put him in touch with the manufacturer again, he wonders? Perhaps, in the new climate, the ukulele will be welcomed again in China? The old man is no longer in good health, but he is thinking of his sons.

The revolution went badly for Ying. He was a small businessman, a promoter of Western culture and products, and, to top it all off, a Christian. Ying's wife was the daughter of a Chinese pastor of a protestant church, prominent in the Chinese Christian community. His tweed sports-jackets and round clerical collar made him an easy mark for jeers and taunts in the new anti-foreign climate, but he persisted in sticking by his Westernised ways, learned from those who taught him his Christian faith, until he died, fortunately before things got rough.

Ying's business was not bought out, like the big Capitalists. Instead, he was steadily taxed and squeezed until there was nothing left of it, and import of instruments became

impossible. He gave up the business and went back to work as an accountant for one of the amalgamated co-operative stores down by the waterfront. But he must have grumbled about his loss, for with the massive anti-Rightist campaign across China in 1957, he was interrogated, labelled and gaoled for four years for 'counter-revolutionary agitation'.

His two boys were mere children at that time, and the experience for them was shattering. As the children of a Rightist, they were hounded from the Young Pioneers, and 'put under supervision of the masses' by their schoolmates, in case they, too, should show signs of counter-revolutionary ideas. Their mother persisted in taking them to church, even so, until the church itself was closed down a few years later as a 'remnant of bourgeois thought' and an enclave of foreign worship.

Ying was released from prison, but retained the Rightist label on his personal file, and could not get steady work. The family lived by his casual work as an accountant for collective units and surviving small traders, and by meagre rent from a room of their house. His boys had become regular truants and were beginning to get into minor police trouble. It was a relief for him when they were both sent away in the early stages of the rustication programme, though their mother wept over their exiles in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, two of the poorest provinces.

Come the Cultural Revolution, Ying and his wife were both rounded up, he as a Rightist suspect, she as a foreign lackey for her persistence in her Christian religion. Her father's prayer-books, which had been passed on to her, were burned by Red Guard raiders, as were most of his souvenirs of the Ukulele Band and his brief career as a successful small businessman. While their boys were away, their housing was declared 'excessive', and the other family was moved in. Since the policy of restoring housing to its rightful owners was announced, Ying has been trying to regain the rest of his house through the courts. First priority in such cases is being given to Overseas Chinese, to encourage their loyalty to China. Elderly, poorly-connected Christians with bad political records get low

priority. Ying has been rebuffed in his first approach to the court, and is running low on energy.

Both his sons returned years ago from the country, but because of their father's political status were unable to get jobs. Fortunately, both married girls with factory jobs, and they do not starve. The elder son makes a little money giving guitar lessons to local youths crazy to learn Western music, the other has a casual factory job, without security or welfare benefits. Party policy was to make the 'petty bourgeoisie', like this family, join the working class. In Ying's family, they have succeeded in one generation - his sons were denied education. Old Mr Ying's dream for them is to follow his footsteps - become Chinese agents for some foreign firm or other, as he was for the ukulele manufacturer. He thinks the present climate would permit this. But his sons have been so roughened by the torments of their formative years that they are unlikely to inspire confidence in any Hong Kong or foreign merchant.

The Yings had a daughter, whom at first they never spoke of. It was only after Mrs Ying let something slip about grandchildren in a country town that I asked further, and was told. She was younger - young enough to have believed the indoctrination of teachers at her school regarding her parents' 'crimes'. She had grown up as a pious Young Pioneer, lecturing her parents conscientiously on their backwardness, and denouncing them publicly when the occasion called for it. When her own turn came to be sent to the country, she vowed to stay there to 'Serve the People', as Chairman Mao had called upon her to do, in expiation for her parents' ideological failings. This vow was fulfilled when she married another of her group, which automatically established residence registration for them both in the small town, and cancelled their Shanghai registration.

The Yings still loved their daughter, and were grateful that she sometimes brought one or other of her own children to town to see them. But they never saw their son-in-law, and never wanted to.

'He is a Communist', explained Ying, as if no more need be said.

The Communist Party in China had always had a most complex attitude to Christianity. Along with other religions, it was automatically condemned as 'superstition' and 'opiate of the masses'. But, more than other religions, it was attacked, perhaps even feared, as something foreign, like opium, which had the power to capture the minds and wills of Chinese and make them resistant to communist indoctrination. The cruder peasant communists, like Mao himself, were unambiguous in their special hatred of Christianity. Chinese historians knew that there had been many instances where 'protection of missionaries' had been the pretext for armed territorial expansion in China by foreign powers. In 1978, I was taken to see a 'historical drama' in which a depiction of a foreign bishop, huge putty nose, flaming red wig, and bulging purple robes, was seen persecuting poor Chinese peasants in the most abominable way. At the climax, this foreign Christian bishop picked up a crying Chinese baby in one hand, drew a gigantic pistol from his robes with the other, and blew off the baby's head.

But others at the more intellectual end of the Party spectrum had a more complex attitude. Many of them had been educated in Christian schools and colleges, and realised that there were many kinds of Christians, many of them sincere in their desire to help China. Premier Zhou Enlai was one of these, and owed his life, on one occasion, to the hospitality of a foreign bishop in China who hid him from searching Nationalist troops.

'Freedom of religion' was the nominal policy of the Peoples Republic from the beginning, but it was a very qualified form of freedom. The first condition of this freedom was that any church in China must sever all organisational links with any foreign church. This could be accommodated by protestants, on the whole, but was doctrinally impossible for the Catholic Church. The Vatican, anyway, with its overt hostility to Communist China and its continued diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, made no effort to compromise. Foreign catholic priests were expelled, and those Chinese who felt bound by their loyalty to Rome went to prison. Many of them are still there. The proportion who felt that compromise was preferable

to annihilation participated in a schism very similar to that which created the Church of England. They denied Papal authority and re-organised as a Pope-less Patriotic Catholic Association of China. Under Party supervision, they proceeded to elect their own bishops 'democratically', and have continued in this form, including the saying of Latin mass, to this day.

The protestants had included some of the most troublesome and militant of missionaries, as well as some of the most liberal or even left-wing Christians in China. In their turn, they were obliged to shrug off foreign links and amalgamate on the principles of Self Determination, Self Financing, and Self Administration as the 'Three Self Christian Movement'. Another condition of both churches continuing to function was that they could not preach sermons during their services. For a long time, in fact, it was forbidden for them to #teach# religion at all, even to their own children, under Chinese law. Even when religious freedom was relaxed again from 1977 onwards, many Christians complained that they were still not allowed to teach, publicly, the true doctrines of their religion, including resurrection, virgin birth, and original sin. Though I never encountered it myself, I heard numerous reports of a continuing underground Christian movement, with those unsatisfied with the state-supervised churches arranging their own services in private homes.

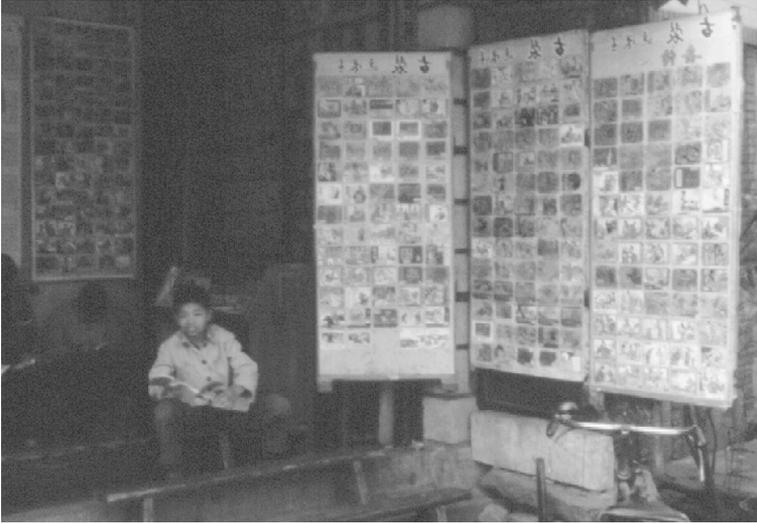
None the less, there was a tremendous upsurge in church-going, Catholic and Protestant, year by year. Many churches which had been closed were re-opened, at least in the major cities of China. Property was restored to them, and they were allowed to renovate and expand. Services in the Chinese churches took on a deep poignance, in the context of the common persecution that most of the participants had shared. At the big catholic Cathedral Church of Mary the Immaculate in Beijing I met an old Chinese woman who had been a nun, but was no longer permitted to wear her habit and had been forced to work in a factory - only male priests were recognised by the state religious administration. In the small wood-panelled chapel of the former YWCA in Beijing, which operated for many years as the only licensed Protestant church,

I watched women weeping with emotion through the singing of hymns. The official press reported on a village, north of Beijing, where the entire population of six hundred remained faithful and considered themselves to be Catholics, three decades after their priest had been chased away and the church desecrated by Party activists. They arranged to have two priests visit them once a year from Beijing for seven days, during which the whole year's round of baptisms, marriages, and even extreme unctions could be consecrated, not to mention the confessions.

One aspect of the renewed worship which must have surprised the Party leadership was that an increasing proportion of those attending churches were young people under thirty years of age - people who had grown up entirely under the communist system and through the programme of communist education in atheism. With the general opening in attitudes towards the West, some of this might be attributed to a curiosity about Christianity as a central feature of Western culture. At the very least, it could be taken as a vote of no confidence in Party doctrine.



No business is too small, cosmetics are no longer “bourgeois”, and a row of testimonials does wonder for sales of home-made products.



No TV, can't afford books – so for two cents you can rent a children's comic book from this private library, updated regularly.



Headless foreign emissaries among the stone attendants at the tomb of the Tang Empress Wu, near Xian. The heads were removed to prevent foreign influence disturbing the local river dragons.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THOSE WITH KNOWLEDGE

'Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts' was the great central propaganda cry of the second half of 1978. It had particular meaning for the doctrinal and personal struggles then in progress within the Central Committee, but it was a heroic reversal, also, in the fortunes and status of the great class described in China as *zhishi fenzi* (The Element who Know Things), usually given the rather too airy English label 'Intellectuals'. The *zhishi fenzi* included all of China's millions of citizens with education at senior secondary level or above, not merely those few with higher academic and theoretical proclivities, as the English term might suggest. As far as the peasants were concerned (including some in Zhong Nan Hai) anyone who could read the Peoples Daily without mouthing the words was an Intellectual.

The Intellectuals had always had a problem in Peoples China - Chairman Mao did not like them. A largely self-educated man himself, who had been snubbed, when young, by the middle-class students of Beijing's Westernised universities, he seemed

to consider the Intellectuals more of a threat than a resource to China's Marxist revolution. When a large number of radical students came to join the Communists in the forties, at their defensive base at Yen-an, Mao welcomed them with mixed feelings. As some of them, fresh from their library books and student demonstrations, began to bandy words with him about Revolution, Mao reacted with cold hostility. At a forum on Art and Literature held in Yen-an in 1942, Mao warned the intellectuals of the Party that a strictly utilitarian basis was the only acceptable one for art, literature, and in fact all intellectual life. Literature must reflect a 'proletarian' point of view, or it would be tantamount to betraying the revolution. Writers who did not reflect the proletarian viewpoint should be obliged to 'unite with the peasants', living and working among them, to correct their own outlook, before considering themselves part of Mao's revolution. 'Art for Art's sake' could not exist. All art, even conversation, must be considered as part of the propaganda work of a committed revolutionary.

With this line (which followed that of Lenin in Russia) Mao was challenging not only the students, but a generation of truly intellectual communists, some of them at that time with international reputations stronger than that of Mao Zedong. His line on this was never fully accepted by them, and his war with the *zhishi fenzi* culminated, twenty-five years later, with the launch of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966. In earlier campaigns, Mao had described eight basic 'black' categories of enemies to the revolution within China. Now he added the 'Stinking Ninth Category' - the *zhishi fenzi* - and it was open season upon them from Maoist ideologues and party loyalists right across the country. 'The more you know, the more stupid you become' was a favourite Mao quotation of the peasants and workers now put in charge of 're-educating through labour' the *zhishi fenzi* hounded from their universities, offices, and research institutes. Museums and libraries were targets of licensed vandalism on a scale unprecedented in history.

Premier Zhou Enlai, while publicly supporting the on-rushing tide of Maoist personality cult, fought a secret,

unremitting rearguard action to protect the nation's most irreplaceable resources and cultural relics, placing military guards on hundreds of sites, and even on those individuals he was willing and able to save from the mobs. The targets included thousands of foreign-trained scientists who had given up lucrative careers overseas to come back and serve their Motherland, with no interest in ideological disputation. They included scholars of China's ancient culture, and also scholars of the most high-flown Marxist philosophy. Doctors were hounded from their hospitals, engineers from their drawing-boards, to feed pigs and grow rice, while semi-literate peasant soldiers were promoted to run technical professions by drawing on the power of Mao Zedong Thought and the Inspiration of the Masses.

When the Cultural Revolution had collapsed into national anarchy, resolved only by a state of military occupation, it would still be years before the *zishi fenzi* could return to their work. The Party had been loaded against them since the fifties, when the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 had first established that all intellectuals should be considered potential Class Enemies. The orthodoxy became that *zhishi fenzi* could only become Party members when their superiors (proletarian Party members) considered that they had fully 'united with the masses'. This highly subjective judgement seldom favoured even those intellectuals who sincerely believed in Communism. With the supremacy of Party committees over every aspect of life and work, the *zhishi fenzi* were leading blighted lives.

Hua Guofeng had issued the call for the Four Modernisations Campaign, but by late 1978 it was stated that more than thirty percent of all China's resource of qualified, educated people were employed in menial tasks, while another twenty percent were employed in areas which did not make proper use of their skills. In 1980, when the programme of opening to the west had created a huge demand for interpreters and linguists, a survey found six thousand seven hundred fluent foreign-language speakers buried in clerical and manual labour positions by their units. Cadres motives for this could be

ideological, could be personal grudges, or, as often as not, sheer ignorance and incompetence. In the Cultural Revolution, simply knowing a foreign language could make one suspect as a spy.

Just before the Cultural Revolution began, as the lines were beginning to be drawn, Fang Guiying was a Chairman Mao Line Activist. She believed not just in the absolute truth of Mao Zedong Thought, but in the shining genius of Chairman Mao himself. With her fellow-activists, she marched on the streets, fist raised in salute, tears of emotion pouring down her cheeks, crying 'Long Live Mao Zedong Thought! Long Live the Great Leader Chairman Mao Zedong!

But when the Cultural Revolution began, and the Red Guards were formed, she found that she was not allowed to join. Membership was open to only two kinds of people - children of Party members, or children of peasants and workers. Guiying's father was an engineer who had studied overseas and returned to serve China. Guiying swallowed her bitter disappointment, believing so much in the ideals of the Cultural Revolution that she accepted this policy, even though it hurt her, as infallibly correct. She cheered as the 'Counter-revolutionary Headquarters' of the universities were sacked and anti-Mao figures in the Party itself were dragged down from their pedestals of privilege. She believed they really were bad people, and deserved their punishment.

She didn't believe it when her mother warned her, 'One day, it will come to us.' Her father, didn't believe it either, maintaining they were safe, since he had not only served China well as an engineer, but had always been active and generous to those needing help in the neighbourhood. The authorities must know that he supported Party policy and ideology.

Mother still believed trouble would come to them, pointing to the Red Guard raids on similar middle-class families of the neighbourhood. She arranged numerous portraits of Chairman Mao throughout the house, as amulets of protection. Twenty-four hours later, the Red Guards arrived. It was late at night. The front door was not locked, but they broke it down anyway, shouting 'Bourgeois, stinking bourgeois! The Revolution has

come for you! Don't try to hide anything.'

Father Fang, still hoping to avoid further trouble, immediately brought out all the family possessions - jewellery, books and papers, life savings in gold bars, to give the Red Guards. To the Red Guards it was axiomatic that he must be hiding even more, and they proceeded anyway to destroy everything they could, ransacking the place, prising open window and door frames, and finding nothing.

Guiying pleaded with them, telling their leaders that she herself was a Chairman Mao Line Activist.

'Whatever you say means nothing. You are the child of a dog' was their reply. They took her father out into the courtyard and whipped him till he bled, while neighbours stood by and watched. Guiying wept not for his pain, but for the injustice, knowing her father had supported the poor and the Party. She couldn't believe it was happening. She would now be shunned by classmates at school, taunted as 'bourgeois' and 'intellectual'. All she wanted was to be patriotic.

'You can't imagine what the pressure was like,' Guiying said. 'The best thing really good friends could do was say nothing. Everyone who was not such a friend would join the insults. I had loved going to school, but now it became torture.'

The time came for her high school, like all the others, to be sent down to the countryside. The general rule was that classes went all together to one destination. Guiying had been the best student in her class, and had been nominated for the literature faculty of elite Beijing University. She had dreamed, and talked, of a literary life ahead. Now she knew that the stupid students of the class would take their revenge upon her, and she would be persecuted unmercifully once they were beyond the constraints of family and neighbourhood. Her only chance to prove herself a good and true young revolutionary would be to go separately, somewhere else, where she could make a fresh start.

At first, the Public Security Bureau would not allow her to go separately. But Guiying had already formed a view on the bureaucracy: 'Most men are lechers'. They almost always said 'Yes' to a pretty girl. Guiying herself, chubby and spectacled,

knew that she was not classed as attractive, and would have no hope of gaining special concessions. So she asked a pretty, fair-skinned friend to go and plead with the police on her behalf. She was able to name a village in South China where her mother had some distant relatives, and her friend was able to obtain her, as predicted, the Public Security approval to be 'inserted' into a production brigade there. By this time, her father had been sent to a prison farm to 'reform his ideology'.

When Guiying arrived at her destination, the local Party leaders refused her a residence permit, because her personal file showed that her father was a *zhishi fenzi*. She couldn't return, and she couldn't stay without local approval. The police found a man who had once owed debts to her mother's family, and who let her stay a few days. Despairing, Guiying offered to serve them as a house-maid if they would let her stay, but the wife was afraid, also, of her political stigma, and after two days Guiying was told she would have to leave.

Eventually, the police sent her to the brigade 'on probation', not to be registered as a commune member until she had proven herself free of undesirable class characteristics. She set herself earnestly to the task, living little better than an animal, but the hard physical work, the endless gossip she endured from the peasants, and the coarse food made life a misery. For her first year of labour she earned two yuan and seventy-five cents, plus her grain ration - but she had to pay for her own cooking-oil. For five years Guiying endured this alone, saving not a cent, and gaining not a single privilege. From a 'bad' family, and without good looks to help her, she had no leverage at all.

Many such city children died during those years. A large number of the girls were raped or seduced by peasant cadres, or used their bodies to wangle their way back to the cities. But after five years, the peasants themselves were complaining about the presence of the city youths, and there was a policy change to allow 'seriously ill' young people to return to the cities. The initial result of this was that all those parents with good political connections took advantage of the loophole, arranged to get their own children classified as 'seriously ill',

and had them released back to the city.

In 1974, Guiying's father was released from gaol, emaciated and incapable of standing. Nothing had been proved against him, and a change of political climate due to the brief resurgence of Deng Xiaoping allowed people like him to return home. He was permitted to resume work for eighteen yuan per month - one tenth of his original salary. Guiying's mother had found menial work for twelve yuan per month. In dire poverty, they had no resources to bring their daughter back, and had no 'back doors' to open. The only hope was that Guiying herself had become expert in the jargon of the times.

Guiying really was in poor health herself, but always excluded from the quota of 'sick' returnees in favour of children of better-connected families. However, she did know that the local cadres had a horror of the complications involved in being held responsible for her death. In wintertime, she immersed herself in a lake and brought on a case of dangerous bronchial pneumonia which left her in high fever, incapable of standing. In fear that she would die on their hands, the commune Party Secretary eventually decided to get rid of her, and shipped her home to Beijing.

It was good to be back with her family, but at first there was no job for her. After some months, a connection of her father's was able to find her a job boiling animal bones in a glue factory. It was sickening work, but at least it brought in monthly pay, and she stayed at the glue factory for five years. Her family's books and possessions had all disappeared. The Red Guard troop who raided them had not even registered their confiscations, as they were supposed to do, and everything, including the eight bars of gold, had vanished forever into their pockets. Guiying hunted libraries and second-hand shops to renew her literary studies after hours.

By the time the universities re-opened to public examination candidates, Guiying was above the age limit of thirty. A year or so later, a national magazine publishing organisation held a highly competitive recruitment examination for editorial assistants. To her great delight, after wasting ten years of her prime, Guiying was accepted. She threw herself into the work

with enthusiasm, and thought she had done very well at it. A little too well, perhaps. Guiying told me that she had run into a problem with an older woman, an ambitious Party member, who wanted to monopolise the important parts of the work. According to Guiying, this woman, though married, had a husband posted in another city and was conducting a long affair with the head of the unit. With her enmity, Guiying was now convinced that her career had come to a dead end.

'Unless you are a Party member, you can get nowhere', she concluded gloomily.

'Once, I wanted desperately to be a Party member. But at that time I believed in Communism. Now, I have seen so many Party members who are so corrupt. In material terms, by Chinese standards, I am now quite well off. In a spiritual way, I am under pressure. I have no future here. I used to think all the time about the future of China. I found I was not able to change anything. Now I think about myself, I will be more realistic.'

Throughout 1979, a flurry of economic reforms had brought about radical improvements in the standard of living of Chinese workers and peasants. By 1980, industrial workers were almost universally receiving 'productivity' bonuses, and the peasants were getting more money both from their state-purchased crops and from their free-market activities. The intellectual workers, it seemed, were being left behind. By the end of that year, a survey in Beijing showed the average wage of industrial workers to be more than ten percent higher than the average wage of 'white-collar' *zhizhi fenzi*, including such people as school-teachers, scientists and academics. Amid general inflation of around six percent that year, the intellectual workers were in fact becoming worse off by the month, just as they were being exhorted to carry the principle initiatives for the Four Modernisations.

Such people had had the disadvantage that their work seldom put them in possession of anything they could use to trade for favours. Teachers might sometimes gain extra favour or money by coaching students after hours, but most had too full lives already, with household chores to complete after the

day's work. The situation had become particularly acute for a generation known as the 'middle-aged intellectuals', who were being squeezed from all sides. Having graduated before the Cultural Revolution (i.e. before 1966) they were now of the age when they were likely to be supporting children, perhaps caring as well (as, by law, they must) for aged relatives, and carrying the bulk of daily work in their professions. There was a ten-year deficiency of younger people who should have been trained as their juniors in the professions, since all the colleges had been closed. At the same time, promotion was often blocked from above by senior cadres and professionals who showed no intention of retiring as long as they lived. The 'middle-aged' were thus trapped in the lower wage grades, with no prospect of promotion.

At Beijing University, (*Beijing Daxue* or Bei Da), China's most prestigious for the humanities, a gigantic faculty of teaching staff had been accumulated, with the best graduates every year being invited to stay on. But nobody ever seemed to retire. Promotion was according to a grand total of class hours taught - so over the decades, Bei Da had grown a crop of 1,849 professors, associate professors, and senior lecturers aged in their late fifties and upwards - more than half the total teaching staff for a student body of only ten thousand. Average age of the professors was seventy years, and associate-professors in late middle age made up nearly seventy percent of the whole staff. The net result was that junior teaching staff had very few teaching hours per week, and it was calculated that for the existing junior staff to reach associate professor level would now take fifty years. In that particular case, the answer was for the adventurous among them to go to teaching assignments in distant, less prestigious institutions where the need for qualified staff was great. Once the Party got this principle across to the university administration, things began to move. Disillusioned and slothful younger teachers suddenly found themselves facing real careers in the provinces. 'A worm at Bei Da becomes a dragon when he leaves', ran a saying of the times.

A short story, later made into a hit movie of that year, was

the vehicle that brought the plight of this generation to public attention. "At Forty" followed, somewhat sentimentally, the life of a woman doctor in this situation, pressured by conscientious professionalism, by the demands of home life, and by the pestering of unqualified, interfering Party cadres and their wives demanding privileged treatment. It struck a great chord with the Chinese Press, many of whose writers could identify strongly with the woman concerned, and there were a spate of articles, features, and finally a national conference on the theme of 'solving the problem of the intellectuals'. The papers were full of stories of valuable qualified people who had died, gone mad, committed suicide, left the country, or otherwise ceased to be useful to the Four Modernisations, as a result of the prejudice and obstruction they encountered from cadres of the old Party type in their places of work.

The white glow of a fluorescent street lamp pushes out into the dark, dusty *hutong* (lane), dissipating in the black cavern of the open-fronted coal depot across the road. We walk along by the plastered wall, peering at official number plates fastened over each doorway. We find the number, and turn through an arch into a narrow, even darker alleyway between dwelling-rooms. Every inch counts in this tiny compound. All breathing-space in what was once a moderate-sized courtyard has been squeezed out by the extensions tacked on each family's two basic rooms. Family vegetable supplies are stacked outdoors on boxes in the cool autumn air. A family of young chickens erupt in a panic of chirping as my shoe kicks the edge of their wooden hutch in the dark. Earthen pots of dusty cacti stand along window sills, and old plastic-soled cotton shoes air by doorways. A raised voice in one family's quarters would be heard by all in the compound, and as visitors we feel highly invasive.

We find the man we have come to see at the end of the short alley, and tap on the peeling, latticed door. His wife lets us

in, thin and smiling politely. The family has two connected rooms, each three metres by four, but the demands of our host's profession have reduced the living-space drastically. He is a painter, and a broad, high work-table takes up half of the living room. The wall behind it is pasted over with layer upon layer of fine white paper, as a base on which to paste finished works, stretching the thin, absorbent paper before mounting on board or scroll. Three works are on the wall this evening - a classic eroded 'mountain and water' landscape in bold ink wash, a small painting of two crickets on a frond of bamboo - an exercise in virtuoso brushwork, and a pair of angora goats on a grassy mound, in the style of a famous contemporary painter. A Chinese painter must still prove his mastery of brushcraft before adopting a distinctive personal style. Most will never be more than expert craftsmen, replicating visions of the few who have achieved personal artistry.

Qu's work table is cluttered with boxes of brushes, ink blocks, saucers of dried wash from other days' work. Finished and abandoned works are stacked in rolls, on the table and in racks under it, along with his own collection of scrolls. The floors are bare cement. Jammed between the table and the end wall is a fine antique rosewood cabinet with glass doors, filled with his art books and the visual curios that have taken his fancy over the years - small statuettes, painted fans, a chance antique bronze inkpot, a variegated stone picked up on an aesthetic pilgrimage to the famous mountain temples of Wu Tai Shan.

His wife pours us jasmine tea, and we sit in the pair of wicker armchairs that take up the rest of the studio room. 'He paid a lot for that cabinet', she remarks ruefully. 'Let's hope he makes a bit of money from the exhibition next month'. The painter pretends not to notice. He is a classicist, and by tradition true scholars never accepted money for their

paintings. He actually draws his salary as a teacher at an art institute, so sale of what he paints in his own time is his own right. Painters who have made it to the honour role of fame will be put on salary by the Artists Association, and thereafter allowed to keep only a proportion of the high prices commanded by their paintings, especially from overseas Chinese collectors.

As we talk over the tea, his wife returns to the other room. Their plank bed takes up half of it, and the children sleep on cots behind a curtain, over by the back window. There is just room left for a small dressing-table, a wardrobe, and a stack of trunks for all other storage. A large enamel washbasin sits in a wire stand by the front window, small cotton towels drying over it and a cracked cake of soap on the sill. The kitchen is a lean-to in the courtyard, near the common cold tap. In winter the iron coal stove will be moved indoors and burn all day for heating.

The bedroom now is lit only by the flicker of the black and white television set, sitting on a small wooden stool. Mrs Qu and her children sit on the bed. She is coaching her son to compete with the children on a schools' science quiz programme. As I peep in, she ruffles her son's crew-cut head.

‘When you grow up, you're going to be a doctor, aren't you’, she smiles.

During 1981, stern instructions from the Party Centre resulted in a million such *zhishi fenzi* being granted overdue promotions, around the country. In Changsha, ninety-four scholars and scientists were ostentatiously dubbed Labour Heroes at a special ceremony. Theoreticians, from the Party's central journal Red Flag downwards, confirmed that intellectual workers were clearly members of the working class, now that the bourgeoisie had ‘ceased to exist’ as a class in China. Investigation groups were sent out from Beijing to

check up that the work was really going ahead, and expose those units which were merely putting on a charade of complying with the policy. Intellectual workers began to be described as a 'national treasure'. After all, China had only six million tertiary graduates in total, compared to about two hundred and thirty million illiterates and semi-literates, in its population of a thousand million.

Mao's revolution had ended the centuries-old reverence for the scholar, the master of the written word. But it had replaced this with an equally pernicious inverted snobbery. It became a boast for cadres of the old generation to say, aping their seniors in the Party, 'I'm just a simple old peasant with rough hands, entrusted by the Party with this great responsibility'. Some of the old cadres who originated such sayings had overlaid their peasant backgrounds with considerable intelligence and sophistication, but in all too many cases, the humble self-definition was sadly accurate.

Many such men were not impressed by the instructions to increase the participation of *zhishi fenzi* in the decision-making of industrial enterprises. Su Deshan, a cadre from factory in the Northeast, China's heavy-industrial base, protested to the Workers Daily over one of its editorials on this theme.

'Why do these intellectuals suddenly become "clear-headed", armed with their bookish knowledge, and we old cadres "muddle-headed", who have been working at it over twenty years. I started in this workshop as a teenager, when it had only twenty workers. Now it's expanded to twelve hundred workers, in the hands of roughheads like me, and makes the state several hundred thousand of profit every year. We made great achievements without any intellectuals to "add sand" to our leading bodies - and now how can you say that cadres of worker and peasant origin aren't good enough?

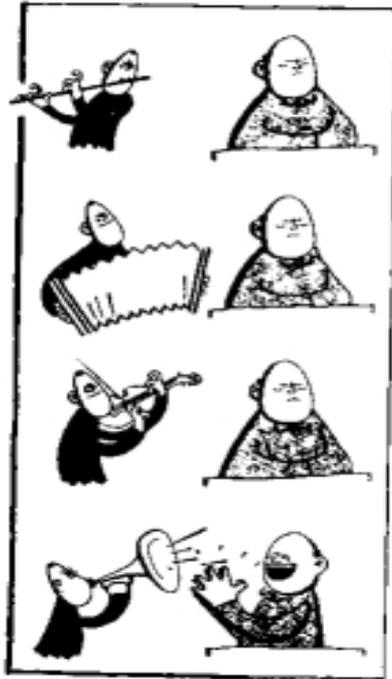
'I hold that knowledge, anyway, is secondary to labour. The knowledge of the intellectuals was created by the labour of the working people. Without the workers and peasants, they'd have nothing to eat or wear. I've heard workers around here say "The black hand raises up the white hand", and I think that's about right. Plans and charts drawn up by the intellectuals won't get

us any nearer to the Four Modernisations. Better treatment for the intellectuals only dampens the morale of cadres and workers. I've been here over twenty years, and my salary is still only a bit over seventy yuan a month. My lack of education is a matter of history - should I be blamed?

'If we follow the road of Salvation by Science, which failed before in Republican China, we will end up back at the old Confucian system that those who work with their brains rule, and those who work with their strength are ruled. Many people are worried about this'.

Mr Su was not alone in his feelings, and his reasoning was only what had been taught by the Party itself over the preceding twenty years. But the tide was running against him. There was no longer to be a conflict between Red and Expert. Even Party Secretaries, once all-powerful, were instructed not to interfere in the professional business of the Academy of Sciences and the universities. They should now restrict their concerns to matters of ideology, leaving the specialist decisions to those qualified to make them. Even harder, they must encourage specialists and experts in their fields, the 'Stinking Number Nines', to join the Party Committees themselves. There was no way that such relinquishing of a life-time of unchallengeable power would go down well with the Party functionaries at lower levels. But, faced with an imminent purge of the Party itself, they were obliged to swallow it as best they could. Party conservatives had more to get their teeth into when it came to intellectual involvement in the arts and literature, since the Party had never denied Chairman Mao's dictum that all art was propaganda, either for Party policy or against it.

Party cadres had always been put in charge of organisations like the Federation of Art and Literature Circles, and the various Writers Associations, under which all licensed arts and literary workers were marshalled by the supreme Ministry of Culture. Publication lists, theatre repertoires, film scripts, even costumes, could be vetoed by Party committees attached to every unit where creativity was supposed to be channelled for



From the Chinese press: A wordless comment on the taste of uneducated cadres commonly placed in charge of administering the lives of artists and performers.

the public good. At the extreme of the Cultural Revolution, only eight 'Revolutionary Operas' were approved by Jiang Qing for public performance in the whole of China. There was almost no publication of fiction, and no movies were being made by the tens of thousands of people employed in studios all over the country. Hundreds of prominent writers had been imprisoned or fallen from grace, and with them everything that they had ever written would be scrubbed from the approved list.

At the end of 1979, a time of intellectual ferment in the land, the Party called the first national congress of writers and artists

in ten years, with a view to working out how such people should ply their trades in the interests of the Four Modernisations. Emancipation of the Mind, Seeking Truth from Facts, and Letting a Hundred Flowers Bloom Together looked like a pretty good beginning for a writer, if the slogans could really be taken at face value. Deng Xiaoping addressed the congress, roundly berating the unwarranted interference of officialdom in the process of the arts, calling it a major inhibiting factor. He promised that regulation of the arts by administrative orders would cease forthwith. He was backed by a vice-chairman of the Writers and Artists Federation, the veteran communist playwright Xia Yan, who warned that the writers of China had to battle against 'feudal authoritarian ideas' which had been entrenched in the Chinese mind for two thousand years, and still infected the attitude of officials.

Other writers complained that China's contemporary literature was still ridden with taboos and fetishes, forbidding honest criticism of important areas of Chinese life, and producing unreal and unconvincing styles in Chinese literature and drama.

The strongest challenge of all came from a playwright, Bai Hua, who had twice been imprisoned for long periods by Maoists for his doggedly independent critical writings in the fifties and sixties. Bai Hua stated that Chinese writers still lived under the fear of future persecution for what they might write today - even avoiding associating with one another in case they might later be denounced as a 'reactionary clique'. Calling for all writers to act courageously together to oppose bureaucratic suppression, he said it would still be a long and arduous struggle before creative freedom was a reality in China. Bai Hua was speaking in the year which had seen a wave of arrests and prosecutions of independent writers who had dared to be critical of the Party in wall-posters and self-published magazines. It remained to be seen what latitude there was for individual freedom within the framework of the official cultural media.

It happened that 1979 was also a year of significance in official intellectual life. It was the year in which many writers

who had been imprisoned or silenced under the Maoists began to publish again, and, naturally, many of their writings reflected what they had been through. Almost all the newly emerging writers, too, wrote of the traumas so recently past. A genre of its own emerged - the 'Literature of the Wounded' - characterised by deep disillusionment with the authoritarian system. Much was allegorical, as Chinese literature has often been. But much was also very direct. The success of the most daring encouraged the next, and a cathartic tide of Literature of the Wounded swelled and swelled.

Inevitably, the Party decided that freedom of expression had gone too far. As usual, the issue turned on a single individual, who happened to be none other than the same Bai Hua who had castigated the literary bureaucracy at the writers congress, a few months previously. Bai Hua wrote a film script which appealed strongly to a large section of China's intelligentsia. Called *Ku Lien* (Bitter Love), the story was of an overseas Chinese who returned, full of idealism, to help build a modern China, but was caught up in political persecutions, frustrated, and, to cut a long story short, died, sighing bitterly, in a snow-drift. The movie was actually made, and shown to preview audiences in many parts of the country. But before it was released, conservatives raised such an orchestrated howl of protest, starting with the military newspaper Liberation Army Daily, that it was banned. All the old clichés rolled out again - 'bourgeois liberalism', 'unhealthy tendency', 'nihilistic and pessimistic sentiments', - all of which said more about the critics' point of view than about the movie itself, which some who have seen it describe as rather facile.

The point of the incident was not that a 'New Cultural Revolution' was about to begin, as some foreign press suggested, but that, in China, artists and writers, all dependent on the state payroll, need only the proverbial whiff of grapeshot to make them run for cover. Literature of the Wounded quickly faded from the scene, and 'healthy', positive themes concerning personal commitment to the Four Modernisations returned to dominate literature and the arts.

China is a massive cultural market. Five and a half billion

books were sold in 1982, seventy million cinema tickets are sold each day, and forty thousand new cinemas are set up each year. National radio reaches a good billion of people, national television about three hundred million. The major book distributor, Xinhua Bookstores, has sixty-five thousand branches and sales agencies across the country. Three and a half thousand full-time performing troupes across the country employ two hundred and thirty thousand people, and there are a million people working in cultural institutions, media, publishing and performance troupes overall. It might seem an extraordinary feat to control them all, and the Party now seems agreed that the best way to do it is loosely.

An experienced stockman may control a mob of a thousand sheep with only a horse and two dogs. The basic principle is to prevent any alternative line, leadership, or focus dissent developing. Individual breakaways will soon enough rejoin the mob, if not of their own accord, then with a crack of the whip in their direction or a nip on the heels from the keen-eyed sheepdog.

Very few of those million people are interested in risking their secure, relatively luxurious urban lifestyle as 'cultural workers' for some abstract ideal or other. In the home of a middle-ranking ballet dancer, my wife and I drank Coca-Cola from their refrigerator, drinks and appliance both purchased with Foreign Exchange Certificates from the Friendship Store - unthinkable extravagances for most Chinese. The dancer told us that her ballet troupe had been through some problems during the Cultural Revolution, but they mainly affected the leaders - directors or choreographers who disagreed with Jiang Qing over repertoire or on points of production.

'We didn't really mind Jiang Qing here,' she said, 'In fact we quite liked her. As long as we did the revolutionary dance-dramas that she approved, she made sure that we had everything we wanted, right through the Cultural Revolution'. The couple had a child who lived with her grandmother, so the mother could concentrate on her dancing. Dozens of new young ballerinas were being trained every year, and the dancer knew that any day she would be turned out to teach somewhere, herself, if she let herself go.

Another woman, a minor painter, wanted us to help her arrange an exhibition of her works somewhere outside of China. Her husband, also a painter, had been picked out for persecution during the Cultural Revolution because of his special interest in Western impressionist styles of painting.

'I always kept clear of politics', she said. 'In compulsory discussions, I never spoke first. If there were eight on one side and two on the other, I always went with the majority'.

That probably included the meetings called to denounce her husband, I thought to myself. The painter had little time for political or intellectual dissidents:

'Chinese should not make speeches or give any kind of information that reflects badly on China. They should be careful of their national pride. Lots of artists here have the same view - it doesn't matter what the real conditions are, Chinese should not make China look bad. This is our country'.

In private conversation, however, she had nothing good to say about China. Bad service in restaurants seemed to make her particularly angry, and she was dissatisfied with access to medical care.

'Some Western countries are more socialist than China', she asserted. The couple had two children, whom they hoped to get either into one of the Key Universities or, as a last resort, into their own Fine Arts institute. Experience had taught them that detailed planning for the future was futile. She had decided that the only way to survive was to live in the present, from day to day.

'When I think of the future, it hurts', she said.

For many in official arts and literary circles, China's re-opening to the world came as a blessed relief to the decade of xenophobia they had endured. They did not feel that it made them any the less Chinese that they took an interest in what foreign cultures were doing. Since the fifties, it had somehow been taken for granted that China would develop its own symphony orchestras, ballet corps, even a Western-style Opera Troupe. For most of the life of the Peoples Republic, these massive invasions of Western culture have eclipsed the indigenous music, dance and drama of China. European music seems to pass itself off as somehow 'advanced', while Chinese

classical music was somehow 'feudal'. A conservatorium student from Tianjin wrote a letter the paper exclaiming in amazement that a 'foreign woman' from Hong Kong (in fact her mother was pure Chinese) had mounted an impressive exhibition of Chinese-style painting. It seemed not to have occurred to him that the same might be said about hundreds of Chinese students paid by the state to devote their talents to the mastery of purely European schools of fine arts, music, and dancing.

Another *zhishi fenzi* of humble origins, but with overseas relatives, told me:

'I have quite a collection of Western classical music records at home - Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky - lots of them. I often bring them out when friends come around to show them what a broad-minded and advanced intellectual I am. But I tell you honestly, I really don't understand or enjoy the music at all, and never play it by myself'.

In intellectual circles, Western culture is very fashionable.

The cream of Beijing's more Westernised intelligentsia have collected for a bizarre annual gathering - Burns Night. Scottish, English and other anglophone friends from the foreign language publishing and academic circles of China, have joined a collection of prominent Chinese academic and theatrical personalities in the Capital Theatre upstairs workshop. Jardine Matheson, the Scottish trading company which has been making millions from the China trade since the Opium War, has donated the usual case of scotch whisky to lend authenticity to this celebration of the Scottish bard.

Who would expect to meet, in Beijing, a man like Professor Wang Zuoliang - an Oxford graduate of the forties, researcher and translator of Robert Burns, speaker of Gaelic and of Burns' own Scots dialect, Lallands? What has this to do with twentieth century China? Professor Wang, head of the English department at Beijing University, frequent traveller to world literary conferences, will tell you that Robert Burns was a true proletarian, even a revolutionary.

Those homely ballads and celebrations of small moments of life were a great contribution to the awakening of the proletarian mind.

A coarse loudspeaker crackles to life with an eightsome reel, and out from the wings gallop a mixed collection of Scots translators from odd corners of Beijing's publishing world, dancing with earnest students of Professor Wang's literature courses.

A fourteen year-old girl, daughter of an academic, recites "Up in the morning", lisping though a rendering of Scots dialect into international phonetics. A famous comic, in a boxy approximation of a Western suit and tie, presents "To a louse" with high drama, squeezing his powerful voice out thin and flat, like a Beijing Opera singer. A timid virgin from the Conservatorium, slim body muffled in many layers of clothing, mounts the low stage to sing a perfectly modulated "Comin through the Rye", the round words emptied of all sensual resonance.

Now here's a contrast. Cai Qin, daughter of a famous Beijing Opera actor of the previous generation, has returned from her career as an actress on the London stage, with all that goes with it. She is no longer young, with a lined face, heavy eye makeup, teased hair and the deepened, threadbare voice of one used to seeking the attention of jaded British theatre audiences. To my surprise, she recites nervously, as at an audition, one slight hand thrust defensively up to its oversized bracelet into the pocket of her Soho trenchcoat.

David Crook rises to the stage - the Fabian Englishman of the thirties who has spent more than half his life in China, creating almost single-handedly the mannered colloquial standard of English taught right across China, his own accent frozen into the standard Chinese orthodoxy by phonetic transliteration. In green tweed sports jacket and borrowed

tartan tie, he recalls how Robert Burns sent cannon bought with his own money to the French Revolutionaries. He speaks of his own experience in the International Brigade in Spain, but his language is more that of a country vicar than a proletarian revolutionary.

An unplanned eruption from the wings. Yang Xianyi, donnish Oxford literateur, respected translator of classics, Editor-in-Chief of the English-language magazine *Chinese Literature*, penner of elegant prose, and prime Cultural Revolution target, has been enjoying Jardines' whisky with more gusto than most.

'We're here to *celebrate* Burns!' he cries, waving his whisky glass vigorously at the audience. 'Burns is making a satire of me here tonight. I'm just a drunkard who can't hold his liquor. Let's hope Robbie Burns is still writing poetry in heaven!'

'This whole thing tonight's too much like a damn church service. My lassie's not here tonight... let's all relax and enjoy ourselves!' He stumbles amiably stage left, to be captured in the wings by two young women and led away to cool off. A muttering rises and dies in the audience.

It takes the presence of Ying Ruocheng, celebrated actor of the day, to recapture the stage. Ying's voice resounds like a fine cello, as he speaks for the theatre, naming the many actors and directors who would like to have been there.

Ying Ruocheng's biography is a remarkable one of modern China. As in a woven silk tapestry, the coloured thread of foreign learning dived beneath the surface of Chinese culture for many years, to re-emerge, in a leaf or in the heart of an embroidered blossom, further down the design. Ying's grandfather was a first-generation Westernised Manchu of the last years of the Empire. He founded a newspaper, *Ta Kung Pao*, which is still published in Hong Kong. He became a

Catholic, and founded *Furen Daxue*, the Catholic university of Beijing, which trained leading intellectuals in modern arts and sciences for two generations. Ying's own father was put through a British Public School education, and returned to become Professor of English at the university his grandfather had founded. Growing up in the midst of both Manchu princely decadence, and Catholic intellectualism, Ying Ruocheng could hardly regard himself as a typical Chinese.

He led a rebellious boyhood, and had become a member of the radical student movement at Qinghua University, on the outskirts of Beijing, by the time the Communist armies took the city. Ying's father fled to Taiwan, leaving his wife and family behind. Ying's own standard of colloquial English is quite outstanding, but he now denies that he learned much from his father. Be that as it may, his career, with the usual Cultural Revolution interruptions of agricultural labour, has been a stellar one. He has become recognised for his outstanding translations of Shakespeare, as well as taking leading roles in movies and the Italian co-production TV series "Marco Polo", in which a shaven-headed Ying Ruocheng played the Mongol Emperor, Kublai Khan. Earlier, I had witnessed him perform a remarkable feat, unscripted, as the on-stage translator for a Bob Hope stand-up routine before a live Beijing audience. Hope's jokes were appalling, occasionally insulting to China, and aimed, anyway, over the heads of the politely bewildered Chinese to American TV cameras. But Ying Ruocheng managed to put the whole thing across, instantly, even mimicking Bob Hope's laboured inflections.

When I last met Ying Ruocheng, he was collaborating with the American playwright Arthur Miller on a production in Beijing of Miller's classic play, "Death of a Salesman". Ying had made the translation, and Miller was to direct it, through Ying as interpreter. Ying would also play the lead role of Willie Loman. Arthur Miller had nothing but praise for the dramatic feel of the translation, claiming that he always knew just where in the script his Chinese actors were, without understanding a syllable. More importantly, he was confident that the meaning of the play would strike a chord in China.

Of course, the "salesman" idea is a metaphor, in any case. It's the whole process of selling yourself, of making yourself

valuable, of finding your identity through what other people think of you', he said during rehearsals at the Capital Theatre.

Who knows what orthodox Marxist critics might make of that in China. Ying Ruocheng himself had to be more cautious:

`You know, I don't quite believe in direct messages. I think we've had too much of that in the past, and that leads to propagandistic plays... I think the chief value of a play like this is the human relationships, the alienation of the individual by society, which I think is a universal thing..

`I think Willie Loman is simply so human that anybody, everybody should be able to understand him and be able to identify with him..

`The theatre is a public art, like a newspaper. It's one of the first things to feel the underground trembling of society, and we reach the public directly.

`Authorities always are afraid of the theatre.. but we've been here a long time, and we'll go on a long time... I think.'

But, by this stage, Authorities were no longer as sanguine about opening China's cultural doors to the west wind as they had earlier been. All the brave slogans on mental emancipation were predicated, from the beginning, on commitment to the Four Principles of the Socialist Road. Literature and the arts had got the bit between their teeth and were rushing off into explorations of individualism, of alternative philosophies of life, of exploring a Human Nature which Marxist philosophy did not admit. Students and young intellectuals had begun to explore the existentialism of Sartre, the psychoanalysis of Freud, and the range of the European humanistic tradition, to the discomfort of their orthodox political commissars. Inevitably, many had begun to question the very foundations of Marxism.

On the other hand, a liberalisation of life-style had also found its way into the arts. Sprung from their peasant and military garb of the Revolutionary Operas, China's dancers in their thousands now took to writhing sensuously about the stage in skimpy or transparent raiment, supposedly portraying fish, seductive reptiles, or ethereal characters from Chinese legend. Variety performers tightened up their hitherto dowdy costumes as well, with plunging necklines, tight skirts and even the thigh- slit *chi pao*, or cheong sam, re-appearing on stage. A

young traditional *erhu* (two-string fiddle) player from a folk troupe in Beijing, Cheng Fangyuan, shot to stardom on the concert circuit when she switched to guitar and studied up a repertoire of popular American songs of the sixties. Other singers, led by a soprano in an Air Force entertainment troop, Li Guyi, adopted the breathy, crooning style of Hong Kong and Taiwan pop-singers, and were received with adulation. As cassette-players proliferated among the young, so control of popular music became extremely difficult. What was selected for broadcast on state radio no longer defined the music actually listened to in the land. People recorded, from friends or from short-wave radio, the songs they liked.

The treatment of love themes, once taboo, became more and more daring in their treatment, in song and on film. The vigorous handclasp of revolutionary comradeship was replaced by real embraces and by almost-real kisses - astounding to conservative Chinese audiences. Even fidelity to one's chosen partner was questioned, in stories which increasingly concerned the individual's search for satisfaction in life, rather than sublimation in a collective goal.

In popular literature, the fad was for thrillers - home-grown or translations of foreign titles. In 1980 alone, twenty Agatha Christie whodunits were released in translations, selling millions of copies. A professor of literature complained that the foreign thrillers were teaching an innocent Chinese public to enjoy the stimulation of drugs, homosexuality, pornography and excessive violence, at the expense of Socialist Morality.

The Party guardians of social ethics had had enough, and a vigorous campaign of 'cultural criticism' began on all these issues. There was not to be a repetition of Chairman Mao's denunciation, in his talks in Yenan, of all bourgeois writers being tantamount to enemies of the revolution. The Gang of Four slogan that 'Art must Serve Politics' had been abandoned in favour of 'Art Must Serve the People and Serve Socialism'. But there were firm denunciations of the ill wind of Bourgeois Liberalism in all its forms.

'The advocacy of individual freedom, free choice, free development and so on is apt to bring about anarchism and

excessive liberalisation', wrote a critic in the magazine Youth Studies.

'The stress on human nature, to the exclusion of other motivations, in these theories can also bring about excessive desire for enjoyment, for material benefits, and other vulgar interests'.

'We must resist the corruption of bourgeois ideology', said the acting Minister of Culture, Zhou Yang, to the China Music Council. 'Music workers must help the masses to raise their standard of taste, and nourish high morality.'

In a directive to the national film industry, Party critics warned that 'self-expression' was not the purpose of artistic creation, and that 'the bourgeois theory of Human Nature, which blurs the social character of people, should be avoided, and class analysis should be stressed'. Bizarre or triangular love affairs were to be banned.

The national drama conference, assigned the task of producing two thousand new plays for the year of 1983, was warned by He Jingzhe, deputy head of the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee, that works 'advocating ultra-democracy, individualism, and statements running counter to Marxism and to the interests of the people' should be critically rejected.

'Writers have the right to decide on their themes.. under the guidance of Marxism', he went on. 'Art must have communist ideology as its nucleus and must educate the people in Communism... Since socialist literature and art is led by the Party, its orientation and prosperity depends largely upon the Party's leadership.'

The Writers Association was directed to despatch delegations of dozens of its salaried writers to spend time with army units, peasant brigades and oil-fields, to 'help younger writers understand real life and get better acquainted with the people'.

Red Flag, the Thunderer of the Party, complained that young writers failed to distinguish between the crimes of the Gang of Four and the character of the Communist Party itself.

'They tend to present the struggle against the Gang of Four

as one between Human Nature and Inhuman Nature. They try to bring out Human Nature at its best in the literary characters representing the Class Enemy (bourgeoisie) and Reactionaries, so that the distinction between the Revolution and the Enemy is blurred. They present the Party-led revolutionary wars, the land reform and even the socialist system itself as suppressing Human Nature.'

Red Flag was quite accurate in this. Much of the writing of that time, in state-backed publications, was highly subversive of the Party's own official view of reality, though it clearly corresponded all too well with the experiences of most Chinese. In Seeking Truth from Facts, the literary world had been quite brave. Villainous Party Secretaries had been common fictional characters of the period.

When the campaign against Bourgeois Immorality had been running for some time, and the current of published literature began to look more as the Party would have it, a columnist in the China Daily turned his pen to the subject of China's intellectuals. He recalled, as scholars love to do, a scholar of ancient times, who had topped the Imperial Examinations, been made Prime Minister at an early age, but was always in trouble for arguing with veteran courtiers, and eventually lost the Emperor's favour and was dismissed from office. The scholar died, at the age of thirty-three, of 'too much sobbing with self-pity'.

'It is a characteristic of the intellectuals that they habitually issue criticisms and make comments. One cannot expect them to change their nature, which is of benefit to the state. However, they have to learn to choose the right way to get their comments across'.

The small classic villa in Bei Hai Park rustles with the scuffling of plastic soles on cement, as a curious crowd picks its way through the exhibition chambers on three sides of a central lily-pond. 'The Star Arts Exhibition', says a cotton banner hung across the rockery dividing the villa from the park walkways. This is a breakthrough - the Star group (*Xing*

Xing) are painters without recognition, rejected by the tradition-bound official art world, but determined to reach a public. They have twice been forcibly removed from illegal exhibitions they set up on the streets as their protest against the timid Art establishment. Somewhere in the cultural bureaucracy, a cog has moved, and they have been given two weeks in this villa in Beijing's Imperial gardens.

I see both excitement and embarrassment on the faces of the Chinese there, facing something both unfamiliar and unofficial. Much of the work shows Western influences, more or less digested. There are derivative Impressionist landscapes and abstract expressionism of totally obscure meaning. Often the technique does not match the conception. These are startling departures from traditional Chinese ideas on art, but the subjects themselves challenge more than mere conventions. Breaking Chinese taboos, there are several female nudes, in painting and sculpture. But most striking are the black currents of political protest that draw the exhibition together in ink, paint, print, and wood sculpture.

In piece after piece, tiny individuals struggle for freedom against hostile, implacable forces. Pleading hands rise from darkened villages, and men walk up featureless roads into a black horizon. Chinese visitors gasp at the audacity of the exhibition's centrepiece - a stark wooden sculpture of a man's head with empty eye sockets, no nostrils, and his mouth blocked with a huge wooden stopper. It is titled 'A Pillar of Society'.

I find the sculptor, Wang Keping, a stocky man in his late twenties with cropped hair, a wry grin and a sharp glint in his eye. He sits sideways on a balustrade by the central lily-pond, chatting with fellow exhibitors and friends. I congratulate him on the power of his work, and ask if I can buy his sculpture.

'I'd like to sell it to you,' he says cheerfully, 'but I'm afraid I'd get into trouble. You'll have to get in touch with the Ministry of Culture about that, or perhaps the Public Security Bureau'.

The courtyard rings with derisive laughter.



Democracy Wall 1978 – many believed that freedom of expression would persist in China. It didn't.



The Enlightenment Society touch up their epic literary poster calling for Human Rights in China.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEMOCRACY

WALL

Orthodoxy creates its own heresy. The more rigid the orthodoxy, the more shocking is a heresy generated by even the most elementary of contradictions. Orthodoxies are supported by an awesome alliance of interests: the power of the power-holders, the aspirations of those near to them, fear of uncertainty among the citizens, and blind faith among the led. Even orthodoxies built by terror, as many are, survive on a loyalty that can look very much like love. China's current orthodoxy, Marxism-Leninism- Mao Zedong Thought, has waged so successful a campaign against heresy that any slight deviation attracts immediate and drastic attention from the guardians of orthodoxy. It is not a matter of theory, nor of some metaphysical salvation, but of the survival of the State. Until 1978, bold heretics had been rare in China for the past twenty- five years, since the aftermath of the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956. At that time, a high proportion of the idealistic intellectuals, most of whom had supported the Communist Party's plans for China, took all too seriously an invitation from Chairman Mao to contribute their comments

and suggestions on ways in which the Communist Party's methods could be improved - 'Let a hundred flowers bloom together, let a hundred voices vie to be heard'.

Mao and the Party were so stung by the virulence of the criticisms offered, even from within the Party itself, that a huge purge of 'Rightists' ensued. On Mao's instructions, Rightists had to be found everywhere, whether they had been vocal critics or not. In the usual pattern of such movements in China, victims were found, one way or another, in sufficient numbers to appease the hunger of the beast. A generation of trained and natural intellectuals was decimated, the minimum punishment being transfer from one's area of expertise to a rural or menial exile, for 're-education'. Thereafter, philosophy was discussed with blunt instruments.

In 1978, a mighty battle was in progress in China, not just for power, but for control of the orthodoxy itself. No flashing of stilettos, this time - more the seismic heave and grind of continental tectonic plates: movement massive, but invisible to the naked eye, driven by the surge of subterranean magma. It was Deng Xiaoping, jauntily wearing the harlequin cloak of the heretic, who issued the challenge to those claiming the mantle of Mao Zedong Thought. Before the battle ended, he was to have flung that heretic's cloak, in triumph, across the supine corpse of Chairman Mao Zedong himself. The course of that battle affected everything else that happened in China over some four years, and one of its side-effects was the brief, but spectacular, flowering of the Democracy Wall.

In the massive politics of China, battles are often fought like a game of *wei qi*, known in the West by its Japanese name, *go*. Opponents take turns to place single black or white ivory 'beans' on the board, in such a way as to claim territory surrounded by their own beans, or to cut off the opponent from gaining territory. Simple in concept, *wei qi* has been a national obsession for over two thousand years, and develops the most subtle and complex strategies from this deceptive simplicity. Thus, in politics, did Deng Xiaoping place his beans, with a long series of feints, sallies, and strategies, until his opponents, hopelessly surrounded, had no choice but to surrender the field.

Odd as it may seem to outsiders, the first beans were laid with a public editorial debate in the national press over what we might consider a tautology : 'Seek Truth from Facts'. The inner issue, though, was the authority of Chairman Mao, and in Beijing that was equivalent to a Vatican debate on Papal infallibility. Deng could get nowhere until he had re-established rationality, not faith in a dead leader, as the basis of national decision-making. That skirmish was proved won on October 1 1978, when Hua Guofeng, at that stage still both Chairman of the Communist Party and Premier of the State, put forward the slogan : 'We must emancipate our minds, and seek truth only from facts'. As the virtual unknown whose claim to national leadership was based on the personal blessing of Mao Zedong, Hua, conceding Mao's fallibility, was opening his own leadership to question. Hua Guofeng, who had come to Mao's attention as the county leader who built flattering monuments in Mao's own home town, was the figure-head of the group known to their enemies as the 'whateverists' - people on record as saying, in Politburo meetings, 'Whatever Chairman Mao said was right, whatever Chairman Mao taught must be upheld'.

The so-called Tian An Men Incident of April 5th, 1976, had been the watershed for Maoism. Mao was still living, just, but all immediate power was in the hands of the small group of extremists headed by his wife, Jiang Qing. The great moderator, Premier Zhou Enlai, had died on January 8th, leaving the field to the extremists who had control of the enfeebled Chairman Mao. Zhou had brought Deng Xiaoping back from banishment, and Deng was trying to maintain some life in the administration and the economy, as the extremists rapidly reduced the entire country to chaos. Premier Zhou was deeply mourned by people throughout the land, and deeply resented, even in death, by Jiang Qing and her coterie.

On 5 April that year fell the festival called Qing Ming - a kind of All Saints Day in the Chinese calendar, a day when people remember the dead and sweep the graves of their forebears. Zhou Enlai's funeral had been a minimal affair, on his own instructions, so millions of Chinese at all levels of

society chose make the Qing Ming festival their day of remembrance for Premier Zhou. In defiance of warnings from the leftists, individuals, groups, military units, party units, schools and colleges, buried the Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial in Tian An Men Square in thousands of memorial wreaths, often accompanied by poems or inscriptions which bore pointed warnings to Jiang Qing and her band about trampling on the will of the masses.

Most of the wreaths were placed on the evening of April 4th, and by custom would have remained on display for a week before being cleared away from the square. But the leftists decided this implied insult to them was too much to bear, and had army units remove every last wreath and poem in the dead of night. All that was left for the second day of the festival were pools of water where poems had been scrubbed from the monument. The reaction was absolute outrage, which ran in waves throughout the land. Thousands of demonstrators - real, spontaneous demonstrators, rushed to Tian An Men Square and besieged the Great Hall of the People on its western side, demanding the return of their wreaths and punishment of the sacrilege.

The Beijing authorities took a hard line. They gave no explanation, and ultimately sent thousands of militia into the square to beat and arrest those demonstrators who refused to disperse. Reports say about a hundred demonstrators were beaten to death that day, and four thousand arrested. The official press quoted Chairman Mao from his sick-bed denouncing the incident as 'counter-revolutionary'. Mass reactions were suppressed, but many powerful people at the top of the party and the army had been as outraged the demonstrators, and the climate was formed in which, five months later, Jiang Qing and the group around her would be deposed and arrested within days of the old Chairman's death.

One of the great untold political tales of this century lies in that coup d'etat, and in the means by which Hua Guofeng, a man trusted by the extremists, was persuaded to support the coup. Even more interesting to China-watchers would be the persuasion of General Wang Dongxing - Chairman Mao's

personal bodyguard for years, the most obdurate `whateverist', and commander of the special guards regiment which was supposed to protect the national leadership but in fact carried out the coup d'etat against the Gang of Four. One can be certain that promises were made to these people concerning the security of their future roles in politics - promises which Deng Xiaoping, on his return to centre stage, was to repudiate, one by one, as he laid down his *wei qi* beans.

When one player's beans surround another player's bean, they `eat' it. One of the first beans to be eaten in Deng Xiaoping's campaign was the Mayor of Beijing, Wu De. Though a second-ranker by Chinese standards, Wu De was also a vice-chairman of the National Peoples Congress, a party politburo member, he had a versatile revolutionary history enough for two normal lifetimes, and more power than most of the world's Prime Ministers, ruling a population of some nine million in Beijing and its rural surrounds. It was Wu De's voice which had echoed through the vast public address system of Tian An Men square, warning the demonstrators that they were counter-revolutionaries and faced arrest. Wu De had given the order for the beatings and arrests that followed. It may not have been his own initiative, but he was held responsible. Sporadically, in the second half of 1978, small hand-written wall-posters appeared in various parts of central Beijing, bearing demands that Wu De should be sacked.

Immediately after Premier Hua Guofeng's national day address on Seeking Truth from Facts, the Foreign Ministry Information Department organised a visit to Xinjiang, a remote and exotic part of China, for almost all the foreign correspondents. Only the Soviet bloc countries were not invited, on `security' grounds. We correspondents returned to the capital on October 10, our notebooks bulging with exotic feature stories to file, only to find that Wu De had been sacked. And the nature of his sacking was quite pointed, because while he had been removed from his post as Mayor of Beijing, he still held his honorific posts in the National Peoples Congress and the Party, at least for the time being. Deng Xiaoping had plenty more beans in his pot. The removal of Wu De from his

Beijing office meant that those who had demonstrated in Tian An Men square were about to be vindicated, or, as the Chinese put it, politically rehabilitated.

Indeed, within days the official media were blanketed with eulogies of the Tian An Men incident, photographs of those who had died, interviews with participants, private photographic records and documentary film hitherto held only as police evidence. The official reversal generated tremendous excitement amongst the ordinary people of many levels. The more simple-minded saw it as a belated tribute to the spirit of Premier Zhou Enlai, the last senior official they had really trusted with their hearts.

But for many young and middle-aged thinkers in the community, this seemed the culmination of a liberation that had yearned for. The preceding months had seen the freeing of tens of thousands of people classified as enemies of the people for daring to speak their minds. Hua Guofeng's speech had spoken of 'emancipation of the minds', and had repeated the abused slogan, 'Let a hundred flowers bloom'. Now the classification of those spontaneous demonstrations at Tian An Men as revolutionary, not counter-revolutionary, seemed to mean that the broad masses had been given a licence to express, publicly, their views and criticisms, even of the Party centre. The gags of twenty years were removed.

Wall-posters are an ancient part of Chinese culture. They reflect the reverence traditionally held for the written ideograph, far beyond the mere alphabetic scribbles of the non-Chinese world. Workers and peasants paste prayers and written spells for good luck across their doors. Burning paper with someone's name written on it will curse them. The political wall-poster, denouncing injustice, has a history of centuries. In the Cultural Revolution, the Maoists accorded the individual wall-poster such status that the right to paste them up became specifically enshrined in the constitution of the Peoples Republic.

As part of the officially-backed rehabilitation of the Tian An Men incident, organs such as the Communist Youth League were encouraged to paste up wall-posters which echoed,

perhaps in more callow rhetoric, the editorials of the Party press. But these prim offering were soon smothered in a blizzard of genuinely spontaneous comment unseen for decades.

Within days, posters signed by ordinary workers were daring to suggest that the re-appraisal had not gone far enough, because it had not questioned the role of Chairman Mao himself in the matter. It made the hitherto unthinkable suggestion that Mao supported the Gang of Four, and that his thoughts in later life were mistaken. It pointedly left the name of Chairman Hua Guofeng off a list of trustworthy senior party officials. A later poster warned that unless the Chinese people faced up honestly to the serious mistakes made by Chairman Mao, 'political swindlers' like the Gang of Four could grab power again in the future. The author signed himself 'A Railway Worker'. Another described a factory meeting in a north-eastern province at which speeches were made denouncing Mao Zedong, and his portrait taken down from a wall and smashed.

The standard *dazibao* (big character announcement) is a broadsheet, about a metre high, hand-written in characters five centimetres square. But anything goes, and views were pasted up on anything from sheets of cotton to a torn scrap from a notebook, scribbled in pencil. There were rumours, which proved to be true, that an important meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee was in progress, and excitement mounted.

The telephone rings at eleven-thirty, and it's an excited member of the Gynaecologists - that informal brotherhood of foreigners in Beijing who share a professional interest in the internal workings, the 'private parts', of Chinese politics. No-one can know everything - we exchange what information we have. Someone has just called to tell him a gigantic poster has gone up in Tian An Men Square itself - Let's go! I struggle back into my clothes, then a heavy sheepskin coat and fur-lined hat with earflaps. The temperature in the Square will be below zero.

Tian An Men Square is almost deserted at midnight, a vastness of dark grey cement paving, with pools of light under the lamp-posts. All the meagre traffic of home-going cyclists is stopping to read the poster, still damp with paste. It is a phenomenon, over ninety poster pages, spread along a paling fence on the eastern side of the square, facing directly across a hundred metres of paving to the tomb where Chairman Mao's body lies in its crystal sarcophagus. It is a symbolic Manifesto for Human Rights, and it is pasted on the back fence of the Public Security Bureau.

A poetic miscellany of verse, prose, and stark red graphics, the poster is an appeal for Human Rights. It cries out boldly that China has never known the meaning of democracy. Power has been passed from emperor to tyrannical emperor, and modern times have only seen the techniques of psychological oppression brought to a new peak in support of the Cult of Personality. China's dictators have built a spiritual Great Wall around the country to protect their dictatorship - it must be smashed along with all idols, old and new. America is powerful, because it is not hampered by idolatry and superstition. What is the truth about Chairman Mao Zedong? Is he China's Stalin? People of China, rise up and do battle for the Truth, against feudalism!

By one o'clock in the morning, the temperature has fallen further and the cold is clawing up through the soles of my shoes. Word has been passed on, people have been woken up, and more young Chinese are cycling into the darkened square, unsure that this radical document can survive the night. The fence is on top of a paved embankment, six feet above the square. Two lamp-posts light it well. The short-sighted have scrambled up to form a shuffling, fifty-metre procession along the small ledge at the top of the embankment, reading sheet by sheet, obscuring the text and forcing others to follow their lead. Some read aloud to others on the pavement below. Guards from the Square detachment are there, reading the posters themselves. One of them takes notes in a small pad. Small groups are in heated discussion at

the foot of the embankment. Chairman Mao lies a hundred metres away in his tomb.

We went back at eleven o'clock the next morning, and the crowds were large, the procession still shuffling its way along the top ledge of the embankment. People from the American and Soviet embassies were there, taking photographs of the posters. Unidentified Chinese were there, taking photographs of the foreigners. Some of the poster's authors were there, as well. They were the age of almost all the poster-writers of that period.. around thirty. They were the generation who had been bred with the greatest ideals for a Socialist China, had been passionate Red Guards, had seen their ideals disintegrate, but kept their passion.

The huge poster was a product of a small group of like-minded people from Guiyang, in south-central China's Guizhou province, the poorest in China. Several of them had been sent there after leaving school, and had been denied the opportunity of formal study during the Cultural Revolution years. Assigned to factory and menial office work, they had come together, and sought out educated people of the older generation who could pass on knowledge of things beyond the sterile texts then served up to them. Whatever their sources may have been, they became enamoured of European social philosophers. They quoted Thomas Locke, de Tocqueville, Adam Smith, even Sir Thomas More's 'Utopia', written in sixteenth-century England, but our own century, at least in book form, seemed largely to have passed them by.

The leader, Huang Xiang, was spectacled, thin, with a lank wisp of hair falling across his face as he pasted up some extra sheets of poems alongside the magnum opus. He had been writing poems secretly for years, showing them only to trusted friends. Much of the giant poster was his work, woven together under the allegorical title 'The God of Fire'. Hearing the praise being heaped on the poets of the Tian An Men Incident, this group of provincial intellectuals had gathered their ink-brushes and their manuscripts and had caught a train to Beijing, in search of a receptive audience. On the day they laboured to

paste up their ninety pages, they followed the tradition of such groups in China to found a grandly titled society - the Enlightenment Society - with a burning torch as its emblem. It was from student societies like this that all China's progressive movements, including the Communist Party itself, had always grown.

The Enlightenment Society certainly caught an audience, and the poems Huang Xiang pasted on that wall have been copied, filed, translated and published in several languages: more, it must be said, for their topicality than for their literary merit. They blew a brazen fanfare to open the Democracy Wall, but their high-flown, allusory style reduced any hard political challenge they may have contained.

No-one remembers who named the Democracy Wall. It had been a popular one for posters since it was built, due to its convenient location separating a local bus-depot from a bus-stop where many commuters spent time waiting to change bus routes. It was a stone's throw from a major commercial cross-street, Xidan, on Beijing's main thoroughfare, Chang-An. There was an open space about fifteen metres wide between the wall and the kerb, leaving plenty of space for impromptu gatherings and discussion meetings. A stack of lumber against the inside of the wall, in the bus-depot, provided handy access to the top of the two-metre grey-brick wall for bold orators, or, later, for sellers of the unofficial magazines which soon proliferated. If the quotation is accurate, Deng Xiaoping himself endorsed the name 'Democracy Wall', at least for a time.

In those few heady days of late November, the poster-writing activity, which had sprung up all over Beijing, quickly centralised there at the Xidan Democracy Wall. In the mainstream of the posters, the themes were similar: there must be more democracy in China, there must be an honest evaluation of the past, and those people in power who still thought like the Gang of Four must be removed. In a matter of days, to suggest that Chairman Mao was capable of making mistakes (a heresy earning at least fifteen years labour reform up till now) became almost a commonplace. Posters containing

this suggestion were not torn down, which meant that police had been ordered not to tear them down. But ordered by who? The assumption was that Deng Xiaoping wanted the Democracy Wall to give messages to his more orthodox colleagues about the feelings of the masses.

Posters received stern judgement from their readers. The mediocre, the fatuous, would be quickly covered up with someone else's essay, and the reactionary posters (there were almost none) defending Maoism lasted not much longer before overpasting. Layer after layer built up, until there was a multi-coloured crust of paste and paper a centimetre thick over most of the hundred-metre wall. Soon, it was harder and harder to find sensational new statements on the wall - so many of the taboos had been broken. Later posters became more introspective, and there were more in the category of personal complaints, rather than general social criticisms.

The other remarkable break in taboos was that people at the wall began talking to foreigners. That had always been a risky thing to do, in a xenophobic society, bringing suspicion of betrayal on the head of anyone who conversed unsupervised with a foreigner. At some stages in the Cultural Revolution, foreigners had been discouraged or even forbidden from reading the wall- posters, which were considered the private affair of the Chinese people alone. In November 1978, people gathering at the Wall to read the latest posters would suddenly initiate conversations with any foreigner who happened to be there. Some foreign language students offered their services as translators, guiding foreigners to the most interesting posters. Others sought out Chinese-speakers among the foreigners, who, after all, were most likely to be the ones down at the wall anyway.

Many of the names of the foreign correspondents in Beijing were well-known to the informed Chinese, at least in their Chinese forms. Newspaper reporters, in particular, frequently had their despatches translated and published (without royalty payment of course) in the Reference News tabloid that circulated to millions of cadres each day, giving them a view of China as foreigners saw it. When members of our craft were

introduced to groups of excited youths, there would often be cheers. It was flattering, but sad, that a generation thought of us foreigners as more truly sympathetic to their views than their own people.

When such conversations began, it could be hard to get away. The young Chinese were often surprisingly well-informed about the main stream of politics in the West, as one would glean from reading the front page, only, of a daily newspaper. But they were almost totally ignorant about how society worked.

'Tell us about democracy.'

'Does the English Queen take all your taxes?'

'How can the law be independent of the government?'

'How is the Independence Struggle in your country?'

'How is it possible for every peasant to own a car?'

On Sunday, 26 November, the correspondent of the 'Toronto Globe and Mail', John Fraser, took a visiting American columnist, Robert Novak, down to see the Wall, which by now was an Event, not just a Thing. Fraser had a smattering of Chinese, and was by nature highly sociable and inquisitive. He fell into conversation with a handful of young Chinese, which soon swelled into a substantial crowd. Fraser had been his paper's drama and ballet critic before coming to China, and brought his sense of drama with him. Perhaps inspired by the growing audience, he said that Novak had been told he might be having an interview with Deng Xiaoping the next day. None of us realised then, of course, that Deng was on the point of finalising the diplomatic rapprochement that would end thirty years of formal estrangement with the United States. He was in a mood to be kind to Americans.

With Novak's somewhat bemused agreement, Fraser then asked that random bunch of young enthusiasts whether they would like Novak to pass on any message to Deng Xiaoping. The response was a wild cheering and clouds of dust raised from the arid earth by jumping feet. Fraser and Novak then left the scene with a handful of questions scribbled in Chinese on

bits of paper, having promised to return, the next evening at seven o'clock, to report.

Novak had his interview, and was able to give Deng a selection of the questions that had been put forward. Deng answered them without turning a hair, well aware of the effect his answers would have.

I found out about this when I received a call from someone to say that Beijing University was abuzz with the news that there would be a mass meeting at the Democracy Wall that evening, for Beijing's youth to meet with foreign journalists. My message said nothing about Deng Xiaoping, Fraser or Novak. As was our custom in such matters, I set about ringing as many of my colleagues as I could find, to let them know about the event.

One of those I called was John Fraser. He seemed somewhat alarmed at my news, as he was already having misgivings about his undertaking, on the grounds that journalistic ethics tread a fine line between reporting of, and participation in, the politics of one's host country. I told him it was too late, since the meeting would go ahead whether he were there or not. He decided to go ahead, but not without trepidation.

The sun sets early in Beijing in November, and it was well dark by seven o'clock. On the long strip of land in front of the Democracy Wall at least three thousand young people had gathered, though as yet they had no focus.. standing about in groups, some talking excitedly, some just waiting. Hundreds of bicycles were propped up on their stands, and some self-appointed marshals were encouraging people to move their bicycles out of the crowd to ordered rows. Chinese know that bicycles are dangerous obstacles in large crowds. The night was clear, as most winter nights are, and the bulky, padded overcoats blurred individual outlines into dark, shifting masses. Foreigners usually wear more expensive and warmer hats, and here and there I recognised the headgear of the people I had tipped off, and others of the Gynaecologists. A few of the East European journalists and diplomats were there, cautiously staying further back in the crowd, just to be sure. I saw a couple of young men looking expectant and waving, and made

my way through the crowd towards them. They asked me if Fraser was coming, and I said I believed so. There was a cheer from those within earshot, and our small knot became the centre of a suddenly polarised mass. I pulled a wad of my name cards from my pocket - roman script on one side, Chinese on the other - and surrendered them to the eagerly stretched hands on all sides. There could be nothing criminal in that, and police agents would already have noted my presence, so there was nothing to lose.

Soon John Fraser arrived, pushing his way nervously through the crowd, which was beginning to jam in from all directions as more and more young people arrived at the back and craned forward to hear what was going on. An interpreter was found in the crowd, as none of the foreigners capable of it was prepared to place himself quite so much on centre stage. Inside my bulky sheepskin coat, my cassette recorder was rolling.

The group around us opened things properly with two rousing choruses: the Chinese National Anthem (openly modelled on the Marsellaise), and the Internationale - popularly known as the Anthem of Zhou Enlai. The crowd again began to surge forward dangerously, and the group at the centre tried chivalrously to protect the foreigners from pressure, linking arms around us. The surge subsided, and with a rhythmic chant of 'Please sit down', the organisers succeeded in getting a dozen or so front rows of the crowd on all sides sitting on the ground. Fraser's message from Deng was brief, but there was still no way that people at the back could hear what was being said at the centre of our circle, so a system of human relays was set up. The translator bellowed from the centre, then, in rings back through the crowd, individuals who had heard the message turned and bellowed it to those in the sector behind them. The effect was unusual, each concentric ring of the crowd responding vociferously as it received the message, and the response coming back to the centre in phased waves of enthusiasm.

The message from Deng Xiaoping was simple, and was delivered by Fraser in short sentences for translation. After

some preliminaries, he came to the line everyone was waiting for:

`Vice-Premier Deng says, "The Xidan Democracy Wall is a good thing."

The crowd erupted in huge cheers, and there was another dangerous surge forward from the rear. Those Chinese sitting at the front, practised in such matters, leapt to their feet in order to avoid being crushed. It was a further minute or two before order was restored.

`But Vice-Premier Deng says, "Not everything that has been written at Democracy Wall is correct."

The crowd fell relatively silent, apart from those at the back who were still cheering the first part of the message.

`"For instance, about Chairman Mao - it is not correct to say he was only seventy percent good and thirty percent bad. He was better than that."

`I myself', Deng added in a later answer, `am only sixty percent good and am forty percent bad'.

When Fraser revealed that a former Defence Minister, Marshall Peng Dehuai, was soon to be posthumously rehabilitated, there were wild cheers from one section of the crowd, close to the organisers. General Peng was a peppery character, who had been purged when he dared to challenge Chairman Mao openly, in the late fifties, over Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward. Peng's posthumous rehabilitation would have little impact on the lives of these people, but it was seen as symbolic of the kind of slaps the authority of Mao Zedong was going to receive in the general re-writing of recent Chinese history. The young people who cared about this sort of thing were generally the children of intellectuals and of the Party elite - those most wounded by Mao's autocracy.

John Fraser melted away into the mob, still nervous about the consequences of his role, as some of the crowd set up a chant, `We want freedom, we want freedom'. The floor was taken by one of the young group leaders, who began bawling out a hoarse oration on democracy.

`For some days, we, the people of the April 5th Movement, (the first time we foreigners were aware this movement had taken any formal shape) have been coming here to express our

views. The people, a free people, is a thing with a deep history. (cheers) There are some people, hidden, who say they support the people, but really they fear the people... Are there still people in the upper ranks who are like the Gang of Four? (There are! There are!) These people are sabotaging the Four Modernisations of the people. Its time to purge the Party, and to discuss the way forward for our people, our social system, and our place in the Third World. Today, Vice-Premier Deng has supported our Democracy Wall, so we must do it right, we must do it thoroughly...'

The speaker's voice tailed off in yet another surge from the crowd, this time an irreversible one. Two wives of foreign journalists, who were slow to scramble to their feet, were trampled and bruised, despite the best efforts of Chinese nearby to protect them. Clutching my tape-recorder to my chest, I found both arms pinned to my sides in the crush, and had great difficulty keeping one foot on the ground as I was propelled bodily sideways. My face must have showed the alarm I felt, and a young Chinese who had been pressed hard up against me in the crush nodded and smiled reassuringly to me as we were both borne irresistibly, in a human undertow, away from the Wall and towards the middle of Chang An Boulevard.

I remembered sitting on a stockyard fence, watching cattle forced through a drafting-gate, and I felt a sudden sympathy for those beasts as the human current swept me along the iron railings of the bus-stop. Resistance would have been dangerous and hopeless. By the time the pressure of the crowd released me, I was standing in the middle of the eight-lane thoroughfare, which had been taken over completely by the crowd, swollen during the evening to at least ten thousand.

A murmur passed through the crowd and became a shout:

'To the Square! To the Square!'

The crowd streamed off in ranks twenty wide, narrowing now to only half of the roadway, but not deigning to yield the rest. Many pushed their bicycles along with them in the march. The growling articulated buses, taxis, and the rest of the night traffic moved carefully to the other side of the road, passengers

staring out the windows at this disorganised rally of thousands. Group by group, the exhilarated crowd became a march, and the marchers raised the slogans:

'Long Live the People! We Want Freedom! We Want Democracy! Carry Forward the April 5th Movement!'

They fervently believed that, through the April 5th Movement commemorating their days of defiance in his honour, they were the inheritors of Zhou Enlai. We left Xidan behind, passed the Telegraph Office, and then a police depot. The Public Security Bureau obviously knew that the rally was going to occur, but would not act against it without orders. Apparently, orders never came. We marched past the long red wall of Zhong Nan Hai, the former Imperial park, now occupied as a secure residential compound by the national Communist leadership, and wondered which Politburo members within might raise their heads from their files at the sound of marchers outside the wall. As we approached Tian An Men Square after twenty minutes walk, the bulk of the Great Hall of the People loomed up on the right of the Boulevard. Perhaps again remembering Premier Zhou, one group stopped and sang a chorus of the Internationale in the direction of some lighted windows on its upper floors.

It was an extraordinary moment as the demonstrators, by then down to about three thousand in number, spilled into Tian An Men Square, taking possession of it again in the name of democracy, believing that they had support from inside the Great Hall. But the Tian An Men Square had held a million people at a time, during Chairman Mao's Red Guard rallies in the sixties. The vast square, and the buildings surrounding it, were designed on a scale to glorify the state and to diminish the individual. Even a crowd of three thousand could begin to look ominously small.

The intoxication of the hour overrode such feelings, as most of the young crowd headed for the traditional rallying-place, the steps of the Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial in the centre of the square. There were a couple of speeches, mostly continuing the theme of learning from other countries, such as Yugoslavia, in developing a new kind of socialism for China. Yugoslavia was then a popular model for Chinese investigation, as it seemed to offer the material and cultural

benefits of contact with the west, without abandoning socialist morality - something few of these young Chinese would at that stage have seriously considered.

The speeches were no substitute for direct contacts, however, and soon the crowd broke up into small discussion groups, often with one or two of the foreigners at their centre, being grilled about their own countries, about democracy.

I was in a group with two other foreigners, one of them John Fraser. We asked those around us, 'What do you mean by the word democracy'.

A young, spectacled woman in drab grey was the most vocal.

'It is the pre-requisite for any progress in China. Democracy is the right of the people .. we must dare to speak. Secondly, what the people say must be considered carefully. All those people sitting over there inside the Great Hall of the People.. they should all consider themselves members of the people.' The words tumbled out at high speed.

'But why are you so keen on telling us foreigners these things?', I asked her.

'For a long time in the past we could not speak. Now there is more communication, we can speak our minds. We feel more and more that we, too, are human. We can speak out the things that are in our hearts.

'We know that in the past the people of China have been regarded as thoughtless Blue Ants, milling about, talking big but achieving little. But in the people's hearts, underneath these drab clothes, there is a strong power of thought.

'Our call now for liberalisation is not the call of Western youth, for rock and roll and nightclubs, that sort of thing. We have not come to that yet. If we can have a little freedom, look a little nicer, that will be fine. But the main thing to solve for the youth must be this: for ten years people could not read or write, could not study. That problem must be solved immediately. And we must end the sentences of the Educated Youth sent down to the villages. All are ready to take up new vocations. First solve these problems.'

A man, somewhat older, chimed in on the subject of the press itself, knowing we were journalists.

`Of course, our newspapers are not like yours. They exist only to carry out the work of propaganda. They probably won't report what happened tonight'. (He was right on that).

`We are all working people. We have finished our shifts, but instead of going home we have come here in the cold to talk over what is in our hearts.

`Chairman Mao has been dead now for three years. We knew that questions like democracy would have to be faced sooner or later, but we expected they would wait until we had made some economic progress. The reason this is happening now is that we realise that unless we solve the problem of democracy, we cannot make fast progress in our economy'.

It was near to midnight, and the frost was creating small haloes around the lights on the square. The handful of organisers on the steps of the monument called for a second rally at Democracy Wall the following day, and knots of Chinese youth melted off, back to the industrial suburbs, by bus and by bicycle.

There had been a sense of destiny, of the historical moment, as the place of isolated, almost surreptitious self-expression suddenly coalesced into a crowd of thinking people, all possessed with similar convictions, and believing that the future really did lie in their hands. From kindergarten on they had been told they should be revolutionaries - many had participated in violent civil ructions in the Cultural Revolution - and now it seemed they might be able to break through into an era of open participation in their country's decision-making - democracy!

Two more rallies followed that spontaneous eruption, on the Monday and Tuesday nights, and they were a sad lesson in the dynamics of mass politics. Things started poorly on Monday night, when the organisers switched the venue from Democracy Wall back to Tian An Men Square - perhaps anticipating trouble in that confined space by the bus depot. By the time people had straggled together, an hour had been lost, and there was some impaTiance in the crowd. There was also a different character to them. It seemed that a number of the most articulate leaders of the previous night had reconsidered

the risk of too much prominence, and they either stayed away or kept a low profile. On the other hand, it was clear that in the crowd of two thousand who were there many more than the previous night had come out of sheer curiosity, or worse, in the hopes of some *re nao*, a bit of sensation, perhaps.

Speakers could add little to the generalities of the night before, but the audience wanted to hear specifics, programmes, concrete demands. When these failed to materialise, there was heckling and jeering. We foreigners felt that some there were not merely neutral, but actively hostile to our presence. Occasionally someone in the crowd would mutter provocatively 'KGB, KGB', as a foreigner moved past. Some of the heckling, too, was Maoist in character. But, if there was a plan to defuse the movement, the tactic was clearly to be deflation, not confrontation. There was some aimless surging in the crowd, for no apparent reason, which served to distract the amateur democrats trying lamely to hold their audience.

As things ran down, a man in his middle forties, smugly dressed in cadre-standard clothing and with the hollow bonhomie of a Youth League organiser, took over the electronic megaphone. He was clearly a trained manipulator, and in half an hour he managed to blur all distinctions between the demands of the young democratic activists and the current Party line of controlled liberalisation. It's doubtful that a single person was impressed by his arguments, but his intervention was a depressing reminder, to all, of the omnipresence of the Party, the thought-control of its rhetoric. The overweening, bombastic Party slogan hoardings which still crowded the margins of the square, but had been forgotten in the democratic fervour, seemed to take on again their smug assurance: 'When you are gone, we will be here'. By the time the man finished, people were drifting off, and the rally was eviscerated. Its organisers doggedly announced another for the following night.

The third rally showed that the Democracy Movement was going nowhere on the streets. Fewer people again turned up - perhaps two thousand - and a disturbing proportion of those were loutish teenagers clearly in search of excitement. There was constant trouble and distraction in the crowds, and many

of the more serious-minded Chinese soon left in disgust.

'The Chinese people are not used to freedom of speech, and do not know how to handle it', said one disappointed activist. Others were convinced that the meetings had been deliberately undermined by agents of the Public Security, looking for an excuse to clamp down on the movement overall. The April 5th Forum put up a notice at Democracy Wall the following day, announcing that, on these grounds, there would be no more pre-arranged rallies, but they would be publishing a magazine, also named the 'April 5th Forum', for exchange of views among those who shared their concerns. It was to be known, later, as the Beijing Spring, the Democracy movement had blossomed, pollinated, and now it would fruit.



Democracy Wall in late 1978 – hands reach up for the dissident magazines



Crowds form in Tian An Men Square to read the Enlightenment Society's poster on the wall of the Public Security Bureau compound.



**Democracy Wall inspired night rallies of dissident youth all over China.
The official media ignored them completely.**

CHAPTER NINE

GOLDEN VOICE

The grey winter was deepening, and the romantic flush had died away from the cheeks of the young democratic activists. Several posters had gone up on the Democracy Wall criticising the Enlightenment Society from Guizhou as 'petty bourgeois intellectuals'. A Central Circular had been the rounds of local Party organisations, warning that this Democracy business should be kept within reasonable bounds. Rabble-rousing would not be tolerated, and criticism of the old Chairman, Mao Zedong, must not go too far. The faint-hearted enthusiasts dropped out of the movement within days, leaving the field to a harder core of poets on the one hand, working for freedom of speech and individual liberties, and an even smaller number of the most determined social critics, who were prepared to test the Party's promise of political freedoms to the limit.

A few days later, on December 5, an essay-length poster appeared on the Democracy Wall which set a new standard both in style and in content. It was signed with a pen-name, *Jin Sheng* (Golden Voice), which could have stood for an

individual or, in the common Chinese writing custom, for an editorial group. It was a brilliant polemic against the failures, deceptions and broken promises of Maoism, and against the entrenched powers that still held sway in China. Its author was witty, incisive, obviously well-read, and sprinkled with literary allusions so beloved of the Chinese.

It was also the first poster to question whether Deng Xiaoping was really as interested in the development of true Democracy as many poster-writers had happily assumed, and it uncompromisingly argued for Democracy as the pre-requisite, not the ultimate fruit, of social development. It was titled 'Democracy - the Fifth Modernisation'.

It had been common to see readers making notes from the posters they appreciated at the Wall, propping their pads on a knee or a tree. By the time I saw this poster, the morning after it had been pasted up, the space in front of it was jammed with a slow-moving throng of readers, many of them copying down the entire poster, word for word. As fingers quickly stiffened in the chill air, they would hand the task over to a friend and jam hands back in their armpits to revive them. It was clear that many were not just excited, but deeply moved.

'Democracy - The Fifth Modernisation' has since been published widely, in many languages, in anthologies of the writings of those times. This is not the place to reproduce it, tempting though it would be to do so in its entirety, for the essay, even in translation, is well worth reading by anyone who cares about Democratic ideals, or about the Chinese people. It is also a pleasure for those who enjoy rhetoric for its own sake.

It began by reminding the Chinese people of what they had hoped for with the return to power of Deng Xiaoping - the dream being held up before them of the Four Modernisations to bring universal bounty by the year 2,000. It recalled the old Chinese proverbs, 'Painting a picture of a cake, in order to satisfy hunger', and 'Looking at plums to ease the thirst'. It pointed to the Communist Party leadership's promises and campaigns of the past, and of the vast efforts of the masses expended in pursuit of Party dreams.

'Thirty years passed like one day, and left us this lesson: the

people are like the monkey grasping at the moon's reflection in a pool. Do they not realise there is nothing there?' People in power enforced the fiction.

`The people do not want Democracy, they want collective leadership. Believe this or not, as you choose - the point will be proven in prison... Go on, old yellow ox, continue the revolution. You will reach your heaven in the end'.

It traced the hollowness of Party claims that the people were already masters of their own destiny.

`Chinese worker, simply ask yourselves this: other than the meagre monthly salary to keep you from starving, whose masters are you.. what do you own? To spell it out is pitiful. Others are you masters. Even marriage is not an exception. In a socialist society, the workers are supposed to enjoy the fruits of their labour. But what do you get? Nothing but enough salary to support your power to produce...

`Is this the road to Socialism, as in the vision of Marx? Of course not... It is a feudal monarchical system disguised in the cloak of socialism.

It further compared the social system developed under China's Communist Party to the systems of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. It asked where the enormous labours of the working people had gone, and pointed to the relative luxuries of life enjoyed by the Party elite. Without Democracy, the `lords' would always be able to act `fearing neither law nor Heaven'.

`What the Lords are concerned about is not Democracy, but rather how to find excuses to thwart the people's democratic rights'...

`If we do not have this Fifth Modernisation, then the other Four Modernisations are no more than a new lie... Do not believe in the "unity and stability" called for by the despots... They have cheated the people of their most precious rights for thousands of years...

`The enemies of Democracy always tell the people that Democracy will develop of its own accord, so there is no need to waste your strength struggling for it. But as facts show, do

not socialist governments use their mandarins to turn history upside down? In fact, every little advance towards Democracy has been paid for by the blood of martyrs and of tyrants. Each stage has to fight against the forces of reaction...

`There will be more blood spilt, there will be more sacrifices, we may encounter more intrigues against us - but the banner of Democracy will no more be misused by the demons and freaks of reaction!'

This last paragraph was more accurate than the author himself, at that time, fully realised.

It's a cold, leaden evening. The office staff have departed for the weekend, and I've spent a dull afternoon filing an obligatory story on the alphabetization of the Chinese language. Looking out my window onto the leafless trees of Chang An Boulevard, my neck is jabbed by a piercing blast of cold wind from the leaky window-frame, and I don't look forward to trudging through the cold and dust of the Democracy Wall routine, yet again, in hopes of dredging the odd gem of enlightenment from between the thickening wads of personal grievance posters that are beginning to swamp it. The phone rings, and I hope it might be an invitation to dinner. An unfamiliar Chinese voice asks for me, using my Chinese name, Du Weici. Adrenaline begins to move, but I am cautious.

`What do you want?'

`I'd like to talk over some things with you!'

`Who are you?'

`A friend. Can we meet somewhere?'

`How did you get my phone number?'

There is still no published telephone directory in Beijing. Most numbers are considered to be state secrets.

`Someone gave me your namecard. Can you meet me now?'

I remember the dozen or so namecards that had been taken from me so eagerly at that first sensational rally at the Democracy Wall, and guess that this might be one of the activists from there. It could also be a black marketeer, someone wanting personal favours, or even, in the present climate, a police trap. But the adrenaline has got me by now. 'OK, I'll come in my car. Where shall I pick you up?'

The voice suggests the gateway to the Friendship Guest House, in the north-west suburbs of Beijing, far across the city. I nominate the soonest I can be there, describe my car, and quickly hang up. We assume all our phone calls are monitored at random, but even if the Public Security are interested, it will take them some time to organise themselves. I feel somewhat naked, and worried that my still-limited conversational Chinese will let me down. I phone the best linguists I can trust, but they are not home. I set off with a friend whose Chinese is only marginally better than my own.

There are forces moving out there, under that evening pall of winter coal-smoke, that have been dormant for many years. The known rules are being broken, and there has been no reaction from the powers. When the forces do clash, some people will be in between, will be crushed. It has always been the way, here. Sometimes, foreigners are made an example. As I drive through Beijing's gloomy dusk, to meet a total stranger, in the capsule of my comfortable, imported car, I wonder what risk I am taking.

At the rendezvous, I drive into the circle of powerful lights on the apron of the Friendship Guest House gateway. As usual, the young soldier on duty moves forward to ask me what country I am from, and what is my business. The security man inside the glassed guard-house looks up from his newspaper. But I am not seeking entry, and make a U-

turn on the apron, hoping my unseen contact will have had time to recognise the car as I had described it over the phone. The security man goes back to his newspaper, and I drive slowly out of the circle of light, heading back down the avenue, the way I had come. Odd behaviour, but foreigners are expected to be odd. A few metres further, and a figure emerges from behind one of the trees on the opposite side of the road, waving the arm of a heavily-padded overcoat. I cruise on a little way, do another sudden U-turn, and creep back to the point at which I'd seen him. Before the car has fully stopped, a tall figure comes out of the shadows and climbs into the back seat of the car. As a precaution, I have locked both front doors from the inside. We move off immediately, wondering what the young soldier stamping his cold feet in the brightly-lit gateway has made of the antics of this strange foreign driver.

'Where shall we go? Do you want to come to my place to talk? There are some people who might notice you.'

The man in the back seat has taken off his quilted hat, revealing a short, military-style crew-cut over a strong-boned, intelligent face, around thirty years old. He has an air of confidence which I do not share in this uncertain situation. 'Come to our place. We can talk there, it's quite safe. I'll show you the way'.

This is unprecedented. I look at my companion and raise my eyebrows. We shrug, and follow his directions. After a while, the car bumps off the main road, through a gap in some trees, and through a covered passage into the large courtyard of a four-storey Russian-style building of the fifties. I'm still muttering about Security as he directs me to nose the car in between a parked jeep and some piles of rubble, near a staircase entry. We pull up our collars, pull down our hats, and hurry behind him up the dim-lit stairs,

avoiding the ramshackle kitchens and chicken-coops installed on the landings. He identifies himself with 'It's me', at a flimsy wooden door, and takes us inside. The room is crowded with wooden cabinets, a couple of book-cases, a few chairs, and single bed along one wall. Three more young men rise to greet us. Our guide sends one outside to mind the door. Through a doorway I see two young women in the next room, watching television. We are sat down on the bed, and I pull out my notebook and tape recorder. They agree I can record, and begin to speak.

I had hardly had time to ask why he had brought us here, when our host launched straight into the subject.

'We are democratic activists. All of us are deeply concerned about the future of our country. The recent history of our country has been clouded, hidden from everybody, from us Chinese as well as from foreigners.

'I have seen many beggars, many people starved to death. The three years of drought, following the Great Leap Forward in 1958, saw twenty million people die. The biggest proportion were in my home province of Anhui - three million starved to death there. Later, during a year of living there in the villages, I saw some abandoned villages where every inhabitant had died. Ten years later, in 1968 and 1969, still no-one live there. I asked why no-one had returned to this fine village, this beautiful village, surrounded by fields. At that time, many of our generation were beginning to question these things, to question Marxism. We also wanted to study outside of Marxism. We had few resources. To understand the real situation in our own country was difficult'.

His friend chimed in, 'They didn't want us to know'.

The conversation from then on often referred to 'Them', (*tamen*) without further description. 'They' were the Party and its servants.

'It was very difficult for Chinese then living in the cities to know how bad things were in the country.. now many of us

comrades are trying to clarify these things'.

I interrupted, 'Sorry, I still don't know your names..'

The leader hesitated a moment, then said, 'My name.. its the pen-name I used to sign what I have written - Jin Sheng.'

This crew-cut young man was the author of 'Democracy - the Fifth Modernisation'.

'I am Lu Lin,' said his associate, a slighter, younger-looking man. He wrote down the characters for 'road' (*lu*) and 'forest' (*lin*).

'Golden Voice' and 'Forest Road' - two romantic pen-names in the old tradition if ever I heard them. It was compounded when I met another of their associates, Yang Guang ('Sunshine'). In fact, the men had chosen pen-names very close to their real names, taking advantage of the fact that most Chinese spoken words can be written in several quite different ideograph characters, according to their meaning. Lu Lin and Yang Guang were real names, but with changed written characters. Jin Sheng soon dropped the pseudonym, and signed his later writings with the real name by which the world would later hear of him: Wei Jingsheng.

We talked for an hour. Wei did most of the talking, and he was a fast talker, making no concessions to the limits of my fluency in Chinese. Occasionally I would lose the thread, but kept prompting him as best I could to keep going, knowing that later I could go over the tape with better linguists than myself.

Wei told how, after considering things for many years, he and his friends had concluded that China's greatest problem was *goanliao juyi*. Most simply translated as 'Bureaucratism', the word really refers to the Chinese 'mandarin' system, involving not merely the complex and conservative obstructions we naturally associate with bureaucracy, but also a system of feudal patronage and personal loyalties, binding the whole into an malignant and impenetrable mass.

'All the organs of power in this social system have been alienated to the hands of a minority. Others have no legal rights. And if there are different opinions within that minority, you can't drag them out. Nobody there has his own views.'

Lu Lin chipped in, 'Those who may have different opinions don't dare to speak, and if you do speak, you get squashed.'

'What do you think of the chances of the Four Modernisations, now being talked about?', I asked.

'We very much hope they can be achieved, but, looking at realities, we can't achieve them,' said Wei. 'You can see what I have written on my wallposter. Naturally the Four Modernisations are very good, they will raise the living standards of the people. Naturally, that would be a very good result. But the main restraint on the development of our nation's capacity to produce is the social system itself.'

Lu came in again. 'The people's spirit at present just can't be aroused. The workers just plod along where they are told, like cattle. If you wanted them to take initiative, they couldn't do it. At this pace, we will not have made much progress by the year 2,000. It is not possible to have achieved the Four Modernisations.'

'But there are still 20 years to go...' I suggested.

Lu scoffed. 'No good.. not even forty years would be enough! The people won't do it!

'This call to catch up with America and Britain was first raised twenty years ago, in the Great Leap Forward.' Wei said.

'Production figures were raised.. At the time the effort was great, and many people felt the result would be good, but when things came to their conclusion, most people were worse off than before. With the history of policies like these, we reckon that unless both the policies and the whole system are changed, the result will also be the same as before. The effort will be wasted.

'Just empty talk!', added Lu, who seemed apt to be more sweeping in his remarks.

Wei took him up. 'Yes, it is a lot of empty talk, and it's not just a minority of us who think so. The great majority of workers feel the same. None believe this kind of thing.

Workers can't be bothered organising themselves any more.'

'But most don't dare to speak out', said Lu, 'because the Cultural Revolution has left a deep impression.. if you spoke out then, you could be executed.'

This was the point I had been waiting to raise with them.

'Why is it that *you* now dare to speak out?'

Lu answered first, with some bravado. 'We are not afraid, because we rely on the spirit of the people. We don't care for our living standards, our families, for money. With the spirit of the Chinese people, we are not afraid.'

At the time I doubted inwardly that this outspoken Lu Lin would stand by his heroic posture if really tested. As it happens, when the time came, Lu Lin did stand firm, without fear.

Wei Jingsheng, again, answered more thoughtfully. 'The reason most people don't speak up on these matters is that most of the ordinary people don't understand these problems very clearly. Why don't they see them clearly? Because although all have their points of view, they have no way to exchange their points of view, so they have no means to put them in order. Thus they have only rather cloudy opinions.

'If, in your countries, nobody could converse, nobody dared to come and exchange their views, to speak their own minds, then you (foreigners), too, would be in the same boat. Most people's views include a lot of discontent, but discontent is not enough. One must also understand the realities. So we aim to do this kind of work. Naturally there is some danger in doing it. We few people, now undertaking this kind of work, know there are difficulties, but we are prepared to put ourselves to the test. For instance, our own rights, our own security, the conduct of our own lives, are all put at risk. It is worth it if, in the future, all the people of the country can achieve a better life..

'Many people outside the country will probably think that this is a lot of nonsense, that we don't have any strong movement behind us, that we are mere common citizens,

making a noise, but with nothing in our heads. Do they think that?'

Wei stopped, regarding me with a friendly skepticism, and I could not deny that many foreigners, including some reporters in Beijing, were inclined to write off the democratic movement just as he described it.

'There may be some who will think that this is somehow a part of the Communist Party's own work, its own tactics', I said.

Wei acknowledged that, as the movement grew, there would indeed be people getting involved in it who had backing from the Party centre or its security organs. Some would try to sabotage it by the crude tactics of writing obscenities on posters, or stirring up trouble while posters were being pasted up. Others, he said, would put up posters of their own attempting to influence the movement into conformity with Party policy. He spoke with some disgust of the way in which the three rallies in Tian An Men Square had degenerated, as an example of this. There were about ten people trying to organise it, he said, and even between those few there were serious disagreements on the direction the movement should take. Some wanted to attack the Party line, others wanted to support it. His own group had decided that the future course was not to hold public rallies, but to publish magazines, and try to reach the foreign press as well. Hence the phone call to me.

'If we didn't follow this line, it would be very dangerous. At first, we few just bumped into each other. But chance meetings are a very dangerous method to grow. We have a telephone downstairs. Someone watches that telephone, and if you make too many phone calls they come and question you. It's very possible crooks can ring up, and if I go to meet them, I'll be grabbed.'

I thought again of the chance I had taken in accepting Wei's own invitation that very night, and of my car, with its identifiable foreign press registration plate, sitting at that moment in the courtyard of the building below.

'We foreign journalists are all the official guests of the Foreign Ministry,' I reminded Wei. 'It is probable that our

telephones are recorded. Its likely that today, when you called me, someone was listening.'

He smiled, apparently unconcerned.

`It's very possible. But now, with Deng Xiaoping's policy of encouraging friendly relations with all foreign countries, the police are cautious not to exceed the limits. These are good times for us. Three years ago, we would have had no hope of such meetings. Our only request is that you foreign reporters publish about us in your papers and so on. But not our personal details or our address.. that kind of thing. If you do report these things, They will immediately know, and that will increase the danger for us. You can trust us.. the three of us would be beaten to death without betraying you, so you will get no trouble from us....

`If They discover our relationship, they can clap a mask on us as `spies sold out to capitalism'. We all chuckled nervously, though I was not enjoying this part of the discussion.

`Although this kind of coming and going between us has nothing to do with spying, They can easily say that it does. And although the ordinary people might not believe it, They still have the power to send us to Labour Reform, or even to execute us.. even secretly execute us without trial.. They can do it all. They have all the power they want. No matter what They do, They always have a reason, no-one can do a thing.. '

Lu Lin had been to answer the door, muttering something to someone through a crack, without opening the door fully to reveal the foreign visitors. Now he came back into the conversation.

`Our Human Rights, and your Human Rights, don't have the same meaning. When you talk of human rights, you talk of freedom of speech, freedom of opportunity, all kinds of freedom of action. We don't have that at all - we can only hope for some tiny rights of political equality.

`You can elect Human Rights leaders.. if you want such a person, you can choose him. We are not like that. Whom we can choose is decided from above. Whether the people like him or not doesn't matter. The leaders are the leaders. If you don't obey them.. poof! They'll take you away! That's it! We have no

right of choice.'

'What will your strategy be, then?,' I asked, wondering why, faced with this, they still bothered to try.

'In general, our aim is genuine elections', said Wei. 'The government may indulge in some empty talk on the subject, but, for real Democracy, we must rely on our own strength.'

'First, we must get the whole Chinese people to understand the question. When they understand it, we can put some pressure on the government. Then more and more people will rise up to take part in the work. It must be done through legal struggle, that is, in accordance with the laws. We don't plan to get involved in secret conspiracy, or in secret organisations. We don't want to work the way the Communist Party itself did in the past, before it gained power. We plan to work openly, with the support of all the people.'

We talked more - about the problems of the peasants, about Chairman Mao, about the influence on isolated Chinese minds of the flood of foreign films then being shown on Chinese television. Wei recalled a recent American movie, expertly dubbed into Chinese, which related the story of a young American who became a millionaire by the time he was twenty-four years old. That had been a cause of much debate in China, he said, and many articles and essays had been written on the subject of 'opportunity'.

Wei considered it very valuable for organisations like my employers, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, to continue their Chinese-language information and cultural broadcasts into China. All sources of alternative information were of great value to young people in evaluating their own country.

Meanwhile, my mind kept running back to my car parked in the dim courtyard below, and in my mind's eye a scenario unfolded in which a busybody old caretaker snooped about, called a local policeman, who took notes, and who in turn called the Foreign Ministry to advise that one of their guests was engaging in espionage. I wasn't engaging in espionage, of course, and there was no law or regulation to prevent me being right where I was. But, as Wei Jingsheng had just finished

reminding me, 'They' could do and say as they pleased.

When my tape ran out, we left, ducking our faces again from curious passers-by on the staircase. No-one had interfered with the car, and I drove home. Wei had given me the telephone number at his workplace, but, knowing the unwelcome attention that calls from foreigners would bring on him there, I said I must leave it to him to contact me when he wished to talk more.

The next time we met, a week or so later, Wei brought Yang Guang with him, and I picked them up in the car. On their own, they could not enter the Qi Jia Yuan compound, where I lived, without registering their names with the police at the gate and answering some stiff questions on the reasons for their visit. But the protocol seemed to run that if Chinese visitors entered and left the compound in the car of one of the foreign residents, they would not be stopped or questioned. Wei and Yang came up with me to the apartment, Wei, in particular, earning some hard looks from the lift attendants in his rough, dusty worker's clothes and heavy suede working boots. We talked more, as, again, I telephoned in vain around my linguist friends for some support.

We went over some of the same ground again - how many of those now active in the Democracy movement had been shocked out of their blind acceptance of the Party line when their careers as Red Guards took them out into the real peasant hinterland. We talked about the universities, where a growing number of foreign students were now sharing rooms, and some confidences, with Chinese student room-mates. Wei, of the 'lost generation' who had grown up when the universities were all closed down, was inclined to dismiss the Chinese university students as aspiring members of the elite.

'They are all thoroughly trained and indoctrinated before they are allowed to talk to foreigners. They know what they can say and what they can't say, and they have to report on their conversations. No-one interferes while you talk to them, but after you have gone, They will come and squeeze them for information.

He turned the conversation back to his fellow-activists.

'We are not just a few people with nothing better to do. We are all workers, going to work every day. We use our nights to do this.. we go without sleep all night. We want foreigners to understand that'.

'We also want to know about foreign countries - what is your own social system really like? How do things work in Australia? In Hong Kong?'

He asked my help in meeting more foreigners, to expand the exchange of knowledge. Knowing the grave dangers for any Chinese who kept up unauthorised relations with foreign diplomats, I did not suggest any of the Gynaecologists to him, though I would in the normal course of things be sharing with them what Wei was saying to me, in exchange for items they might have gleaned elsewhere. I was also concerned that Wei, so cavalier in his readiness to take risks, could easily find himself betrayed if he spoke to journalists who could not be trusted to protect his confidences. In the end, the only person I could recommend to Wei was Francis Deron, of Agence France-Press, who was an ardent sinologist, a fluent linguist, and a person of great discretion. It seems extraordinary now, but in 1978 Deron and myself were the only accredited Western journalists in China with formal Chinese language training, though some others had picked up a little since their arrival.

Wei Jingsheng and Yang Guang also displayed a great thirst for foreign newspapers and periodicals, but as they could read only Chinese, there was little I could offer them.

Finally, Wei asked if I could help him obtain a Chinese-character typewriter, to use in the production of their magazine, '*Tan Suo*' (Explorations) which had now gone into its second issue. This I saw as a very serious mistake on his part, and I warned him, in Chinese as strong as I could muster, that it would be very dangerous for Wei and for 'Explorations' if I were to help him in that way. Nothing could suit the enemies of Wei's ideas better than to be able to label his group as 'puppets of foreign powers and foreign money'. All I could do, all I would ever do, was to buy a subscription to 'Explorations' itself, and I warned Wei not to ask more than that of other

foreigners, for his own sake.

Wei seemed disinclined to listen to this. For all his trenchant criticisms of the Party and its leaders, he seemed sure that Deng Xiaoping had issued a New Covenant that would protect Wei and others like him.

'Now that Deng Xiaoping has come back to centre stage, things are much better. Before, we had even less freedom. In the past, if I had come here, the people in the lift would certainly report me, and as I left there would be a car waiting to pick me up. It's better now, it's not like that now!'

Much had happened by the time of our next meeting.

Deng Xiaoping's *wei qi* beans were clicking down with great speed through that December and January. About the time I first met Wei Jingsheng, a Party circular from the Beijing Municipal Government had told officials to warn those under them against the Democracy Wall, saying that it was being made use of by hostile forces. It named the Soviet official newsagency, Tass, and said some western reportage was also deliberately exaggerating the events in order to promote rumours of disunity among China's Party leadership. This disingenuous document was a warning both to and against foreigners, and there were incidents at the Wall in the succeeding days in which western observers who happened to be wearing fur hats faced hostile groups of youths muttering 'Tass, Tass'. Discretion was the better part of valour for a foreigner in those circumstances.

But the Wall movement could not be suppressed without agreement from the national party centre, i.e. Deng Xiaoping. One reason he would not agree became evident a few days later, with the stunning announcement on December 16th that China and the United States had agreed on a formula of mutual recognition, which would permit the resumption of full diplomatic relations after a break of thirty years. The negotiations had been in progress, or regress as China's political climate varied, since President Richard Nixon's visit in 1972. It was Premier Hua Guofeng who made the

announcement on China's behalf, but within hours it was also announced that Deng Xiaoping would be paying an official visit to the United States within a few weeks, in January. This would be the first visit of any senior government figure of the Peoples Republic to the United States.

Americans diplomats in Beijing also cheerfully let it be known that, while there had been some steady progress in the negotiations for a number of months, all remaining obstacles were swept away in a mere three days after Deng Xiaoping himself decided to sit down at the bargaining table.

Visiting American press during that time were writing somewhat hysterically about 'Democracy comes to China', taking rather too literally Deng's earlier remarks about the Wall. Deng was being hailed in the United States as the architect of a miraculously democratic China such as Americans had dreamed of for decades, so it was obvious that Deng himself was not keen to do anything which could stamp him as a suppressor of Democracy, right on the eve of his historic visit to the USA.

Through late December and early January, the Democracy Movement spread rapidly to many other large cities of China. Official media continued to ignore the phenomenon, on the whole, but by word of mouth and from reading the foreign coverage re- printed in the Reference News the word got around. 'Democracy Walls' sprang up in Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and numerous other places, and officials, who would have loved to crack down on the unbounded cheek these displayed, were obliged to hold their fire.

But something else was building up in China at the same time. Through December, the official media carried an escalating series of reports of Vietnamese 'violations' of China's southern border - for long a source of friction. At Christmas, we heard that at least three divisions of Vietnamese troops had attacked the forces of China's ally, Pol Pot, in Kampuchea, in a full- scale invasion. The Chinese foreign ministry began issuing formal diplomatic protest notes to

Vietnam, the wording of which drifted closer and closer to being an ultimatum, without ever specifying what China's precise retaliation might be.

In early January, the Vietnamese divisions took Phnom Penh. Half the Khmer Rouge government arrived in Beijing as refugees, and the other half retreated into the jungles, armed with loud declarations of moral support from Beijing for a 'fight to the death'. China reported more and more serious skirmishing along its own border with Vietnam.

There were also a series of announcements of great internal importance in China, concerning changes of direction in economic and social policies which promised something closer to a western style society. Rights and properties taken from China's professional and business classes over the years were to be returned to them on a wide scale. At the same time, January was a very trying month for Beijing's civil authorities, as tens of thousands of aggrieved individuals from every part of China, seeking personal redress, flooded into the capital to petition Deng Xiaoping directly. Deng did not allow them to be removed or treated roughly, as they were useful, living proof of everything he had been criticising about the economic and social policies of the previous twenty years. But neither, of course, could Deng nor the principal leadership deal individually with their complaints.

As the date for Deng's departure to the United States grew closer, tension mounted in the areas of Beijing where the petitioners gathered, and at the Democracy Wall, where many of them had pasted up long personal histories and appeals. One Sunday, a Beijing woman with a grievance of her own organised several hundred of the petitioners into a march to the gate of Zhong Nan Hai, the leadership's residential compound. Foreign photographers' pictures of this miserable throng, crying out for justice, some crippled and in rags of poverty, made front pages around the world, especially in the United States. From Deng Xiaoping's point of view, this was most unfortunate timing, as it graphically undercut so much that had been done to create a benevolent, progressive image of contemporary China.

Within days there was an angry meeting of activists at the Democracy Wall, claiming to have got wind of a top-level decision to crack down against freedom of expression in the streets and on the walls. In a few more days, the young woman who had organised that peasant march, Fu Yuehua, was arrested on charges of breaching the peace. The suspicions that had been growing in the minds of many of the activists focused in an enraged sense of betrayal. More meetings at Democracy Wall protested against the arrest, and supporters pasted a giant slogan, demanding Fu Yuehua's release, right across the head of Tian An Men Square. In huge characters, one to each yellow poster page, it straddled the foot of the Gate of Heavenly Peace itself, the very symbol of Beijing, from which Chairman Mao had declared the Peoples Republic and reviewed the million-strong Red Guard rallies. There was more tension, and anger on both sides, but still no general crackdown.

On January 28th, the day before that year's Chinese New Year holiday, Deng Xiaoping took off for the United States, dragging behind him, comet-like, a huge train of excited Chinese officials and media representatives. But as Deng's progress across the United States got daily saturation cover in the Chinese media, whether wearing a cowboy hat or being flattered by John Denver, the mood at Democracy Wall was increasingly pessimistic. The euphoria had gone with the arrest of Fu Yuehua, and the climate now was one of disappointment and some anxiety.

I was out of Beijing for parts of February and March, on a filming expedition which had taken months of planning and could not be postponed. Each time I returned to Beijing, I would catch up with developments at the Wall as best I could. More editions of 'Explorations' were published, and I learned that Wei Jingsheng had managed to make contact with some other foreign journalists.

On March 17th, as I was standing on the platform of a railway station at Suzhou, in East China, the station loudspeakers announced a Chinese 'counter-attack in self-defence' against Vietnam, in which Chinese troops had crossed the border. For the next few days, with an almost total lack of

information of any kind about the fighting from the Chinese side, I could report only China's repeated insistence that this was a brief punitive raid which would be over within days, that China did not seek an inch of Vietnamese territory, and China's denials that the invasion had anything to do with Vietnam's overthrow of China's ally, the Khmer Rouge regime of Kampuchea.

I had returned to Beijing as soon as possible, but would have to leave for the prearranged film work in two or three weeks time. The timing was close, but by juggling schedules I was able to hang on in Beijing until China's Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, called a press conference at the Foreign Ministry to announce that all Chinese troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam.

A week or so prior to this, I had received a call in the early afternoon from Wei Jingsheng. I had told him he should call in the evenings, as it was better not to have the Chinese office staff listening to conversations that took place in Chinese. He said something important had happened and he wanted to talk to me. Could I pick him up outside the Minzu ('Nationalities') Hotel? I left to meet him, thinking it highly probable that this time, in the present climate, someone had been listening to the phone. With such a public rendezvous, trouble was possible. On the way down Chang An to the Minzu I passed the Democracy Wall, now taking on a somewhat shabby appearance from the layer upon layer of crudely lettered papers pasted along its length.

Wei was standing under the tree directly beside the Hotel driveway, in full view of anyone watching from the security post at the door. I drove off quickly as he climbed into the front seat, and detoured for some time through small lanes to see whether we might be being followed. We weren't. I couldn't take him to my own office at that time, as the local staff would then be bound to get involved, one way or another. Eventually we drove to the house of another friend, and I called one of my colleagues to come and help make sure I did not miss anything.

Wei had telephoned me immediately following a conversation with another correspondent, which had gone

seriously wrong, he felt. They had been talking about the war situation, and Wei had told the correspondent a few things that he knew. He said that he had asked the correspondent not to publish the information, because if it came back to China, Wei himself could get into trouble, and the other Chinese who had told Wei these things could also get into trouble. Did we know this correspondent? He had seemed to become very unfriendly, and the interview had ended badly.

The correspondent Wei had met was Ian Mackenzie, a large, bearded Scot who was bureau chief of Reuters in Beijing. Reuters had been taking something of a hiding from their main rival, Agence France-Press, in their coverage of the Democracy Movement, since neither of their two correspondents then in Beijing, though experienced reporters, could speak any Chinese at all. They therefore had no unsupervised sources whatsoever, and had to rely for their coverage on dragging their very competent, but orthodox and often reluctant, office interpreter down to the wall during his limited working hours. With so much of the real activity going on at night and on Sundays, it was a real handicap. Ian Mackenzie's initial reaction to this situation was a common professional error - he sought to downplay the importance of the story.

'They're just a bunch of kids', he said angrily to another correspondent at one stage.

The story just wouldn't go away, however, and Reuters had to struggle on as best they could with it, while Agence France-Press kept scooping them. Ian Mackenzie was delighted, then when Bill Kwo turned up in Beijing. Bill, whose Chinese name is Guo Li, is a short, round, mercurial character in his forties with an exotic and complex personal history divided almost equally between London and Beijing. He had come to Beijing at this stage as the representative of the world's major international television newsagency, Visnews, of which Reuters is a part owner. On Visnews behalf, he was negotiating television news exchange agreements with the Chinese Central Television organisation, but he also showed enthusiastic interest in the Democracy Movement, and had brought an 8mm movie camera with him hoping to shoot some stories of his

own while he was there. He was all too ready to act as interpreter for Mackenzie in any contact with activists. It was in Bill Kwo's room at the Minzu Hotel that the interview with Wei Jingsheng took place. It was the contents of this interview that were later to be a significant source of evidence against Wei in his subsequent trial for treason.

In mid-March, after his return from the United States, and with the punitive invasion of Vietnam under way, it appears that Deng Xiaoping now found it expedient to make some concessions to those in the national hierarchy who were itching to clamp down on the public Democracy movement. The news got around quickly in Beijing. Some reports had Deng agreeing to some arrests, but some signs of reluctance.

'If we go down the old track of suppressing unorthodox opinions and rejecting criticisms, we will lose the trust and support of the masses', he was reported as telling a meeting of officials.

'So, in my view, we should let the people put up a few wallposters. Pick up a few proven trouble-makers in this Human Rights movement, but let the others do as they please'.

Wei Jingsheng seems by this time to have given up his earlier hope that the Democracy Movement could continue indefinitely on its present programme of agitation. In a conversation, recalled in the book 'Coming Alive - China after Mao', by one of the most active of the Gynaecologists, the British diplomat Roger Garside, Wei Jingsheng had acknowledged that collision was inevitable, 'because we want to go further than those Party leaders who have called for Democracy and liberation of thinking'.

Garside then asked him why, knowing the punishment in store, he and his colleagues persisted.

'Because I know that Democracy is the future of China, and if I speak out, now, there is a possibility that I can hasten the day when the Chinese people can enjoy Democracy. Two years ago it was pointless for us to speak or write as we do now, for we would have been arrested as soon as the words were out of our mouths. Now, through our posters and our journal, we can

make our voice heard'.

As the stories of Deng Xiaoping's compromise circulated, Wei Jingsheng's group brought out a special edition of 'Explorations' in which Wei, in a signed editorial, lambasted Deng for betraying Democracy and free speech. It was an emotional and provocative essay, and one is bound to wonder whether, under Wei Jingsheng's invariably calm demeanour, he was not, in fact, actively seeking a kind of martyrdom.

At this point our genial hosts, the Foreign Ministry Information Department, suddenly arranged what the resident correspondents had been requesting in vain for over a month - a visit to the war zone at the Vietnamese border. Not quite to the war zone, as it transpired, but to a prisoner-of-war camp in Yunnan province, where we were to be shown Vietnamese military and civilian prisoners in varying degrees of penitence. While the majority of the seasoned resident reporters were thus drowsing through endless briefings in a tropical barracks, thousands of kilometres from Beijing, the authorities announced a set of severe guidelines to 'clarify' the freedoms of speech, assembly, and poster-writing. This revived one of the old faithful slogans of the past: the 'Four Principles' - a meaningless title, since they all traced back to a single principle at root, thus:

- 1. Keep to the Socialist Road.**
- 2. Uphold the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.**
- 3. Uphold the Leadership of the Communist Party of China.**
- 4. Uphold Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.**

The regulations had a preamble which encouraged 'emancipating the mind' and 'seeking truth from facts', but the sting to it was a complete prohibition on any slogans, wallposters, books, journals, photographs or any other materials which did not fully support the 'Four Principles'. At a stroke, any fundamental public criticism of China's social system became a criminal act.

Two days later, on March 30th, I was in Kunming, the

capital of Yunnan province, following a long train ride up from the POW camp with a tired and irritable group of colleagues. In the evening, as usual, I turned on my short-wave radio for the world news. Radio Australia, all bias aside, was universally recognised as providing the quickest and most thorough international news service for the Asian region. On that evening bulletin I heard a three-line report, quoting newsagencies in Beijing, to the effect that Wei Jingsheng, and several others, had been arrested.

Five days later, Ren Wanding, the mild, studious leader of a group calling itself the Human Rights Alliance, was arrested at the Democracy Wall itself, in the act of putting up a poster criticising the new regulations. By a great irony, this was the third anniversary of the Tian An Men Incident, the day those thousands of Beijing citizens had defied the regime of their time to place their flowery tributes to Zhou Enlai in the square. A foreign press photographer, who had been tipped off that the arrest was imminent, was manhandled by police as he photographed Ren Wanding being led away. To many, it seemed the end of the Democracy Movement.

There's no law against poetry, yet. Someone has put up a poster on the Democracy Wall, advertising a mass poetry-reading to be held this Sunday afternoon beside the Yuyuantan, the 'Jade Spring Pool', in Beijing's west. Well away from Xidan, it is convenient for cyclists coming from the south-western districts, where most of the theatrical units are based, and from the north-western district, from the colleges and universities. I drift in with my tape-recorder, and find a hundred or so young people gathered in a thin grove of conifers, where a low mound presents an outdoor stage. Several young men are working away at a battery-operated public address system they have drawn out of a kitbag - prodding it with pliers, hanging metal loudspeaker horns in a tree. It's too early in spring for any new growth on the ground, and the powdery dust rises slowly, like a low evening mist, as people move around. Some sit on the few patches of pine-needles, under the trees, or on their khaki book-satchels. Couples have brought a child or two.

Music erupts suddenly from the metal horns, falters, crackles, then stabilises. It's a synthetic disco arrangement of 'The Laughing Cavalier', a cassette from Hong Kong. It's harsh, but it's a statement of sorts. Young poets file across the stage, some shy, some histrionic and declamatory. There are love poems.. young women in the crowd blush and nudge each other. Declarations of fervent patriotism are received in silence. A tall, thin man of thirty recites a cycle of small poems on alienation, wispy little beard moving up and down with the point of his chin. An old man on the fringe suddenly launches into a traditional verse- ballad, accompanying himself with rhythmic wooden clappers. Among these earnest young descendants of the mandarins, he revives the poor man's art of social protest through satire, China's blues.

Plainclothes police agents are in the crowd. The activists know who they are, and avoid eye-contact, denying the enemy. Agents make a show of photographing any Chinese who speaks to a foreigner. The afternoon chills, as the sun moves below the smog-line, and the poets leave the stage. People queue to buy copies of their magazines. Suddenly, there are new focuses of attention. Dotted through the crowd, people open their satchels and begin a hasty distribution of pamphlets demanding an end to government intimidation of democratic activists. Papers are jammed into coat pockets and people disperse quickly, pretending the police are not amongst them.

There were about thirty arrests that April, all based on the new regulations, and often, in Chinese fashion, applying them retrospectively to actions committed before the regulations were promulgated. Such is Chinese law: it is not a mutual treaty between the rulers and the ruled, equally binding on each, but a unilateral statement of the attitude, general or detailed, of the rulers. Communist party legislators call this 'responding to the indignant demands of the masses'. Throughout the history of the Peoples Republic, thousands upon thousands of Chinese have been prosecuted for actions

which became 'crimes' only many years after they had been committed.

Another of the many *wei qi* counters that had been laid that year was the beginning of a general discussion of the Rule of Law. Certain powerful figures in Beijing were arguing strongly that a true Rule of Law must be created in China, if China were to become a modern state, and if the Party were to retain the loyalty of the masses. In the *wei qi* game, even mere public discussion of this would further detract from the authority of the mantle of Mao Zedong, currently worn by the Party's number one office holder, Hua Guofeng. One of the side-effects of this line of thinking was the extraordinary way the trial of Wei Jingsheng was conducted.

Nothing more was heard of Wei Jingsheng for almost six months following his arrest. The Democracy Wall kept going, although it became increasingly difficult to locate the interesting political comment among the voluminous personal grievances that plastered it. There were periodic calls for the release of Wei, of Ren Wanding, and others who had been arrested.

In June, the National Peoples Congress met for its annual plenary session. This, too, differed from the previous decades, in that the Chinese media were encouraged to report discussions taking place on various issues, not simply the 'unanimous' adoption of resolutions proposed by the bosses. The idea was to show a kind of representative government at work. One such reported debate was on the abolition of the right to put up wallposters.

A professor of physics was quoted defending the practice, though suggesting that people attacked in wallposters should have right of redress through laws of libel. A rural cadre was quoted at length giving the view that 'suggestion boxes' at people's work units were a more than adequate substitute. By definition, those appointed to the NPC are integrated with the existing political system, and cannot speak for the politically alienated who are represented by the Democracy movement. However, this report indicated that Deng's policy of allowing the posters to continue, but pouncing on the outspoken, was

still in force.

Steps towards restoring confidence in the rule of law were also proposed at this NPC meeting, one of them being the restoration of 'open, public trials'. A new Criminal Code was adopted, supposedly aimed at the various kinds of delinquency which had been coming to light in the preceding months. Very soon, the Chinese public were treated to two televised reports of major criminal court cases - a large-scale embezzler, and a local rapist-murderer. In the case of the murderer, the camera followed the man to the courtroom where his final appeal for clemency was rejected, then to his immediate delivery, in clanking chains, to the execution ground, where a soldier held a pistol to the condemned man's head.

Of particular importance to the democratic activists was that while China's law officials denied that there was such a thing as a 'political crime' in China, the crime of 'counter-revolutionary activity' was prominent in the new Criminal Code, right at the top. It was second in criminal importance only to treason, and in a more serious category than rape or murder.

In October, Wei Jingsheng was finally brought to trial. The charges were extremely serious: 'Selling State Secrets to Foreigners', and 'Engaging in Counter-revolutionary Agitation.' Wei's trial was also to be an 'open' one, with a public gallery admitted by tickets. No foreign press were permitted to attend, and none of Wei's former colleagues on 'Explorations'. The American Embassy in Beijing submitted a request to send an observer, but it was refused. The trial was set for the morning of October 16th.

There's nothing grand about the entrance to the Beijing Intermediate Court. A plain wrought-iron gate opens onto a short concrete driveway to the entrance porch of what could be any one of thirty fifteen-story buildings thrown up in 1977 along Nan San Men street - 'Three South Gates'. This wall of grey concrete towers stands where used to be the great red Ming city wall and moat of the Imperial Capital. The anonymous tower holding the Intermediate Court is on

ground where the Boxer rebels laid siege to the Foreign Legations of Beijing during those famous fifty-five days in 1900. Today we are standing about, hoping for scraps, uncertain what opportunities may come up. Fifty or so Chinese, mainly young activists, are waiting too. There is little conversation, and the morning is grey. I climb on a heap of building rubble to take some film shots. Someone from the invited trial audience comes out of the building. He is besieged with questioners, but, under the eye of guards, doesn't want to talk to foreign reporters. A car comes through the gate and is mobbed by photographers, on the chance Wei Jingsheng might be inside it. The court adjourns, and the audience stream out. Some push hastily through the crowd and hurry off, others give a few guarded remarks. Wei defended himself strongly, we are told.

A closed jeep is preparing to leave the grounds of the court building. At that moment a crowd of thirty schoolchildren issue from a laneway and mill about noisily, excited by the unexpected display of foreigners in their neighbourhood. The jeep noses out slowly through the crowd, and we jostle and peer inside, trying to make out if Wei is there. We can see nothing. A ten year-old boy from the school runs along beside the jeep, shouting hoarsely, 'Where's the criminal? Where's the criminal?' The trial has not yet finished, but Xinhua has already referred to 'the counter-revolutionary, Wei Jingsheng'.

By late afternoon, Wei Jingsheng had been found guilty of both charges and sentenced to fifteen years labour reform, with a further three years 'deprivation of political rights' - kind of parole system. Chinese official media ran hot with 'spontaneous' approval from people who had been in the courtroom. A Communist Youth League activist, whose parents had given him the name Weidong ('serve Mao'), described Wei Jingsheng as 'the scum of Chinese youth'.

Xinhua announced that two of Wei Jingsheng's former colleagues on *Tan Suo*, who had been arrested with him, had

`confessed everything with a good attitude' and given evidence against Wei. They were released scot-free. One of these was none other than Yang Guang, who had sat with Wei in my apartment, talking with such heat about the need for change. Yang, it later appeared, had given in to pressure from his family. Yang Guang's father was an American-educated engineer of that generation who had returned eagerly to help with the construction of a New China in 1949, only to find themselves abused, mistrusted and banned from applying their professions in a series of hostile political campaigns. That class, by now nearing the ends of their working lives, were just beginning to regain hope for the role they could play in the new liberalised economy. One can only guess, at this stage, what pressures were put on Yang to recant and betray his friend, but he was only behaving within a time-honoured tradition of Chinese politics. Whatever the background, I could be sure that nothing that had passed between Wei Jingsheng and myself was a secret any more - which is why I have re-produced parts of our conversations freely here, at a time when Wei himself is behind bars.

The prosecution's trump card was what they described as a transcript of the conversation between Wei Jingsheng and Ian Mackenzie, that day in the Minzu Hotel, after which Wei had contacted me in some alarm. Based on this `transcript', they claimed that Wei had asked Mackenzie for several hundred dollars, in return for information about China's military involvement in Vietnam - numbers of troops, casualties, and names of various commanders. Ian Mackenzie happened to be on leave in London at the time of the trial. In what many colleagues considered a dubious exercise of standard journalistic ethics, Mackenzie went public and broadcast an interview, heard in China via the BBC World Service, in which he said that Wei had indeed tried to sell him information, and that he, Mackenzie, had refused both that offer and any further contact. This statement was broadcast before Wei's appeal period was up. It is unlikely to have affected the outcome, which in any case had been determined long before the trial every occurred. But it fell far short of the journalist's normally

accepted responsibility to protect sources who have spoken to him in confidence. Ian Mackenzie later returned to a very cool reception from many colleagues in Beijing, as a result of this.

Having spoken separately to Wei Jingsheng, to Ian Mackenzie, and to the interpreter Bill Kwo after this event, I believe that it was a very unfortunate misunderstanding. I believe Wei did, foolishly, ask for monetary assistance, as he had earlier asked me to help him procure a typewriter. Wei did pass on what he later described in court as 'hearsay' information about the Chinese military, but this was actually information which had already been published by other foreign correspondents, and which Mackenzie was simply asking Wei to confirm. Wei did not in any way see this as a transaction, one thing for the other, and was rightly alarmed when Mackenzie took it that way.

The other nasty aspect of this incident was the suspicion over how the Public Security Bureau obtained a transcript of the conversation. Some of the Democracy activists were inclined to believe that Wei Jingsheng had been betrayed by Ian Mackenzie or by Bill Kwo handing over a tape of the conversation. There was a poster put up, bitterly criticising the untrustworthiness of foreign reporters - no doubt a document of some satisfaction to the authorities. My own belief is that Bill Kwo's hotel room was bugged, possibly for reasons quite unrelated to Wei Jingsheng, and that the conversation was picked up that way. For my own part, I would never have allowed a person running risks like Wei Jingsheng to visit me in a hotel room, as we all knew places like the Minzu were bugged, not constantly, but as a matter of routine check-ups on what foreign visitors were up to.

It gave me no satisfaction that the unheeded warnings I had heaped on Wei Jingsheng, concerning the risks of his foreign contacts, had proven horribly prophetic.

There was a further sensational aspect to this case when the April 5th Forum, the broadest umbrella-group of Democracy Wall activists, began pasting up large sections of their own transcripts of the very trial itself. Someone sympathetic to the Democracy Movement had smuggled a tape recorder into the

court- room. For some reason, police made arrests when the Forum tried to distribute printed copies of this, claiming that it was a 'secret' document unless released by the Court itself, but they made no attempt to remove those sections of the transcript which were pasted up on the Democracy Wall itself.

Early in the transcript, police records of their inter- rogation of Wei Jingsheng revealed he had told them that I was the first foreign journalist with whom he made contact. Since the Foreign Ministry had shown themselves to have remained entirely friendly towards Ian Mackenzie, whom their own courts had accused of being involved in a spying operation, it was unlikely that I would find myself in any trouble over my own contacts with Wei. It was also clear that Wei was not attempting to defend himself with denials of fact, but with explanations of his actions.

Almost the whole of Wei Jingsheng's address in his own defence was pasted up in transcript on the wall. It has been published elsewhere, and is available to those interested in the detail. On the charge of selling state secrets, his defence was to deny that what he had revealed was intended to be, nor could be, either useful to the enemy or injurious to China. More fundamentally, he pointed out that under Chinese rules, no-one could be certain just what should be considered as a State Secret at any given time. He reminded the court that, under the Gang of Four, simply to be seen in any unauthorised conversation whatsoever with a foreigner could be enough to earn a charge of spying. The arguments were accurate, but also specious, since Wei knew as well as anybody that the legal definition of a state secret in China is 'any information at all which has not been specifically cleared for publication'. Finally, Wei admitted that he had 'made a mistake' in talking about military matter to Mackenzie.

If Wei Jingsheng had chosen to abase himself, to repudiate his views publicly, and to submit ask humbly for 're-education' by the Party, he would probably have been sentenced to between three and six years. Instead, he earned the maximum sentence for charges he faced, because he refused to confess and 'show a good attitude'. In his defence against the second

charge - that of carrying out counter-revolutionary activities - Wei did the almost unthinkable: he turned the charges back against his accusers. Using the language of Marxist polemics, he equated 'revolution' with progress, progress with Democracy, and opposition to democratic freedoms with counter-revolution.

'Revolution is the battle of the new against the old.. or is it that anything that opposes current theories of those in power must be destroyed? That might is right? That concept of revolution was one of the most effective instruments used by the Gang of Four over twenty years, to oppress revolutionaries and the people...

'Those who oppose the tide of Democracy are standing for dictatorship... Those who oppose it should be the ones put on the list of counter-revolutionary criminals..

'I distinguish two basic types of socialist system. The first is the Soviet-style dictatorial socialism in which the power is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. The second is democratic socialism, in which democratic methods are used to distribute power... The hope of the vast majority of the people of our country is the establishment of this type of democratic socialism. The aim of our 'Explorations' magazine was also to search for the path to this type of socialist system... 'If criticism of the leadership is to be considered a crime.. this is the same as placing leaders in the ranks of the gods. Must we follow again on the road of the Gang of Four, building another road to a modern superstition?'

Wei's defence might have been a telling one before a jury of liberal thinkers, but, as he had said to me in our first conversation, 'It doesn't matter what you say or do, They can do what they like with you'. He was, in effect, baiting the court with his frequent comparisons to 'Gang of Four' thinking, and it probably contributed to the harshness of his sentence.

Wei Jingsheng's trial was also reported on television, as a part of the Criminal Code propaganda campaign. The report referred to the compounding offence of his refusal to admit he was wrong, and it showed a brief shot of Wei, in contrast to the usual cowed and obsequious convict's demeanour, standing

boldly and proudly before the court in his prison clothes and shaven head, delivering his defence oration with the same calm expression I had always seen him wear. I asked a few ordinary Chinese, not activists by any means, what they thought of Wei and his trial. None of them delivered the expected regurgitation of a safe propaganda line. One conservative working man gave Wei what was close to the highest compliment in that particular man's vocabulary:

'He's really got guts. There should be more like him'.

A few weeks after Wei's conviction, the Beijing Municipality issued a new regulation, officially killing the Democracy Wall. As a token gesture, a new 'Democracy Wall' was to be set up in the park of the Altar of the Moon, an awkward place to reach at any time and well off the beaten track. Moreover, persons wishing to put up a poster had to sign their real names, and to register their name, address, and work unit with a warden before they could go ahead. Not surprisingly, the new 'Democracy Wall' was a dead duck, and soon ignored.

For a week after the Xidan Democracy Wall was banned, the last posters to be hung there faded slowly in the weather, which was turning again to winter. It had been just a year since those first intoxicating rallies and marches had introduced what many activists, and foreign headline-writers, called the 'Beijing Spring'. Many thousands of intensely patriotic young Chinese had been swept up in the idea that they could make their own voices heard above the ceaseless drone of Party propaganda, that they could contribute to the body of thought in their people. Wei Jingsheng, and the others who had been arrested, had sacrificed themselves, knowingly, in a way that few Westerners are ever called to do other than in time of war. What they achieved will also be as debatable as the achievements of people who have died in wars for ill-defined causes or even sheer pride.

In the early, frosty hours of the morning of December 8 1979, a work gang of women in warm quilted overalls came down to clean up the Democracy Wall. With spades and hoses, they scraped away those crowded layers of personal expression

- the dreams, the wild notions, the earnest debates, the tales of persecution and torture at the hands of bullies. As a souvenir, I tore off a piece of a wad of posters that had been scraped down, and took it home with me. Looking at it now - a wafer section of ten layers of posters - the only legible complete phrase on that ragged piece of Democracy Wall is the carefully lettered characters, 'I do not know..'. A deferential opening to a strong personal attack? A diffident conclusion to a proposal for social reform? The anguish of separation from an arrested loved one? It could have been any of these things, but, in my turn, I do not know.

By the following Spring, flower and lawn beds, protected by little iron fences, had been laid out on that patch of ground, that no-man's-land between Party and people, where those first rallies for socialist Democracy had surged across the dust. Neat signs warned 'Please keep off the grass'. On the wall itself, still guarding the bus depot, a symbol of a new China had arisen, in the form of large, floodlit hoardings for commercial advertising.

Gradually, over the following two years, all those activists known to foreigners were picked up and given sentences, though none as long as Wei Jingsheng's fifteen years. The Public Security Bureau is renowned for its patience and its long memory. Such discussions of Democracy as continued were confined to authorised debates in academic institutions, or occasionally in the official press.

Deng Xiaoping's *wei qi* game had its conclusion, in the fullness of time, in a thorough changing of the guard in all senior posts of the Peoples Republic. With Chairman Hua and his fellow adherents to a conservative orthodoxy disposed of, Deng and the new, businesslike generation of managers could see little need to indulge would-be democrats and social reformers outside their own Party fold.

At the National Peoples Congress session in September, 1980, the Constitution of the Peoples Republic was amended to eliminate the article, inserted by the Gang of Four in 1975, which guaranteed citizens the 'Four Big Freedoms' as they were known: the freedoms to paste up posters and to hold

public debates, to raise various opinions, and to disagree. The constitution retained references to freedom of speech in other contexts, but the special status of the Big-Character Poster had come to an end. As with the rest of Chinese law, the Constitution is really no more than a manifesto of current policy, as it can be amended at will by the National Peoples Congress and has no greater legal weight than any other law. Never the less, activists and sundry protesters set considerable store by having Constitutional support for their actions, and regretted its passing.

In 1983, Premier Zhao Ziyang announced that China was finally setting up a Ministry of State Security - the equivalent of the USSR's KGB. Confusion and overlap between various arms and levels of the Public Security apparatus up to that point had sometimes left gaps in which careful people could find some latitude. All reports since then have indicated that a prime task of the new Ministry is to exercise a more forthright and thorough control over contacts between Chinese citizens and foreigners working in their country. There is no prospect of an atmosphere like the Beijing Spring returning in the foreseeable future.

Wei Jingsheng was to be in prison until 1994, if he survived. In 1982, I heard of a report from an ex-prisoner at the Beijing No.1 Prison that he was continuing to hold to his views, and would willingly expound on them to anyone visiting his cell. The following year, I read a rumour to the effect that he was being held in solitary confinement, that he was denied writing materials, and that friends who visited him had reported that his mind was beginning to wander.



On a Beijing reformatory farm, young delinquents sing “The Education Through Labour Policy is Good!”



Chinese-origin refugees from Vietnam crowd a warehouse formerly used for transhipping Chinese aid to North Vietnam in its war with the South.

CHAPTER TEN

THE BACK DOOR

At the height of the Cultural Revolution, visiting foreigners were invariably impressed by the puritanical, almost obsessive personal morality that they seemed to see about them. Personal ambitions seemed subsumed in the desire to abnegate all self-interest and 'Serve the People'. Scrupulous respect for the personal property of others was universal, theft unheard of. Sexuality seemed to have been extinguished, adolescence banished, in an entire population who would say, with an enthusiastic glow in their cheeks, that they would certainly not even think about the opposite sex until they had devoted the best years of their lives to building New China.

All of these things were true, of some of the people, some of the time. During my years in China, the true stories of those years began to flow, in private conversations as well as in the authorised outpourings of a new generation of writers, dramatists, reporters and film-makers, who made the most of their licence to 'expose the crimes of the Gang of Four'. Gradually, as the re-evaluation of the Cultural Revolution gained official stature, the term 'Ten Years of Chaos' came to

replace the name 'Cultural Revolution'. That period was not simply a political and administrative chaos, but also a moral chaos, as monstrous oppression forced millions upon millions of individual Chinese to learn to lie and to betray, as their only means of survival.

The long reign of the Communist Party as the only possible avenue of advancement for the ambitious during that period ensured that its ranks steadily became swollen with opportunists and hypocrites, who paid no more than the necessary lip-service to Communist ideals, as they plotted and fought their way along their own careers. Every Chinese knows many such Party members quite intimately. It became such a matter of course than many Chinese today do not even hold grudges against careerists who took advantage of the situation, except where they, personally, have suffered at the hands of such people.

The most important result of all this was a complete breakdown in voluntary social ethics. Social discipline was maintained mainly through force of terror. Those smiling, scrupulous room-boys in China's state guesthouses were possibly robbing their own commissariat mercilessly, as a matter of habit, but the penalty of being caught interfering with the possessions of a Foreign Guest were too frightful even to contemplate the risk. One could be denounced by an ambitious colleague, even for some inadvertent matter - hence the many strange tales of foreigners' discarded items, such as razor blades and threadbare socks, pursuing them in brown paper parcels from hotel to hotel across the length and breadth of China. But, as China re-opened its doors to the world, all that began to fade away.

One of my name-cards, distributed at the Democracy Wall, found its way eventually into the hands of a character called Yang, who presents a good example of the social flotsam created by the Cultural Revolution. His personal history was told to me in so many versions, with so many inconsistencies, that I am inclined not to believe any of it, as was the case with practically everything the man ever said to me. Still, on those ground-rules, I kept up an occasional meeting with Yang over a period of several months, and gradually built up a more detailed picture of his rather sordid world.

We first met rather as I had met Wei Jingsheng. Yang simply rang me up and asked to meet me, without stating his business. Hoping that he might be someone from another of the activist groups, I arranged a rendezvous near a patch of waste ground, the deserted construction-site of part of Beijing's city ring-road where the great City Wall had stood until the sixties. As I drew up, somewhat nervously, there was no-one to be seen, but a figure soon emerged from behind one of the workmen's sheds. He was unusually thin, with either unusually big feet or unusually big shoes on normal feet. He wore a leather jacket, and a lank, drooping hairstyle that gave him an effete appearance, compounded by the lonely whiskers here and there on his chin that reflected his irregular shaving habits. Yang spoke hesitantly in a high, wheezing voice, which, in contrast to his wispy frame, always reminded me of Marlon Brando's Don Corleone, in 'The Godfather'.

As we drove around Beijing, talking in the car, it quickly transpired that Yang was not the slightest bit interested in saving China from fascism, nor any other political crusade. He wondered if I might be interested in obtaining any Cultural Relics? How about gold, silver, or precious stones? He had access to a steady supply of all these things, he told me, and would sell them to me, or to any other foreigner I could introduce him to, at a very good price compared to the official prices in government shops.

I tried to control my hair standing on end as I heard this, as it was the first time in China that I had been on the receiving end of such a blatantly criminal proposition. The penalties would be very harsh indeed, and I could expect no mercy from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation if I was responsible for having our organisation kicked out of China. I was one of what was, then, still a tiny number of foreigners, resident in China, who did not have diplomatic immunity, and I could easily find myself imprisoned if caught in an offence. I knew that I had already come to the attention of the Public Security Bureau because of my contacts with the Democracy Wall activists, and I considered it possible that the man now making this offer to me was an *agent provocateur* of the Security Bureau, setting up an entrapment. It had not happened to a Westerner in recent times, but it could well happen any day.

'How do you get hold of these things', I asked, wondering if he could produce a story with any credibility at all.

'These are family things. My family was connected to the old Imperial Court. A lot of valuable things were hidden during the Cultural Revolution. Now they don't have to be hidden, but the government buying-stations pay only one quarter of the real value. So, if you are prepared to pay even half the value, our family will still be a lot better off. There are many families like this in Beijing'.

My curiosity got the better of all judgement. I set up another rendezvous and told him that, while I did not want to buy anything, I would like to see what he had.

Our rendezvous was on the eastern fringe of the city, amid walled factory compounds and dusty, four-storey residential blocks. It was a cold January evening when I picked Yang up again. This time he was carrying a standard grey vinyl holdall, the type every Chinese carries on his travels, with the usual picture of the Great Hall of the People and the characters for 'Beijing' stencilled on its side. If Yang was a security agent, he might be wearing an electronic bug of some kind, so I was wary with my words.

'What have you got, then?', I asked, finally.

Yang didn't say anything, but began delving into his bag, bring out a number of small parcels wrapped in copies of the Peoples Daily and the Reference News, the latter being a paper that foreigners were not allowed, at that stage, to read, despite the fact that almost everything in it is of foreign origin. When I saw the Reference News, though, I relaxed, concluding that a police entrapment operation was most unlikely to have let Reference News fall so casually under my view.

Yang first unwrapped some fairly nondescript snuff-bottles and minor pieces of porcelain, of which thousands were readily available in souvenir shops at inflated prices. He then produced two or three other pieces, reproductions of Ming porcelain and bronze which even I, with my limited knowledge, could pick as fakes, while he endeavoured to persuade me they were genuine. On later meetings he attempted to sell me many modern bronze replicas of ancient coins, proving to me that the ancient and honourable Chinese industry of antique-faking was once more

back in business.

When I had made clear I was not at all interested in anything else he had shown me, Yang reached into his side coat pocket.

‘What about these?’, he said.

On his palm were six ingots of gleaming gold. They were the traditional Chinese ‘tael’ ingots, shaped something like a shoe, and hallmarked on the top with purity rating and place of assay. What struck me on closer inspection was that each of the ingots bore, as part of their hallmark, the five-pointed star, proving that they had been cast after the founding of the Peoples Republic. So much for the Emperor's great-nephews! At current world gold prices, Yang held in his hand the equivalent of five years' salary for a middle-class Chinese office-worker.

Yang wanted to sell all these items to me for foreign exchange, so that he could buy scarce items such as refrigerators in the Friendship Store and resell them outside at a profit. It was not an original idea, nor was he alone in nursing it. But I was not inclined to risk my neck for the sake of his enterprise, in a country where ‘speculation’ was a most serious crime, let alone breaching the state monopoly on gold.

Yang continued to telephone me, and several more times I went to meet him, always curious as to what he was up to. His own plans developed.. he had decided to migrate to the United States. Could I introduce him to anyone at the United States Consulate who could facilitate his visa application in return for gold? He had heard that a number of the Americans working there had wives who were of Chinese origin - surely they would be susceptible to gifts? All Chinese liked gold, he told me. I said he must find that out for himself.

Over time, Yang tried to tempt me with various new offerings. As his attempts to woo me got nowhere, Yang finally tried to supply something he thought I, as a journalist, would not be able to resist. He brought along one of his friends who claimed to be a driver in the National Peoples Congress car-pool, who said he would supply me with confidential information if I would help him change yuan for dollars. To prove himself, he told me that the Congress Standing Committee would meet in two days time for some important

decisions concerning Chairman Mao. It didn't, and I never saw him again.

Once, Yang told me that he had now contracted a marriage with a Chinese woman from Hong Kong - a woman older than himself, working as a purchasing agent for Hong Kong factories, who wanted him to act on her behalf in contacting Chinese industrial agencies and suppliers. This marriage would soon provide him the means to leave China, he said with some satisfaction. Several months later he was still hanging around.

'She won't help me get a visa', he confessed, with some chagrin. 'She wants me to stay in China and do the business for her. There's nothing I can do about it. Anyway, I only see her every three months, and I think she has another husband in Hong Kong, or at least a boy-friend'.

Not all was lost. Yang had secured for himself a means of entry to the Friendship Store, and a supply of foreign exchange, through the allowance his Hong Kong 'wife' paid him. His relationship with me had never been anything but blatantly mercenary, and I was relieved when he ceased telephoning.

Many other foreigners had experience of such callers during that period. Some did get deeply involved in illicit transactions of one kind or another, in particular certain of the diplomats from poorer countries, for whom the financial rewards may have been just that much more tempting.

The local reality was that government policies were bringing a great relaxation in the world of China's commerce, which resulted in a huge build-up of both supply of, and demand for, goods and services, which the atrophied state commercial system was quite incapable of handling. This spelt 'opportunity' for entrepreneurs, large scale and small. In some cases, these were people with official positions who operated basically within the recognised commercial conventions. But it also raised a whole crop of free-lance 'fixers' and commission agents whose function was to evade or bend regular commercial channels on behalf of their clients - to find Back Doors for deals and favours.

Wu Qing was a memorable example of such a budding entrepreneur. He lived in Guangzhou, where his father had a

middle-level position as a cadre in a central government department, but his family origins were in Shanghai. This made him an outsider, in the tightly-knit Cantonese world, although he had lived there most of his life, knew the dialect, and knew the city and its workings intimately. It was being different that gave him his start in his career. He did not look like a Cantonese - he was taller, heavier, comparatively fair-skinned, and had by Chinese standards something of a pointy nose. In his schooldays he had been called upon to play the roles of Foreign Devils and Yankee Imperialists in propaganda sketches. He had sometimes been tagged with these insulting epithets outside of school hours, and had learned to use his fists, in retaliation against his Cantonese tormentors.

Wu Qing's parents were minor figures in the Party establishment - they were both former members of the Red Army - and they came in for heavy persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Being non-Cantonese could have exacerbated the treatment they received at the hands of local Red Guard mobs, and Wu's mother never recovered from the beatings and imprisonment she suffered. Her last years were lived in a state of mental debility, living at home, but requiring constant supervision by members of the family. Once, during the time I knew Wu Qing, his mother escaped from home and was found two days later, forty kilometres away from home.

Like many of the children of the privileged in that period, Wu Qing learned a lot about survival while he was living as a virtual orphan, together with three younger sisters. He spent eighteen months in a Labour Reformatory on a charge of brawling, after some gang fighting between his non-Cantonese friends and a local group of young hoodlums. He learned, in the reformatory, how to please his supervisors (which was the only way he would ever get out of the institution), and also picked up plenty of useful tips on life in the fast lane from fellow-inmates, some of whom were in for fraud, burglary, and sexual offences.

Wu and his sisters were shuttled around amongst relatives, most of whom were in Shanghai. Wu soon developed the practice of using his journeys between Guangzhou and

Shanghai to carry goods from one place, where they were plentiful, to the other where they were scarce, and could either be discreetly sold at a profit, or used as presents for people whom Wu would later wish to ask for favours. Tropical fruits and herbal medicines would fill his bags northwards, while haberdashery and manufactured goods from Shanghai would be his return cargo. Thinking this way became a habit, and he practised building up a network of friends and contacts who could get him access to almost anything.

Certain things, of course, were difficult to get anywhere except in the Friendship Stores. In those days, Friendship Stores operated on the ordinary Renminbi Yuan, and their privilege was protected only by security police who guarded the doors. Hanging about there one day, Wu noticed that many of the foreigners being admitted to the store looked rather like Chinese. Many were, in fact, overseas Chinese or other Asians. It was rare that their documents were checked - ninety-nine times out of a hundred the experienced guards could sum people up at fifty metres and sort locals from visitors with no trouble at all. Clothing was a big part of it (Chinese cloth-shoes were a dead give-away), but general style and demeanour were even more important.

Wu decided to gamble on his `foreign' looks and try to run the gauntlet. He located an overseas visitor who was prepared to trade him some foreign clothes for one favour or another, and, Hey Presto! He was admitted without question to a comparative Wonderland of consumer opportunity. He used his first visit to stock up on a few items of `foreign' apparel which would improve his credentials for the next visit, and to check out the lie of the land. He also bought a large container of cooking oil, highly prized and strictly rationed everywhere but the Friendship Store. That oil was not for himself, but as part of his circulating stock of favour-producing gifts.

Wu developed a modest trade in scarce goods this way, earning a little commission in addition to the minor government salary he received for some nominal position assigned to him by an old friend of his father. Having conquered the Friendship Store, Wu began to infiltrate other

`foreign' domains, such as the Dong Fang ('Oriental') Hotel, where all foreign and many Hong Kong businessmen stayed in Guangzhou. He was a sociable and engaging person, almost an exhibitionist, which was probably one reason he was so successful at running the gauntlet of doormen. Most Chinese adopted a diffident if not reverential air as they approached the portals of these privileged institutions, but Wu Qing strolled purposefully in as if he owned them, talking loudly and confidently in his non-Cantonese accent. As his operations grew, he made a practice of travelling from place to place whenever possible by one of the high-class taxis which served the foreigners' hotels. Tactical gifts to certain of the drivers smoothed this path.

I first met Wu, in fact, not in a foreign enclave, but in one of the more fashionable teahouses of Guangzhou. Beijing had closed almost all its once-famous teahouses years before, considering them dens of bourgeois lifestyle, but the Cantonese even at official level were less inclined to take ideology so literally, and the teahouses remained an important part of life. That day Wu Qing was with a friend whose father was Chinese, but whose mother was one of the many European communist enthusiasts who had come out to `help' China, as they saw it, in the 1950s. She had become disillusioned after suffering persecution during the Cultural Revolution, and had returned to her homeland, leaving husband and children behind. The son whom I met spoke only Chinese, but he had refused all his life to identify himself with China, wore the most Westernised clothes he could muster, and even went to the lengths of peroxidising his thick black hair, which turned it red. He was now one of the lucky few who had obtained a visa to emigrate, and he was leaving to join his mother in her own country.

On successive visits to Guangzhou I would usually see Wu Qing, and I watched his life develop remarkably. He managed to get to know some of the foreign traders at the regular Guangzhou Trade Fairs, and he became a sort of unofficial facilitator for them with local bureaucratic and commercial problems. This role expanded until, by the end, he was a

salaried, though unofficial, agent for a European trading house, and negotiating on their behalf with Chinese trade corporations at a relatively senior level. His presentation had come a long way, and he had learned, from scratch, enough English to deal directly with 'clients' who spoke no Chinese. He loved to display his success. One day, in a coffee bar of the Dong Fang Hotel, he caused me some alarm by throwing open his fine leather attaché case to reveal something over ten thousand yuan in bundles of ten yuan notes.

'It's all mine.. My own salary and commissions!', he boasted loudly. Quite apart from the legality of Wu's profits (which in very recent times would have been termed 'speculation' and earned him a heavy gaol sentence), I was concerned about Guangzhou's unsavoury reputation for violent crime, which it shares with its sister city, Kong Kong. I insisted he close the case full of money immediately. Wu was a little crestfallen that nobody other than ourselves had noticed it.

His position was still, as I understood it, quite outside the law, though clearly it was tolerated by those, on both sides, with whom he did business. The favours done earlier in his career may have been standing him in good stead. I knew that Wu would never be bashful when it came time to ask for a favour to be returned - he had already done so on many occasions to me. He would always meet me with some small gift or other - a sweet melon, tickets to a cultural show, or something, and as a matter of course would ask me to bring him something or other next time I came down from Beijing. By the time I arrived back in Guangzhou a few months later with the item, he would normally have forgotten he ever asked for it, and be quite unappreciative.

For some time Wu Qing pestered me with schemes by which he thought I could help him get an exit visa - it didn't really matter to where, since his plan was to abandon whatever nation opened its doors to him and set up business in Hong Kong, where, he was absolutely sure, he would rapidly become a millionaire. But the request I most enjoyed receiving from Wu Qing, and the one I regretted not being able to fulfil, was the time he eyed thoughtfully the Citroen taxi which was waiting

for me outside the teahouse where we sat, and asked if he could 'borrow' it..

'Just for two hours.. I have to deliver a sofa from the Friendship Store to the apartment of a Vice-Director of Public Security'.

I don't think he was bluffing, but I had to decline.

'In China, there is nothing that can't be done, as long as you set about it the right way', he was fond of saying.

Wu Qing's apparently charmed life in the shadows was so astonishing to me in its boldness that, eventually, I was forced to wonder whether he might in fact be operating with some kind of cover from the Public Security Bureau. It was unthinkable that the police did not know at least part of his activities, and it was logical that either they left him loose as a kind of bait, hoping to catch some bigger fish of the twilight world, or that he had done some kind of deal with them. I asked him once, directly, whether he had any connection with the *Gong An Jiu*. He looked a little uneasy.

'They asked me once to work for them, but I refused', was his insouciant reply. Be that as it may, and notwithstanding the fact that I quite enjoyed his company over a long acquaintanceship, I was always very careful not to give him any information about other Chinese contacts. In this, I was behaving as many Chinese automatically behaved in their own social relationships, with always the possibility that someone in the circle might have divided loyalties.

One activity that was expanding on a huge scale during this period was the age-old trade of smuggling. In 1980, China's customs department reported over 14,000 separate cases of smuggling discovered, and, judging by the availability of smuggled goods, this was only a modest fraction of what was really going on. The international smuggling was, and probably still is, concentrated along the southern and south-eastern coastal strip of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, where thousands of fishing boats put to sea each day, and were well within the range of other boats from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The trade was mainly electronic consumer goods - colour television sets, cassette recorders, calculators, digital

watches and so on. These were exchanged on the high seas for antiques, works of art, rare traditional medicines, silver and gold, from the hidden family treasuries all over China. While the official Chinese buying-price for precious metals and other substances remained at a mere fraction of the world market price, there was a strong incentive to such smuggling exchange.

The smuggling trade was still growing in 1982, to the extent that local industry officials in Guangzhou complained smuggled goods were threatening the market for local goods which were now beginning to catch up to demand in quantity, if not quite in quality. Arrests for smuggling were more and more frequent, and extended high up in the local government ranks. Soldiers of the Frontier Guards units themselves were arrested for involvement. Over a million dollars value of contraband was seized on the Fujian coast in the last half of 1981. Anti-smuggling police were repeatedly foiled by the fact that whole villages, including the entire Party apparatus, were in on the game. They tried a system of 'bounty-hunting', whereby anyone catching a smuggling boat could keep thirty percent of the seized goods. This soon broke down, as the bounty-hunters found that they could do deals with the smugglers that were more profitable than the offered bounty.

My own baggage was robbed of some imported items, cosmetics for my wife, after it had been checked in to the domestic airline counter at Guangzhou airport. One county post office gave its seal to a smuggling gang, so they could freely despatch their contraband throughout the country and overseas without checking. The problem became an international one in 1982, when it was discovered that Hong Kong heroin-smuggling rings were using Guangzhou as a transfer point for narcotics between Southeast Asia and markets in the Western world. Eighteen people were arrested in one such ring, and given sentences of between eight and fifteen years, but the trade was not wiped out.

Checks by police at Beijing Railway station, on passengers boarding the train to Guangzhou, uncovered large quantities of contraband gold and herbs. Two youths tottering towards their

compartment on unusually high platform-heel boots (then the fashion) were discovered to have filled their heels with gold ingots. People alighting from the Guangzhou train with quantities of cassette recorders had inadequate explanations as to how they came by them.

The highlight of all these reports, in my view, was of the case in 1981 in which two large fishing trawlers, one from Taiwan and one from the mainland province of Fujian, were arrested by Chinese customs officers just as they completed a large transaction. The customs seized several thousand Swiss watches, which had been exchanged for bars of Chinese gold. On examination, however, it was discovered that not only were the 'Swiss' watches fakes made in Taiwan, but the bars of 'gold' were in fact gold-plated bars of lead. *Caveat emptor*, indeed.

In the first quarter of 1980, Chinese authorities tried to restrict the rising tide of illicit foreign trade, first by banning the circulation in China of foreign currencies (some establishments were willingly accepting foreign currencies for sales, especially in Guangzhou where the Hong Kong dollar was greatly in demand.) In March, they introduced what the Bank of China described as 'Foreign Exchange Certificates', and the foreign community called 'funny money'. This was a form of virtual currency, printed like bank-notes of denominations matching the normal currency, but with one side printed in English. This new currency was to become the only legal tender in Friendship Stores, foreigners hotels, airlines, and so on. The idea was that it would provide better control of access to those goods and services, and would also make it more difficult for foreigners or Chinese to profit by illegal exchange of foreign currency at black market rates. It rapidly became obvious that the reverse was the case, since many people, such as small traders, taxi-drivers, and stores not designated as 'foreign currency' stores, were receiving a constant flow of these 'Foreign Exchange Certificates' from foreigners who had no other currency to offer them. A local market in these certificates flourished rapidly.

For a while, there was a flood of Chinese customers into the

Friendship Stores, and the foreign community in places like Beijing, long cushioned from the realities of China's endemic scarcities, found that supplies of certain consumer durables and seasonal vegetables were disappearing from the stores within minutes of opening time, at eight in the morning. Down in Guangzhou, Wu Qing was naturally one of the first to exploit this situation, and became a clearing-house in his own right for numerous small traders who did not have the means or the courage to capitalise on their flow of Foreign Currency Certificates, and passed them on to him, in return for the usual considerations.

The son of a Guangzhou bank manager, who had been appointed by his father as Foreign Exchange cashier in a big bank branch, played a percentage game in the fringe currency market which had got him an accumulated profit of 86,000 Hong Kong dollars (then worth around 15,000 US dollars) before he was arrested in a crackdown in October 1980.

The development of the free markets during this period had brought its own crop of opportunists, showing conclusively that the wheeling and dealing talents of a proportion of the Chinese people were not severely affected by thirty years of socialist 'political work'. Swindlers, big and small, began to feature regularly in the columns of local newspapers like the Beijing Woanbao (Peking Evening News). One group of youths used to haunt the Qian Men area of Beijing, the old commercial quarter where many of the cheapest hotels are located. They would seek out people among the ten thousand or so rural and provincial visitors per day who came to Beijing on official business, or at least on the pretext of such. They would then offer to sell these visitors a wad of used bus tickets, at a discount price of course. The visitor could then, on his return to his remote home unit, claim 'expenses' for the full value of the tickets. The notion of a bottomless public purse, the 'big bowl of rice', was so ingrained that many otherwise cautious cadres would have no qualms about this dishonest practice.

Imposters and confidence tricksters had did well for some time, as cadres, used only to following instructions from above, were now given the responsibility of deciding how to increase

the profits or efficiency of their units. One of the most famous cases involved a man who built a whole career, in Shanghai, out of pretending to be the son of a senior Beijing military official. He secured all kinds of preferment from local cadres, and even several marriage proposals from attractive and ambitious young ladies, before his exposure. His case was turned into a highly successful play, later a movie, 'What if I were real?', which raised the very prickly point that, while this man had been severely punished for his imposture, thousands of 'real' off-spring of senior cadres were getting away with minor blackmail as a routine way to secure a comfortable life. Some officials tried to have the play banned, as a discredit to the Party, but it was defended at the most senior levels, and survived.

Tables were turned on the theatrical community, however, with the 1982 'Case of the Director's Daughter'. An 18 year-old girl from Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, dressed herself glamorously, armed herself with gossip from the many Chinese movie fan magazines, and set off on a career of confidence trickery. By name-dropping and flattery, she was able to infiltrate the giddy world of China's star-struck movie industry and swindle several ambitious actors and dancers into giving her large 'loans'. Her technique was to introduce herself as the daughter of a well-known film director, hinting that her father was interested in offering her victim a starring role in his next movie. She impressed several others, outside of the movie industry, with talk of high connections and promises to buy scarce goods, then disappeared with the money entrusted to her. This girl, Zhang Ping, was quoted in the Peoples Daily on the secret of her success:

'Many young people admire film stars. They hope that, some day, they can become film stars themselves, and obtain anything they want. It was their ambition, and their desire to find a back door, that allowed me to take advantage of them'.

The liberalisation had also brought about a revolution in public attitudes to sex. There had always been instances of rape, and there had always been young women prepared to use their bodies sexually, for survival or for advancement. The

public display of physical form had been deeply suppressed, however, and when I arrived in China in 1978 any woman who dared so much as to tuck her blouse into the waist of her skirt or trousers, rather than letting it hang loose, would turn every head in the street. It was only just becoming acceptable to curl hair, and the results of novice experiments in this line were very mixed indeed. No facial make-up was ever seen except on the stage, although the shops did carry a wide selection of skin creams, eternal youth potions and the like. 'Baggy is beautiful' could have been the slogan of the Chinese clothing industry, long before Japanese designers, based on their own relatively shapeless clientele, brought the baggy fashions to the world stage.

There were, of course, hand-copied erotic texts which circulated surreptitiously, as they have probably done in every literate human society, but possessing them brought very severe penalties if discovered. Chinese law has a crime which Chinese translators, for some reason, persist in rendering into English as 'hooliganism'. Even in Chinese the phrase *liumang shing* is a fairly oblique reference to general outlawry, whereas the modern meaning is specifically sexual. 'Licentiousness' or 'lewd behaviour' probably convey the meaning best in English. It covers everything from public harassment of women, wolf-whistling, through extra-marital sex to rape. This crime seems to account for about half the prisoners, male and female, in the reformatories I visited. A respectable professor could be accused of 'hooliganism' if he had an affair with a student, for instance, or even with a fellow professor.

The very existence of homosexuality in China was being denied outright, as a matter of policy, right up to the time I left Beijing. Even in Hong Kong, a common line from older-generation Chinese citizens was that homosexuality was a peculiarly Western perversion, introduced to innocent Chinese, like opium, at gunpoint. This had long been the Communist Party policy on the subject, and it is a matter of record that practising homosexual men were summarily shot, like opium dealers, in the early days of the Peoples Republic. My first office interpreter, Wan Jingzhang, was lecturing me piously on

this line of 'Western perversion' one day when I had to point out to him certain very explicit passages on the subject in the classic Chinese novel, 'A Dream of Red Mansions', which I had just been reading. He was furious at the loss of face, but had nothing to say.

The foreign community in Beijing, naturally enough, contained its quota of that persuasion, and I was assured by some of them that homosexual partners were no harder to find in China than in other places where that sexual preference remained illegal. My own observations suggested that there were many obvious candidates among such professions as shop assistants and hotel staff. A high proportion of young urban workers live in segregated dormitories, and the years of strict adolescent sexual repression did not necessarily encourage 'normal' heterosexual development.

Whatever the undercurrents of sexuality that had persisted through the outward asceticism of the Cultural Revolution, there is no denying that in opening up to the world again, China did invite, and receive, a flood of new temptations to sexual appetites. One which grew strongly along with the smuggling trade, and in the same areas, was that of video pornography. The availability of video cassette players spread slowly - first in a very few government and educational institutions, but then, as tastes developed, it became common for officials negotiating any kind of import contract with a foreign supplier to request that video players be included on the deal. It was unwise to refuse such requests, as there were always other suppliers waiting outside the door. Individuals with wealthy relatives overseas could also obtain the machines, and no doubt were introduced to the pleasures of video pornography by those same relatives and business associates. We began to hear rumours of the children of senior political figures running commercial porn shows, charging up to two days wages for tickets.

For some reason, this craze seemed to take particularly virulent hold in Swatow - a large port city in Guangdong Province, near Guangzhou, with much traffic to and from Hong Kong and Macao. An investigation there in 1982 was reported

in the China Youth newspaper, to the effect that nine different work units in the city had been exhibiting 'yellow' (pornographic) videocassettes for money on a quite open basis. Thirty people were arrested in connection with these shows, which the report said had made over two hundred and twenty thousand yuan in profits in a few months - a huge amount by Chinese standards. The China Youth took a stern line:

'These pornographic, violent, unhealthy videotapes pollute the soul, and make the masses very angry!'

The paper published another cautionary tale, in the form of a letter, or rather a confession, from a young man who became slightly unbalanced after a binge of pornographic reading -

'I stayed home every Sunday to read sex books, and when going to political study classes I put these 'yellow' books between pages of the study materials to read them secretly... Lots of strange things began to happen to me.. In the evening when I closed my eyes, I immediately began to think about these things, and during the day I had no will to concentrate on study or work. Before, when I saw women, I used to blush. After this, I began to stare at them and wanted to molest them. I became pale and thin. To get more excitement I bought and rented more and more books, some forty books and magazines altogether...

One evening, walking by a women's public toilet, I heard there was someone inside. I was seized with desire and forgetting everything rushed into the women's toilet.....

Because someone immediately came to the rescue, they stopped my crime. I thank my organisation for patient education. Since this happened to me I feel that these things are a kind of psychological opium, enormously harmful...'

The older generation also became alarmed by what they saw as an increase in juvenile violence. Actually, the violence carried out by children and teenagers in the political campaigns of the near past were genuinely horrific. What caused alarm in the early 1980s was a return to neighbourhood gang fighting, which was often associated with petty juvenile crime and a very high rate of unemployment among school leavers. There were cults, and naturally when Chinese film studios began to

co-operate with Hong Kong martial arts movie-makers, there was a huge upsurge in popularity of the traditional Chinese martial arts. The most popular of all was based on the traditional tale of the Fighting Monks of Shaolin Temple, credited with inventing the original unarmed combat routines, since their religious vows forbade them to bear arms. After the film was shown, there was a wave of juvenile runaways right across China, and the handful of feeble old monks still inhabiting the Shaolin temple today found they were having to turn away streams of ragged schoolboys hoping to become their 'disciples'.

About the same time, Central Television began to broadcast a drama series it had been given for next to nothing by a foreign distributor hoping for later big sales. This was 'Garrison's Guerrillas', an 'action' series concentrating on juvenile mayhem in urban America. This series provoked such enthusiastic imitation by youth gangs across China that it drew storms of protest and was quickly hauled off air.

Other violence was real, however, expressing the anger and alienation of a generation who felt they had been ignored, and whose future had been sabotaged by the political campaigns of old men. The favoured weapon of the juvenile gangs in Beijing's industrial suburbs is a lethal three-edged stiletto, fashioned by sharpening a common metal file to a point, and easily concealed. Stabbings were frequent, often after minor arguments over bus fares and the like. Chinese women told me they were very concerned about the possibility of rape, and I knew of several cases where foreign students had been raped on the dark roads near their institutes on the northern outskirts of the city.

There were occasional acts of violent public protest. A young man blew up himself and several others in the Beijing Railway Station. A young woman taxi-driver went berserk and deliberately drove her cab into a crowd of local tourists at the Gate of Heavenly Peace, killing four. A promising student, turned burglar, clubbed an old watchman to death in an appliance shop. Much was written in the official press on the crisis of a 'Lost Generation' without ideals or faith in their

future. Eventually, the line became that there was no Lost Generation, only lost individuals, victims of the Gang of Four.

Zhang Wenling and Li Guosheng stand before the court, charged with premeditated murder in the course of an armed bank robbery. Both are twenty-three. Zhang served a brief sentence of Labour Re-education ten years ago for stealing magazines, Li has served three years of the same for attempted rape, 'hooliganism'. Zhang has a job as a labourer with a construction corporation. Li is unemployed. Now they are on trial for their life.

The Beijing Intermediate Courtroom is a bare chamber on an upper floor of an anonymous cement tower - duck-egg green walls, fluorescent lighting, three blond-lacquered benches forming a shallow semi-circle, and a large auditorium with two hundred seats, most of them empty. A huge bas relief national crest of the Peoples Republic, five stars grouped over the Gate of Heavenly Peace, dominates the judge's bench from the wall behind it, making all humans seem small. Some foreigners have been brought in to watch justice done. Zhang and Li are on trial for their lives, and they stand in the centre of the bay. The judge is a woman, supported by two 'assessors' who will confirm her judgement and confer with her on the sentence. A defence lawyer has been appointed by the court. He will not plead innocence - innocent people do not appear before Chinese courts - but he may raise considerations for a more lenient sentence.

Both men have pleaded guilty. Zhang is short, square-headed, pugnacious. Li is taller, thin, has little to say. The prosecutor outlines the facts of the robbery at a suburban branch of the Chinese Peoples Bank. Two people were shot, one fatally, with home-made guns. Money was stolen. The culprits have confessed. The prosecutor emphasises that the property of the State must be protected from violation. Since there is no dispute of the facts, Zhang is asked to give his version of events. He has drafted and redrafted his

confession many times, under supervision, since his arrest. He speaks without shame.

“We planned to rob a bank about a year ago. I didn't want to remain a labourer. I'd rather rob a bank than remain a labourer. Li Guosheng believes in me. We decided winter would be the best time to do it, because the heavy clothes make disguise easier. Also there are fire-crackers around, so people don't notice shooting. I began making guns in 1975, from bits of pipe about fifteen centimetres long. They fired with gunpowder and ground-up match-heads, triggered by a battery, one shot at a time. We made the bullets from bolts and pieces of wire rod. Testing it, the bullet went through five centimetres of wood. We carried hand-axes as well, just in case, and wore plastic goggles on our faces for disguise. We reckoned that the bank staff wouldn't resist, since it wasn't their money, and they would be afraid of death. We carried two guns each. We planned to keep one gun each to commit suicide if things went wrong.

“We rode up to the bank on our bicycles, and waited till nearly closing time. We went in twice. The second time, we went in quietly, then Li said "Don't move. Whoever moves will be shot". One of the clerks moved, and I shot him in the face. I was feeling not quite myself. We had agreed that each of us would kill one person, but the plan went wrong. Li fired his shot from inside his plastic satchel, and it missed. I began to shake. To take advantage of the situation, I jumped over the counter, opened four tellers' drawers, and took all the money I could find. We rode off, feeling quite safe, and were home by four-thirty. I counted the money. There was 1,035 yuan and five cents. I gave half to Li.

“We wanted to buy a cassette recorder, so we went to the shop, but there were none available. I swore to behave well at work, so as not to arouse suspicion. Later, we bought a cassette player, and spent all the rest of the money on food, smoking, drink, a few cinema tickets.

`At my unit, quite a few people knew that I had made guns, and that I had the idea of robbing a bank. At a political study meeting, the team leader raised the subject of the bank robbery. I could feel I was sweating, and thought I was suspected. At the movies, I found a policeman sitting next to me, and believed I was being tailed. When the March job roster came out, I had no assignment, so realised that I was under close observation. I reported to the work site, but was told there was no work for me. I was to go to a criticism meeting concerning four people who had been arrested for crimes. I was very afraid, but the case didn't concern me, and I was not touched. After that, every time I heard a car or truck coming, I was terrified they were coming to arrest me. I tried to commit suicide by holding two wires of an electrical flex. But it was so uncomfortable that I turned it off again. I couldn't bear the agony, so I decided to give myself up and hope for a light sentence. But if they impose the death sentence on me, I don't care.'

Li Guosheng gives a simpler testimony.

`Zhang Wenling said, "Let's rob a bank". I had no objection to his plan.' He stops. The prosecutor is holding a more forthcoming confession, written by Li under supervision in the cells, and he prompts him, as one might a child.

`Can you tell us, why did you rob the bank?'

Li's face shows nothing.

`Because I had nothing good to eat, nothing good to drink, and no work'.

That is the end of his testimony, and the court adjourns to discuss sentence. Zhang and Li return to their cells and we foreigners are led out into the pale spring weather. Later, we are told Li Guosheng was sentenced to death, with a year's suspension to allow for heartfelt reform. If he makes convincing progress, his death sentence will be commuted to life imprisonment. Zhang had initiated, led, and planned the

whole crime, but he had later shown a 'good attitude' by giving himself up and informing on his friend, so he was sentenced only to fifteen years prison.

What lay ahead of Zhang Wenling and Li Guosheng as they were led off, manacled, into the Chinese prison system?

In principle, the Chinese justice system pays a great deal more attention to 'rehabilitation' of convicts than occurs in most of the world's so-called developed nations. In Maoist philosophy, criminal actions come into the category of 'contradictions', to use the normal translation of the term *mao dun*, which really means something like a paradox. In 1956, Chairman Mao wrote a dissertation called 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', which was primarily concerned with the conduct of class struggle against bourgeois resistance to communism within China, but which also laid out the distinctions on which the present justice system is based. The principle is that all crimes and mistakes fall into two categories, contradictions *among the people*, and contradictions *between the people and the enemy*. Some convicts are thus defined as 'Members of the People', perhaps needing some corrective re-education, whilst others are defined as 'Enemies of the People' who must be ruthlessly suppressed.

Crime, it can be seen, takes on a highly political flavour in this context. The way for Enemies of the People, often known as Class Enemies or Bad Elements (*huai fenzi*), to cross over and become members of the people again is through abject confession, physical penance, and proven Thought Reform. In the development of the Western common-law system, the trend has been towards separating any religious or spiritual notions of Sin from the social and legal definitions of Crime, but in Peoples China it is quite the opposite. In cases like that of the two young bank-robbers, it is the criminal who is tried and assessed, not the crime itself. The Chinese system, in this regard, is not unlike mediaeval Church-dominated societies in



From the Chinese press: 'Laugh at the hole, don't laugh at the patch' – the proudly-patched cadre bears the label 'self-criticism'.

which Sin and Crime are the same thing.

What would seem an obvious flaw, to Western eyes, is that the system favours the facile hypocrite over the honest or obtuse. Numerous fraud cases were reported in the Beijing papers of the early 1980s, committed by former prisoners who had been released on the grounds that they had 'shown satisfactory progress in Thought Reform'. Clearly, Thought Reform achieved under conditions of duress is a fragile condition, once the 'reformed' individual is faced again with the opportunities of the outside world.

But the process is not made easy for anyone. Confessions, or 'self-criticisms' as they are known, normally have to be written time after time, perhaps daily for months on end, until the supervisors are satisfied. Part of the technique is to give the prisoner as few clues as possible as to the specific confession that is being sought from him, so that he must pour forth every

possible criminal thought, word or deed, and implicate as many as possible of his former colleagues, in hopes of scoring the bingo. A side benefit of this open-ended confession system is that it so often yields material for further arrests or interrogations of people mentioned. This was referred to in the earlier chapter concerning the trial of Wei Jingsheng, in which the confessions of his friend, Yang Guang, were a major part of the prosecutors case against Wei Jingsheng himself.

Even foreigners are not immune from Thought Reform, and it happens from time to time that the Public Security Bureau will require a foreign resident, or even the occasional tourist, to write a series of ever more abject self-criticisms over some lapse or misdemeanour. It may be no coincidence that the Foreigners Section of the Beijing PSB usually imposes this galling experience on the most choleric among the foreigners. It's a lesson, as they like to say, that 'the days when foreign imperialists could lord it over China are finished! The Chinese People have stood up!' Three of my journalistic colleagues of the period went through this, for several hours at a time. The most successful self-criticisms, I regret to have to report, tended to be decidedly tongue in cheek.

It's no joke, however, for any Chinese to find himself under interrogation. Police powers are extremely broad when it comes to 'investigation' of a possible crime, and people seem to be detained for questioning for periods far longer than the laws officially permit. When PSB prosecutors satisfied they have a case, the PSB prosecutors present their case to officials called Procurators, who are supposed to re-investigate the matter to make sure that there is a *prima facie* case. Thus, by the time a criminal case actually reaches the courtroom, guilt has been established by two organs of the state. There is no courtroom discussion over finer points of law, no adversary debate over evidence or new evidence produced. The accused is there, really, just to be assessed for his punishment.

According to the stories of ex-prisoners over the years, first stop for a convict is usually solitary confinement, while the first round of self-criticisms and interrogations goes on to establish the prisoner's attitude to himself, his crime, and the

People. The prisoner must beg the People to forgive him, and crave the opportunity to demonstrate his will to reform through hard labour. When this begging has gone on long enough (possibly for years), he will be transferred to a Labour Reform centre. Some of these are located in or near cities, but the bulk of prisoners are sent to settlements in remote areas of the country. Much of the hard construction labour in places like Qinghai - the inner portion of the Tibetan Plateau - is carried out by prison labour, and the inmates live a Spartan and isolated life. I passed the high walls of several such camps in various parts of the country, but there seemed to be a rule among official guides that they should not acknowledge to foreigners what they were.

Some camp inmates, the more easy-going, seem to adapt almost philosophically to prison camp life, but the hardest time, unquestionably, goes to the political prisoners who hold to their 'counter-revolutionary' ideas. A murderer, after all, might be undergoing Labour Reform to expiate a single, isolated act of violence with extenuating circumstances, but a dissident intellectual is considered by the Public Security to commit fresh crimes against the People every time he re-states his beliefs.

Such was the case with Liu Qing, a leading activist of the April 5th Forum at the Democracy Wall, who had been arrested in November 1979 for distributing unauthorised transcripts of the trial of Wei Jingsheng. Three years after his disappearance, he managed to smuggle a two hundred page account of his prison life out of the Lotus Temple prison in Qinghai province where he was being detained, he claimed, without ever having passed through the legal processes of charge and trial as proclaimed to proudly by the National Peoples Congress in the year that he was arrested.

He told of spending an initial five months in a damp, cold isolation cell in a Beijing interrogation centre, where his hair began to fall out and his eyesight to deteriorate. As he continued to demand his legal rights, he was beaten, chained, and threatened with indefinite detention unless he improved his attitude and confessed immediately to counter-revolutionary

crimes. He wrote several letters to the Procurator-General appealing against his illegal detention, but is not sure that they were ever passed on by his captors. Their only message to him was the stock warning: 'Obstinacy will get you nowhere'. He account verified that the intensive interrogation practices, sometimes accompanied by terror and violence, were still being used by PSB personnel in the 1980s, despite what had been widely heralded as China's return to Rule of Law.

'When you are in the hands of the Public Security you have no way to put your case reasonably', he wrote. 'I want everybody to know the truth and for society to rise up to prevent these illegalities continuing. We must show them that they can't get away with whatever they like'.

The account was published widely in Hong Kong and found its way to the foreign press as well. We can be sure that Liu Qing's defiance in smuggling out his manuscript has ensured that his initial three-year sentence has been extended indefinitely. Release will depend upon a degree of Thought Reform that a man like Liu Qing is unlikely to achieve.

The PSB personnel who carry out this process of Thought Reform are not always very intelligent, but they are thoroughly trained in the techniques of inquisition and, by all accounts, extremely thorough in the pursuit of their goal of complete psychological mastery of the 'criminal'. The term 'brain-washing' entered our Western vocabulary, I understand, from the experiences of American prisoners of war of the Chinese in Korea, but the methods and processes are not foreign to European tradition. They are identical to what we now of the techniques of religious Inquisition through the centuries, and for the same reason: that a spiritual system demanding total personal commitment is married to a jealous State power.

Premier Zhao Ziyang charged new Ministry of State Security in 1983 with the task of 'providing more effective leadership over counter-espionage work and protecting the security of the state'. China watchers had known for some time that China's governing group wanted to end what had been a chaotic situation in Chinese intelligence work. The civilian Public Security Ministry, the military intelligence, and other

groups such as scientific intelligence, foreign trade corporations, and the so-called 'United Front' departments, were all believed to conduct separate information-gathering activities with, up till then, little co-ordination. Formation of the new ministry followed a series of spy and hijack scandals which had shown up embarrassing weaknesses in China's existing internal security set-up.

In April of that year there had been a National Work Conference on Public Security, at which the old guard of the security forces were warned that there had been 'fundamental changes since the early days of liberation. Class struggle is no longer the central problem in China, and the great majority of the population is now classified within the category of The People. The great majority of criminals, too, are the labouring people and their children. The Public Security organs must take great care to distinguish the different kinds of contradictions among the people.'

An official editorial in the Peoples Daily explained that, since China had begun to practise its new open door policy, 'hostile forces at home and abroad have taken advantage of the situation to infiltrate our society and try to destroy it. Remnant feudal ideas at home have re-appeared, and decadent capitalist ideology from abroad has grown considerably. The work of public security should be conscientiously placed under the leadership of the Party and government'.

The old, fragmented security system reflected the clannish attitudes and vertical divisions in most areas of Chinese social organisation, but in the new Ministry of State Security, China had finally set up something equivalent to the Soviet KGB, and just how that Ministry will make its work felt remains to be seen. The same work conference set up a new paramilitary police unit, initially for Beijing only, to undertake much of the routine guard work that had up until then been done by units of the regular army. This guard work includes sentry duty at all important government installations such as the telephone exchange, Central Broadcasting Authority studios, principal railway stations et cetera, and also covers the gateways to embassies, hotels and apartment compounds frequented by

foreigners. Apart from other advantages, a specialised group of permanent guards, rather than raw infantry recruits, will be far more effective in monitoring the comings and goings between resident foreigners and local Chinese.

Of course, the majority of social offenders in China are classified in the first group - those guilty of 'contradictions among the people'. The most serious of these offenders will be passed on, into the court system, and end up with sentences of Labour Reform, but a much greater number of offenders will be fed into what is called Labour Education. This follows the same general corrective principles, endeavouring to inculcate a 'love of labour' among people considered to have reneged on their social obligations, but in theory it does not carry the same life-long official stigma as a sentence of Labour Reform. Those undergoing Labour Reform are presumed to be 'basically bad', requiring a complete mental rebuild, while those undergoing Labour Education are presumed to be 'basically good', but needing some correction.

Criminal law procedures are supposed to be strict, but by a sleight of hand, Labour Education sentences are handed out without any legal processes being necessary. They go on the recommendation of local committees headed by the Public Security authorities, who supposedly have tried and failed to convince the offender to repent of his own accord.

Squads of young men, in standard Chinese summer working dress of blue trousers and loose white cotton shirts, drill energetically in the courtyard of the single-story brick barracks compound. Their drill master calls out slogans about reforming one's self and serving the country, and the young men bellow them back in unison, to the rhythm of their own cotton shoes goose-stepping across the hard earth. This is their one day off field labour for the week, and they've spent it cleaning up the compound to receive a group of foreign and Chinese press.. the first such visit to the Tuan He farm since it was founded. Woe betide anyone who messes up the drill.

Tuan He ('where rivers join') was marshland until developed

as a military state farm in the late fifties. Drainage and tall avenues along the roadsides make it now seem almost as pleasant a place as the average commune or state farm near Beijing, at least in the full leaf of summer, with the din of cicadas in the trees. The inmates work six hours a day in the fields and vineyards of the farm, spend two more hours a day in political study, and go to bed at 9:30, fifteen to a room on one large communal bed.

I go by myself into one of the cells, where the inmates sit stiffly in a row along the edge of the bed under the keen eye of a warder. I talk with the men about their life inside. They are all between seventeen and twenty-nine years of age. About a third are being punished for juvenile delinquency offences, of which 'hooliganism' or sexual licentiousness is the most common offence. There is also a rapist, though his offence must have been judged to have mitigating circumstances, as violent rapists are normally executed. A young hairdresser from a public bath-house is doing three years for illegal gold-dealing. A commercial artist is in for forging official rubber-stamps.. a most lucrative trade in China where such stamps are required for almost every move you can make. Others are in for street-fighting, vandalism, burglary and bicycle theft.. the Chinese equivalent of car-theft.

One of the older men says he was imprisoned for having unauthorised contacts with foreigners. The farm authorities later deny this is the case.. he has been found guilty of procuring Chinese girls for foreign men, is himself morally licentious, and has also committed a theft. In Chinese law, much remains in the eye of the beholder. In the whole reformatory, about twenty percent are in for smuggling or black-market activity, and a good number for gambling, long banned in China but now enjoying a powerful vogue among the young unemployed.

One wall of the cell carries a large notice board, on which the inmates have posted their self-criticisms and responses to indoctrination sessions. I scan a few, and see the familiar

phrases of gratitude to the Party for its care and concern, of regret for a wrong 'class standpoint', of determination to remould oneself and become a useful citizen, serve the People, build the Four Modernisations. The more heartfelt and self-critical, the more likely a good report, an early release, and a chance for a new life outside. Skills of political rhetoric, if nothing else, are being finely honed in here.

Conditions are Spartan here, but still probably better than those enjoyed by the majority of the peasantry. I take a walk away from the main compound, to where work is under way in the fields. I ask an inmate, trimming grape vines under the hot sun, how he finds life inside.

'Much the same as outside', is all he replies, and returns to his vines.

One in twelve of the inmates are the children of Communist Party members, confirming the widespread concern that Party Members do not make better parents than average, and often fail to pass their high social ideals on to the next generation.

Some of the staff are uncomfortable with foreigners. For years it was policy to deny that delinquency ever occurred in New China, now it is being exposed to international view. Others of the staff show a schoolmasterly kindness towards their charges, and I believe that while I might have different views as to who really needs 'Re-education', the way it is practised is relatively humane here.

Music is permitted, so long as it is judged to be in sympathy with the reforming aims of the farm. Western decadence is banned, of course, but 'decadent' music can itself undergo Thought Reform, with a change in lyrics. The labour camp's 'propaganda party' assembles to sing to the foreign guests. I leave with this parting image: the gold-dealing barber on Hawaiian guitar, the seal-forging artist on accordion, and the smuggling son of a well-known actress, leading the inmates

in rousing renditions of 'Goodbye to yesterday, tomorrow we serve socialism', 'The Song of Cultured Behaviour', and (raising large placards aloft) 'The Labour Education Policy is Good'.

Beijing Municipality runs three Labour Education farms like Tuan He, with a total of some seven thousand inmates at any one time. It also runs two of the harsher Labour Reform institutions, where the sentences are invariably much longer, from five years to life. That gives a total of at least twelve thousand in labour camps run by Beijing municipality alone, from a total population of some nine million - one prisoner for each seven hundred and fifty of the population. Allowing for lower criminal rates in the country areas, one can still deduce at least a million Chinese in Labour Reform and Labour Education camps today. Most experts say the number is between ten and twenty million, but these figures are, of course, impossible for a foreigner to verify.

One small victory for civil liberties was a new rule in 1983 to end the practice of endorsing the resident identity cards of all former prisoners. Ever mindful of the possibility of fresh witch-hunts, many ex-convicts had lived in perpetual fear that their past might be exposed. According to the official press reports, some had become complete recluses, because there was so little they could do without having to show the incriminating identity cards. There were cases of men who lost chances to marry because they did not dare expose their past. It is a small victory, however, as the Public Security Bureau never forgets anything, and files are indelible.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE NEW LONG MARCH

There was a popular slogan among Party orators in the twelve months from mid-1978. Referring to the historic Long March of the Communist revolutionary forces in 1935, a watershed between defeat and their ultimate victory, the new slogan called on all Chinese people to contribute their life energies to a 'New Long March towards the Four Modernisations'. Taking up the theme, songs, poems, plays and hoardings soon all proclaimed the New Long March as the heroic task of China's modern age. For many, though, the call came too late. Idealism was not to be roused again, after the betrayals of the past three decades. Foreigners would become accustomed to the snigger with which many of their Chinese contacts used the slogan, for the standing joke among young sophisticates was that the only New Long March to modernisation was the march right out of China, to a life of new personal opportunities elsewhere, free from the weight of China's problems.

Unofficial contacts with foreigners were always a risky matter, and it was rare for any Chinese to keep up a friendship which did not have, somewhere, an ulterior motive of one kind

or another. It was no more than an extension of the normal way Chinese relate socially to one another, in which cultivation of the *guanxi wang* ('connections web'), is considered essential to any long-term endeavour. That is not to say that genuine friendship could not develop, but it was common for foreigners, among them some of the correspondents, to be sentimentally overwhelmed by the apparent pure and naive interest shown in them by their local contacts. It may come down to cultural differences, in that Western culture tends to put the highest value on so-called 'pure' relationships free of self-interest, whereas in China people traditionally evaluate relationships very much in terms of what one person is able or willing to do for the other.

'I've had enough of Chinese friends', said one foreign girl student who had been in various colleges in China for over two years. 'It's impossible to have casual friendships with anybody, they don't seem to know the meaning of the word. Once a person identifies you as a friend, they become so demanding that I just feel smothered. If you start to become friends with someone else, they become as jealous as a lover!'

Some local friends might be motivated by nothing more than an intellectual curiosity about other societies, or a desire to practise a foreign language. But in ninety percent of cases, the bottom line, at some point, would be a request to help arrange for someone to get out of China. I never quite knew whether to be charmed or offended by the bluntness and preposterousness of some of these requests, but, as a journalist, I was clearly gaining some professional advantage myself from the various insights I gleaned from knowing such people, and thus would have been hypocritical to complain about being 'used'.

Requests for assistance varied a great deal. Academically qualified young Chinese would ask for help in contacting institutions which might offer them scholarships to study abroad. This was the cleanest and most honest way to achieve an exit, and I did help one or two by writing letters along those lines on their behalf.

Huang Lin was given my name by a mutual acquaintance in Beijing's Western music circles. His family, as was so often the

case, were all involved in music as teachers or performers in the state orchestras and the conservatorium, and he had some relatives overseas who could support him with money if need be. Huang was a cellist, and wanted to go abroad, it seemed, purely to advance his musical career.

`Just like the Soviet Union, there is a minority priveleged class here,' he said.

`The ordinary people are in a hopeless position. The priveleged class has power, but no culture.. You can't develop your talent here. The government shouldn't be afraid of letting people go.. most of them will come back some day to serve China. Even if they don't come back, they still represent China overseas.

`Take the pianist Fu Cong, for instance. When he defected, it was a great scandal in cultural circles in China. But now, when he comes back to play the piano in China, the leaders say "Lets forget about the past". Now he's one of the glories of the Chinese people. All the time he has been away, he never insulted his homeland. We love our country, but the problem is that writers and artists cannot act freely to develop their talents.'

At that time, foreign governments were falling over each other to set up student exchange programmes with China, and China was taking full advantage of the situation. Thousands upon thousands of students were selected for overseas study by their relevant work units (a term which includes universities and research institutes, in case there is any doubt). Priority was given where possible to disciplines that the government itself considered useful to China - especially all branches of the sciences. Artists, musicians and the like found themselves at the bottom of the queue, and so were prominent among those who tried to find unofficial ways to achieve their New Long March. By mid- 1979, so many artists had departed for foreign countries from the Central Ballet Troupe and its orchestra, for instance, that the troupe had to cancel scheduled performances. All `unplanned' emigrations were immediately banned, to the great bitterness of those whose plans were still awaiting fruition.

Thousands from other units still managed to find their way, however, and by the end of 1982 the Party authorities had decided that a national clamp-down was necessary. Regulations were issued forbidding Chinese graduates to leave the country within two years of completing their courses of study, unless as part of the government's own research programme. After they have `repaid the People' with two years of assigned work, they may be considered for overseas study by their unit bosses. This means, of course, that the more talented graduates are the ones who find it hardest to get approval to study abroad, as their work units may be reluctant to release them.

Even private students, funded by scholarships or by overseas relatives, and who manage to secure approval under these circumstances, are obliged to register with the Chinese consulate nearest their place of study, to obey instructions from the consulate. On return to China, they must accept a work assignment wherever the government should choose to send them. It hardly seems a great incentive to return, but the statistics seem to show that a great majority of Chinese students do return, sooner rather than later. Foreign embassy personnel in Beijing whom I questioned about this said that the rate of return of Chinese students overseas was among the highest for any developing country.

A common cause of irritation, both to students and to many host governments, was the custom of the Chinese Consulates taking the living allowances offered to students under the terms of some host country scholarships. The consulate would then dole out to the student an amount considered by the consulate itself to be adequate, which usually obliged such students to live below the poverty line by host country standards. This can seem outrageous to us, but the Chinese viewpoint is that these students have been educated at the considerable expense of the Chinese People, and should not be encouraged to seek personal profit as a result. In my own experience, this often meant that the students would scrimp and save even more tightly, eschewing any thought of joining in a Western social life, for instance, in an effort to accumulate enough from their pittance to buy at least a cassette player or a

colour television set to take home.

By August 1982, four years after the foreign study programme began to expand, Xinhua was reporting that from a total of over twelve thousand post-graduate students sent overseas, three thousand five hundred had returned, and most of the others were planning to on completion of their studies. Never the less, the media did see fit to carry a series of interviews with Chinese scientists of international repute, mostly mathematicians and computer designers, on the intriguing theme of 'Why I am Not Planning to Defect'. 'The East has its own glory' was the principle sentiment expressed, along with some recognition that, on projects given priority by the state planners, China can indeed offer quite tempting working conditions to dedicated, practising scientists.

Another part of the 'New Long March' was a huge upsurge in official delegations going overseas on diplomatic or 'study' tours. It was, of course, an excellent thing that senior people of an administration that had been in very tight isolation from the world for thirty years should have the opportunity to test their imaginings against the realities of the outside world. But those on the receiving end of such delegations discovered all too often that the people who did the travelling were not the people capable of getting some real technical benefit from the tour. There were major reorganisations going on at the highest levels, and the gift of an overseas tour (courtesy, usually, of some foreign donor) was often the sweetener for a bunch of elderly cadres on the verge of forced retirement. The benefits of such a 'study tour' were often raised by the Chinese side in the early stages of major trade negotiations, for instance, and when the hopeful vendor of steel mills or oil refineries quickly agreed, the Chinese ministry concerned might present a long list of suggested invitees.

The detailed technical presentations prepared for these guests, however, were often wasted, as the delegation made clear that it was more interested in shopping and tourism. Distinguished leaders of such delegations, on whom much personal attention might be lavished, were often found to have retired from active work by the time the anxious trader next

arrived in Beijing, hoping to capitalise on his expensive goodwill. Rumbblings of discontent over this, both from foreign hosts, and from the real experts within the relevant Chinese organisations, soon brought forth some stern editorials in the Party press, and the most obvious cases of 'junketing' declined in numbers.

Some very senior members of the Central Committee and high government offices came in for some flak as well for their self-indulgence in travel, but the cases given notoriety in the press concerned, as usual, people further down the scale. There was a famous expedition by cadres from a Foodstuffs Collective in Sichuan province, who went to spend a week in Hong Kong on the pretext of studying the production of *dofu* (soybean curd). What they learned in Hong Kong about bean curd production has not been recorded, but an embarrassing investigation by the provincial authorities upon their return exposed a four-day carousal in Kowloon, banqueting on the public purse, and not excluding 'investigation' visits to low-life girly bars of Tsim Sha Tsui.

The glittering prosperity of Hong Kong, so tantalisingly close to China and yet so far, had been proving more and more attractive a lure to mainland Chinese, as various aspects of China's opening up to the world meant that the Chinese people knew more about the better life available elsewhere. Hong Kong is attractive to the less sophisticated would-be emigre because it is so clearly itself Chinese, holding few of the potential problems of settling somewhere as different as the USA. Hong Kong-produced movies were shown on Chinese Central Television, in which somewhat glamorised Hong Kong office workers were shown to have living standards worlds above their mainland counterparts. Every ambitious youth knew the stories of the fabulous fortunes of millionaire Hong Kong tycoons who had left mainland China only twenty years previously, with not a penny to their names.

As a result, an ever-swelling tide of Chinese, especially the young, devoted themselves to finding a means to get there. Over 1979, more than 150,000 succeeded in reaching Hong Kong by legal or illegal means, and under the regulations then

prevailing in Hong Kong they were automatically entitled to stay, once they had reached the urban centres. The reasons behind this rule were less humanitarian than in the interests of Hong Kong's then booming light industries, ever hungry for more cheap labour. What brought it to an end was the influx of an almost equal number of Boat People refugees from Vietnam, just at the time when world recession was beginning to reduce Hong Kong's own labour demand. Beijing, after some persuasion, agreed to help stem the flow.

Three out of four Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong had been 'illegals' - either running the gauntlet of border guards into Hong Kong's bordering New Territories, or else staying on after having been granted temporary visas of one kind or another, usually to visit relatives. With such a high proportion of those given visitors visas tending to stay on, the Hong Kong government had to clamp down hard, suddenly making it almost impossible even for those Chinese with husbands, wives and parents in Hong Kong to cross the line.

Because of Hong Kong's disputed legal status (the Peoples Republic never acknowledging that it was not a part of China) there are no Hong Kong government offices in China proper, and the visas for visits are issued through British Consulates in Beijing and Guangzhou. With the sudden strangling of Residence and Visitors visa approvals, the British consular officers in these places began receiving an extraordinary number of applications for Transit Visas. The practice had always been that anyone with a visa for a third country would automatically be granted a visa for a forty-eight hour stay in Hong Kong on the way through. Now, of course, most Chinese holders of such visas began simply disappearing during their 'stopover' in Hong Kong, and the third country mentioned in the visa application never saw hide nor hair of its expected visitor.

A friend of mine working in this area reported a tremendous boom in applications, from apparently impoverished Chinese, to visit the most unusual tourist destinations. For some months, hundreds of such applicants would line up outside the British Consulate in Beijing brandishing tourist visas for Yugoslavia,

Cuba, and Portugal. Word had got around that these countries gave out tourist visas virtually on request. Eventually the rules had to be changed again, allowing a transit visa in Hong Kong only when no alternative route was available. Tourist visas to Cuba dropped off markedly, I was told, when transit visas in Moscow and Bucharest were the only ones a Cuban tourist visa helped to obtain.

A sharp Hong Kong entrepreneur named Zhou Jiangping had a successful career for a few months selling 'World Passports' to the gullible in Guangzhou, at several hundred dollars a piece, until the arrest of himself and several local Chinese accomplices intervened.

A few determined individuals then appeared at British consular offices in Beijing with proposals to visit the tiny number of countries, such as Surinam, which had no diplomatic representation in China, but had an office in Hong Kong. That ploy didn't wash for long, either. Foreign visa officers were offered money and even gold bars by people desperate to get out and ready to try anything. Candidates appeared with crudely forged documents. One gentleman who had been refused a Hong Kong transit visa by the British Consulate in Beijing reappeared an hour later, with the same set of documents, but this time wearing a hat pulled down over his eyes, a long overcoat, and a false pair of spectacles. The officer concerned concluded that this man not only was dishonest, but had a low opinion of the intelligence of foreigners. He didn't get his visa.

There was a third means of emigration, which involved high risk, but which many young Chinese in those days were prepared to have a fling at. One could marry a foreigner.

There had always been a few cases of arranged marriages between locals, usually women, and overseas Chinese who returned to their home counties in search of an appropriate wife. There had always been a number of foreign 'Friends of China' who had settled down in the country with a Chinese spouse, though these had been among the most persecuted as 'spies' during the Cultural Revolution. There were now, since

the overthrow of the Maoists, a few cases where a marriage between a foreigner and a Chinese had been allowed, although it required special dispensation from the highest authorities.

To marry a foreigner required almost the same degree of running the gauntlet as an escape to Hong Kong. There was no rule or regulation that said you could not marry a foreigner, but there was an extremely deep-rooted prejudice against cross-cultural relationships in general. Many of the first generation of communist leaders, not including Mao himself, had been relatively cosmopolitan - they had lived abroad, and some even had foreign wives or mistresses themselves. But the second generation, those who came to power during the fifties and sixties, tended to be more narrow-minded. Their ideas of relations between Chinese and foreigners were formed on the rape and pillage of imperialist invasions, followed up by eight decades of prostitution in the Treaty Ports like Shanghai and, to this day, Hong Kong.

China's own traditions of concubinage, prostitution, and the legal rape of the lower classes could never raise as much righteous ire as the thought of lascivious foreigners dallying with innocent Chinese beauties, while honest Chinese men, too poor ever to be able to buy themselves a wife, slaved outside the door. In short, their ideas were racist, though with some undeniable historical basis, and these ideas were fostered throughout China as part of the general anti-Imperialist propaganda campaigns. On stage and screen, brutal red-haired Foreign Devils with huge putty noses could be seen dragging Chinese maidens into degradation and slavery.

Any relationship between a local woman and a foreign man, even in the 1970s, was presumed gravely suspicious, almost a form of prostitution, unless extremely good arguments, or a very senior sponsor, could defend it. Even during my own period in Beijing, firm steps, amounting to kidnapping if necessary, were being taken by outraged unit bosses and

parents the moment rumours of involvement with a foreigner became known. Inter-racial marriage was not actually illegal, but interracial courtship was definitely out.

Everyone of the older generation in Beijing could tell you, if the subject were raised, of the tragic tale of a beautiful and talented young woman in the Foreign Ministry who threw away everything in the fifties to marry a Hungarian journalist. Some would tell you that the man had 'sold' her after leaving China, others that she had committed suicide out of sheer misery. Bill Kwo told me how a commissar had said to him, as the topic was being discussed in a political indoctrination session:

'She is begging to come back now to China.. but we won't let her come, however miserable she may be! What's wrong with Chinese men?!'

The facts were quite different, and it was my great delight on many occasions to be able to tell these people that the couple, Bela and Kunhua Elias, were not only still very happily married with a grown-up daughter, but, twenty-five years later, were at that very moment back in Beijing. Bela Elias was one of the more humorous and astute among the Eastern European correspondents, and Kunhua an elegant, open woman of an academic Shanghai family, well educated in both Chinese and foreign cultures. But I suspect that the story of Kunhua's supposed 'misery' is still being told to the grandchildren of those who first heard it.

Xu Yanping had heard the story in kindergarten, but she had never dreamed of marrying a long-nosed foreigner. Her family were middle-class doctors in Beijing, and, naturally, they came under attack in the Cultural Revolution. Her father died as a direct result of persecutions, and her family was scattered. Yanping herself was sent, aged thirteen, with her entire class from an elite Beijing preparatory school, to 'learn from the masses' at the old revolutionary base of Yanan - now a place of pilgrimage and memorabilia. Like almost all her generation, Yanping deeply believed in Mao and in his teachings, and became disillusioned only when she encountered the ignorant and immovable class hatreds of those peasants who took Maoism so seriously.

Being the youngest in her class, she was considered too weak to join the peasants at their labour, so she became, at thirteen, a schoolteacher to peasants at Yen-an. Perhaps on account of her youth, she said, she managed to stay out of trouble for the next few years, studied privately, and eventually won a coveted place in the first waves of rusticated youth to be re-admitted to educational institutions. She went to the Shanghai Languages Institute and studied english. On graduation she was assigned to Xian, in the central west - a former Imperial Capital in China's Golden Age, but notorious in the 1970s as a stronghold of conservative Maoism. There she was to be a teacher in the Xian Foreign Language Institute, and it was there she met Stephen Nolan, an Australian who had found his way individually to China as a volunteer teacher.

There was a small group of foreign teachers at the institute, and they were segregated into a separate dormitory block, even eating their meals in a separate room. Chinese students could not visit them there without special permission. Chinese teachers, on the other hand, associated with the foreigners more freely, sharing a staff room at the Institute. Yanping was one of the brightest and keenest among the young teachers at the institute, and it was while doing after-hours work in the staff room with Stephen that a mutual attraction developed. Both recognised the situation as potential dynamite, for if Yanping were suspected of 'flirting' with a foreigner she could face instant transfer and a serious, permanent note on the personnel file that would follow her, wherever she went, for the rest of her life.

Yanping had been forced to take hold of her own life at a much earlier age than most young Chinese women, when she was sent to Yen-an at the age of thirteen. She decided now that she was not going to let her life, any more, be dictated by fear. Even to be seen talking together could invite trouble, so they arranged a rendezvous for the following Sunday at the Temple of Flourishing Teaching (*Xing Jiao si*) about forty kilometres' bicycle ride from the Institute, south of Xian. The temple, seldom visited now, claims to be the resting place of the eighth century monk Xuan Zhang, who had brought a new teaching,

Buddhism, to the great Chinese imperial capital from India. His epic journey is now best remembered as the fairy tale 'Pilgrimage to the West', and known to Western television viewers through the Japanese series 'Monkey'. The saintly monk, certainly, had nothing against foreigners.

By the end of that day, on a quiet hillside overlooking a plain teeming with village agriculture, Yanping had come to a decision. There was no question of half-measures, no question of any relationship short of marriage. On their first date, it had to be an ultimatum. Stephen admits to being somewhat swept off his feet by the speed of developments, and his mind was whirling as they pedalled back, separated by a discreet interval, that evening. Within a few days, each had been to ask their supervisor for permission to marry.

Yanping then went through a period of intense pressure, as the Party cadres of the Institute tried to dissuade her. She was given all the well-known horror stories of what happened to innocent Chinese girls who married barbarians - she would be sold, she was told. Westerners have no morals, Stephen would soon tire of her and abandon her in a strange land. Perhaps he already had a wife in Australia? It was, of course, a *cause celebre* in the Institute, and soon throughout the town.

'The gossip was hardest to bear', Yanping later told me.

'Many people really believe all that about foreigners. I lost some friends, people who thought I was crazy, or who just didn't want to be associated with the scandal of it. But I gained other friends at that time - people who had courage and an open mind. Even my own mother was terrified that our whole family would now be considered to be 'spies' because of our relations with a foreigner - that had always been the case before. But most of the active hostility came from the officials'.

The problem, really, was that marriage with a foreigner was considered virtually a diplomatic crisis, and officials at provincial level were terrified of making a decision either way that could bring unfavourable repercussions from Beijing. The cadres' most fervent wish was that Yanping would simply give up her request, and the whole thing could be swept under the carpet. There were daily 'counselling' sessions. When no reply

was forthcoming to the application, Stephen decided to go to Beijing to see what assistance he could get from the Australian Embassy there. Friends warned him against this - there was every chance that the Institute cadres, or the Public Security, could take advantage of his absence to spirit Yanping away, as had happened several times before when romance threatened between Chinese and foreigners.

Stephen took the risk, and it was rewarded. Representations were made on his behalf through the diplomatic channels, and a message went to Xian instructing the local cadres to approve the marriage. It went ahead quickly, once the formalities were settled. A Chinese wedding has two parts: the registration, which makes it legal, followed by a 'housewarming party', which makes it proper. Stephen was not fully apprised of this, and considered himself fully married once they left the Civil Affairs Bureau clutching their individual marriage licences, emblazoned with red flags. With colleagues now enthusiastically supporting them, a strange domestic arrangement was contrived. Stephen was still a foreigner, and Yanping was still a Chinese, and there was no precedent for them to live together either in the Chinese staff quarters or in the foreign staff quarters. Instead, they were assigned a small classroom in the no-man's-land of the Institute itself. The desks went out, a double bed, wardrobe and enamel washstand went in, and they were home. Without more ado, Stephen and Yanping embarked upon married life.

After some days, Yanping was taken aside by a teaching colleague with a worried expression, who warned her that the unit leaders were scandalised afresh at their living together without having held a proper housewarming. The party was duly arranged, the unit leaders appeared to bestow their ritual congratulations and presents of sweets, and Stephen and Yanping were finally accepted as a married couple. Indeed, they were celebrities in Xian, where the number of foreigners was still small and every detail of their lives was curiously observed. To some, Stephen's marriage to a Chinese would always be fundamentally offensive, but to a majority, it made him seem somewhat more human, after all.

From the start, they had known that a marriage would mean returning together to Australia - Stephen did not speak Chinese, and had no intention of staying beyond his agreed period. When I talked to them in their classroom bed-sitter, they both seemed to feel that their marriage had cut them off, to some extent, from the world of the Institute in which they had met each other. Yanping had few fears about moving to Australia - she spoke English well, and looked forward to further study of Western literature.

'Of course I'm going to miss China, its culture, my friends, and especially I will miss very much my family. But I look forward to more freedom, more varied culture, less pressure of people around me. Australia is a good country - I can have privacy'.

It was the first time I had heard a Chinese use the word 'privacy' which, as is often remarked, has no equivalent in the Chinese language.

Few would-be emigrants could have as relatively smooth a ride as Yanping. In Beijing, time and again, my wife Dilber or I would come across a man, or more often a woman, who, sooner or later, would ask us to find them a foreign spouse. Some of these candidates were simply adventurers. One girl, from a relatively comfortable family in Beijing's professional class, asked me to arrange by long-distance telephone for a man of my own choosing in Australia to become her fiancé, and sponsor her immigrant visa in time for her to begin the next university term in Australia.

'I don't mind if I have to marry him for a short time', she said, and was almost indignant when I declined to undertake this for her. After all, she had cultivated us on one or two previous encounters with little presents for our baby.

'Can't you even do it just for friendship?', she asked. I suppose I might have tried something for 'friendship', but I found the imposition a little premature.

Others who talked about leaving were people who had nursed a genuine desire to work for their own country and their own people, but had been rebuffed too often, for ideological or

personal reasons, and had simply concluded that New China had no place for them. Meihua, for instance, was a woman who had undergone enormous privations in the Cultural Revolution, spurned on all sides for her bourgeois background, her restless intelligence, and her appearance, which, she was convinced, was unattractive to Chinese men. Meihua, having lost all hope of a professional career during the Cultural Revolution, saw her life thwarted, with marriage to a foreigner the only possible way out.

'I don't think Abroad is heaven,' she told us, 'but I would like to try it. The only safe way is to find a foreign husband. He doesn't have to be rich, he doesn't have to be handsome, he doesn't have to have a brilliant career - I don't mind if he's old, divorced, even handicapped in some way. I would care for him, love him, just for the chance to rebuild my own life in a free country! Please help me find someone!'

By the time we left Beijing, nobody suitable had been found.

For the first two years in China, until the end of 1980, I was single myself, and became the target of a number of such marriage offers or 'introductions' by mutual friends. In my innocence, I took a while to realise what was happening on the first one or two occasions.

Among his large repertoire, my friend Wu Qing, the fixer in Guangzhou, was often asked by young women if he could help them find a foreign husband. Amongst Cantonese, it was not too difficult a matter to arrange a marriage with some young fellow who had got away to Hong Kong and had established residence there, but it was becoming extremely difficult, as time went by, for the spouse to capitalise on this by joining him there. At the same time, the growing numbers of traders, foreign advisers, and tourists in southern China were becoming a more tempting prospect to the local girls with their sights set over the border.

I meet Wu Qing as arranged, a hundred metres or so from the entrance to the Peoples Cinema. I notice he has three flimsy tickets, not two, pinched firmly between finger and thumb,

but before I get around to asking why, he introduces me to a girl who has risen from a nearby bench and joined us.

‘Du Weici, this is my cousin, Xiao San’. He uses her familiar name, ‘third younger sister’, which tells me nothing about who she is, so I believe him. Xiao San is slim, pert, and I estimate around twenty-seven years old. Most Chinese women are spoken for, if not married, by that age. Wu Qing looks around a little apprehensively.

‘Let her walk ahead. It could be bad if people saw her together with you. She’s coming to the movie with us’.

He doles out one ticket to Xiao San, who walks ahead into the thickening crowd towards the movie theatre. I note that she is done up in her best, her blouse open one bold button at the neck and tucked into the straight waist of her skirt. Sheer nylon half-stockings end at garters below the knee. A large shady cotton hat, sunglasses, and a white vinyl shoulder-bag give Xiao San the air of heading for a garden-party or a day at the races. But I guess that her high-heeled shoes are borrowed, as they are two sizes too big, and she is having some trouble staying up on them. There is a daring blush of rouge on her cheeks.

A couple of young bloods in the crowd nudge each other, looking at her. There’s no doubt that she has set out to be attractive.

In the dark of the cinema, I am surprised to find Wu Qing ushering me into the seat ahead of him, which puts me between the two of them. Next to Xiao San. Xiao San gives me a small, conspiratorial smile, but does not venture on any conversation. Cinema crowds are always seeded with police informers, or so the public believe.

The movie is mediocre, but after it Wu Qing seems unusually jovial and expansive.

'Lets go to the coffee shop and eat ice-cream', he says, making it sound like a considerable expedition. No woman of any dignity would go beer-drinking at night.

We head for a famous coffee shop which had once, in the old days, been owned by a foreigner. Now, the coffee is made with re-boiled grounds and served weak, in large bowls like soup plates. No milk or cream are available, but a cassette player hooked up to a coarse loudspeaker on the wall is blaring out sentimental disco numbers on a tape from Hong Kong, in Cantonese.

We three sit on benches around a wooden table on which food and spilt drinks have been left by the previous occupants. I sweep these onto the cement floor with a paper napkin, as Wu Qing goes to fetch the coffee and icecreams.

Xiao San takes a deep breath and begins to tell me about herself - how she hates the police, how she wants more freedom, how silly it is that foreigners and Chinese are kept apart. She tells me she has met quite a few foreigners - well, mostly from Hong Kong. A Japanese man asked her to go for a walk in a park, once. That was easy, because he looked like a Chinese, nobody made trouble. What do I think of Chinese girls? She has heard that all foreign men like Chinese girls very much. She leans forward confidentially and pats the table with two fingers.

I find her voice rather trying - she is affecting the shrill tone used by women in the awful stage conventions of contemporary Chinese theatre, and transferred downwards from the theatre world to those who would like to be mistaken for actresses. Xiao San has plenty of self-confidence, and I am sure she has been told often that she is pretty. I notice that Xiao San's small, round face has a very determined chin.

By the time Wu Qing comes back, Xiao San's prattle has attracted the attention of three young men drinking beer at the next table. They have been drinking for some time, and

are becoming flushed and slovenly. One of them reacts.

`What kind of object's that over there? A Chinese man's not good enough, she has to have a bloody foreigner too. Two men for one woman.. Huh!. Dressed like a prostitute, too..'

Xiao San's voice dies away and she sits back in her chair, colouring with fury behind her sunglasses. Her lips move and I detect she is silently swearing. I hope she doesn't decide to take a swing at someone. Wu Qing pretends to have heard nothing, and I take my cue from him. We jab silently at our icecream buckets for a while, saving face, while the muttering continues at the next table.

`Let's go somewhere else.. the coffee's not so good here', suggests Wu Qing. We drop Xiao San off at her bus-stop, and he walks along further with me towards the Dong Fang hotel.

`Not bad, is she, Xiao San? Lots of men like her, but she's pretty fussy. What do you think? Shall we see her again?' I am noncommittal.

A couple of days later Wu Qing arranged to see me again, this time at the gateway to the Dong Fang Hotel itself.

`Xiao San would like to see you again. She thinks you're pretty good, very civilised. She likes you, really. How about we come over to the hotel for a coffee in there? That's high class enough for her.'

At seven-thirty, as arranged, I went out to the gate, and saw what looked like a first-class row taking place, at the foot of a tree twenty metres down the road. As I approached, I saw it was none other than Wu Qing and Xiao San, surrounded by the usual crowd of gleeful onlookers to any kind of *re nao* on the streets.

`You bastard! What do you think I am! You told me six o'clock, and I've been standing here for an hour and a half! Do you know what happens to women who hang around the Dong Fang hotel? I've had enough of you! You're bloody hopeless!'

Xiao San was in full cry, her theatrical voice breaking down into something more throaty and, I must say, more attractive. Wu Qing was doing his best to quieten her as I approached. She took no notice of me whatsoever, lips curled in and small pointed chin twitching angrily until her fury had run its course, another two minutes at least, to the general amusement of the crowd.

Finally, she took a deep breath and turned to me, her cheeks still red with anger at her `cousin'.

`Du Weici, I'm sorry, I'm very sorry', she said, deciding that whatever might have happened was not to be. She walked off quickly towards her bus-stop, and the crowd drifted away, apart from a pair of curious twelve-year old girls who hung about us for the last few drops of drama. Wu Qing watched her go, happy that the tirade had ended if nothing else. Then he turned to me and shrugged.

`Du Weici, forget the coffee. How about a beer?'

Wu Qing's campaign had a motive of its own. One of the many options he was exploring for the development of his own career was emigration. He had asked a couple of foreign women if they would marry him. One, an elderly Canadian teacher, had even agreed, but the matter ran into trouble when her own family raised merry hell with the Canadian consulate. Wu Qing had been obliged to go underground after that, for a while.

But being a man of lateral thinking, Wu Qing quickly realised that having a close relative living overseas was just as good, in most ways, as being there oneself. Most of the countries which interested him had `family reunion' visa provisions which would make it relatively easy for Wu to follow whichever of his relatives he managed to plant overseas. Being blessed with a number of eligible sisters and cousins, he kept an eye out for the main chance. My brush with Xiao San, I later learned, had been part of this campaign.

On my next visit to Guangzhou, some months later, Wu was hinting broadly that something tremendously important was afoot. Loving the drama of life, he wanted me to be curious,

but would give no details. It was several more months before I would learn the secret: Wu Qing had finally got one of his cousins a foreign husband!

It had been a long and harrowing chase, like stalking a prize stag. The quarry was a European trade representative, who had a deep personal interest in Chinese culture and politics as well as his professional business commitments. But he was, above all, a cautious man, absolutely terrified that something could damage his standing with the Chinese authorities, or with his own corporation. From a very early stage, he imposed conditions of exaggerated secrecy on his meetings with Wu Qing, and tried to segregate him from all other foreigners in case the word got around.

Wu maintained that there was nothing irresponsible in his actions on behalf of female relatives, and he only agreed to make an introduction after a very thorough screening of the foreign prospect. It was after weeks of checking out this European bachelor that Wu decided to introduce him to his prize cousin, Xiao Ling. This particular cousin was pretty, good-natured and innocent - he was determined to protect her.

The pair seemed to take to each other immediately. Further meetings were arranged, and, for discretion, the normal rendezvous was Wu Qing's own comfortable little apartment near the old foreign trading enclave of Sha Mien island. By this stage, Wu Qing's prosperity was such that he had employed a fulltime housekeeper who cooked, cleaned and washed for him. To protect the confidential rendezvous, he regretfully sent her back to her village for the time being.

'Rain and shine, I had to get out of the place, to give them a chance to get to know each other', he complained, as of hardships endured in a noble cause.

The potential brother-in-law's caution became extreme. He asked Wu Qing to curb his less respectable activities in case they should get him into trouble, which would then embroil them all. He dithered and dithered interminably before taking the plunge to ask official permission to marry. The stakes were, indeed, high - if they played their cards just a little bit wrong it could mean disaster for each of them. Wu fretted like an

expectant father. At one point Wu threw up the whole thing in exasperation, but by that time the man was really keen, despite his caution, and kept coming back. He decided to go through with it.

This left Wu Qing with another problem. The first question the girl would be asked by the Public Security would be under what circumstances she had met the foreign man. If she named her cousin, he could be accused of procuring. Chinese tradition, anyway, requires a formal 'go-between' (*mei ren*), so Wu went out to find one. The man was fussy - he didn't want any other foreigners involved. Wu Qing eventually found one of his contacts among the businessmen from Hong Kong who agreed to do it, but the 'cousin-in-law' somehow managed to insult the person, and he withdrew. This was too much for Wu Qing, and once more he vowed to leave the pair to their own devices. Everything stalled for another few months, until they came back humbly to ask his help.

'In China, there is nothing that can't be done, if you set about it the right way', was Wu Qing's motto. He set about visiting the girl's unit leaders, bearing presents of cigarettes and wine. He went to see the local Public Security officers, who would also have to approve the match, and sweetened them. Obstacles went down, one by one, over several more months.

As a final humiliation, foreigners intending to marry a Chinese woman have to obtain a medical clearance that they are free of venereal disease! Wu Qing accompanied the intending bridegroom to the hospital, bearing the usual carton of cigarettes, and the test went very smoothly. Finally, when all obstacles to the marriage had been cleared away, Wu Qing was the recipient of what he considered a most ungrateful suspicion from his foreign cousin-in-law.

'You want something from me in return, don't you', said the man.

Wu's reply, as he recounted it to me, was quite blunt, now that the gloves were off.

'From the beginning, you must have known that. You asked for my help, accepted my help, my sacrifices, and you knew that I wanted to help my cousin leave the country... why now should you be surprised if I ask you for some help as well?

Naturally I wanted to help my cousin get out.. if not her, then another one. But don't you try to claim that you were so pure in this, and don't try to evade your debts to me. What I ask from you will be nothing compared to what I have given you - your wife.'

He nourished a certain resentment against his new brother-in-law over this, muttering darkly that the man must be a Leftist, with his fancy hypocritical notions of the ways of the world.

People at the top were well aware of the tide of disillusion among that class in China who were now most needed - the qualified, the energetic, the entrepreneurial. Measures were being taken to a certain extent which aimed to make life more attractive for the middle classes in China itself, but there could be no compromise over the basic issues of the Communist ideology or the `dictatorship of the proletariat', the absolute rule of the Communist Party.

Several movies were made during that period along the general theme of Chinese being tempted by the attractions of foreign bourgeois life. The most popular of these, 'The Herdsman', later declared Film of the Year, concerned a young man sent out from the city to work as a teacher in a remote Inner Mongolian pastoral area. His father had emigrated many years before, but now returned, wealthy, from the United States, and invited his son to join him in America. The young man is seen getting an introduction to the `decadent bourgeois' lifestyle in the fleshpots of (would you believe) Beijing, drinking and dancing the night away.

He asks his wife if he should go, and she lays it on him: `Go on, go! There you can have a car, good food, a big house... you can go bare-arsed dancing if you want it! 'Just leave us and go!'

Needless to say, the hero eventually declines, in favour of his rustic and stoic life `building socialism'. That was the surface of the story, what the script said. But what really shone through the film was that it was actually the purely domestic pull of his family that held the man back, as it has held back generations of Chinese with emigration opportunities before.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LOYAL HEARTS ACROSS THE SEAS

**I love you, beloved Motherland!
I love you, beloved China!
Your rolling southern seas!
Your dancing northern snows!
I love you, beloved Motherland,
I love you, beloved China,
Beautiful songs I will sing to you
The flower of my youth I will give to you
My own, my Motherland! Aaaaaaaaah!
My youth I will give to you, my Motherland!**

The lyrics may not be especially original, and the melody, as it happens, would hardly stir the blood either - but this song carries a hidden and powerful message. It is sung by a person born and raised outside of China, who has never lived in China, but whose identity as a Chinese, none the less, is absolute. This was the theme song of a movie produced in China in 1981, called 'Loyal Heart Across the Sea', in which a contemporary

young woman of an Overseas Chinese family pays a return visit to the Mother land and becomes caught up in the grand vision of building a New China.

The movie was directed at a home audience, at a time when Beijing's policy had been clearly stated to mobilise the huge resources of trading power, technical expertise, and investment capital represented by the twenty-four million Chinese who live in other countries. Poetically, those who return are designated 'Returning Swallows', forever bound by an invisible thread to the land of their origin. The great majority of these live in Southeast Asia, where ethnic Chinese interests are said to control more than seventy percent of the trading economy. The movie happened to be released just as Deng Xiaoping was making a diplomatic sweep through these countries, trying to woo support for the anti-Vietnamese coalition in Kampuchea, but the sentiments expressed in the song are exactly what worry China's Southeast Asian neighbours the most about their own Chinese minorities. Whatever the diplomatic protestations, there is always a suspicion, throughout the region, that anyone with a Chinese ethnic background is expected, by Beijing, to regard China as their Motherland.

Suspicious like this can be very potent, when they are based on a reality of great local Chinese economic power, on the fear of Chinese-backed communist insurgencies, and China's territorial claims to almost the entire South China Sea. Beijing's official maps show the dotted line of its territorial waters virtually scraping the beaches of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and enclosing, like a giant string bag, islands and archipelagos settled, garrisoned, or otherwise used by those countries.

The long history of Chinese settlement and colonisation of the region is a fascinating one of itself, not least being the question as to why, in the Ming Dynasty, China's then-flourishing seaward expansion and exploration was almost totally curtailed. If not for this Imperial policy decision, Southeast Asia today would likely have a far higher degree of Han colonisation than it has now - possibly even amounting to majority Han populations in several parts of the region. As it is,

Chinese historians are fond of digging out the records of early colonies and territorial claims, such as the 'Orchid Republic' of Cantonese settlers, which flourished for a hundred and twenty years before the Dutch colonisation on the coast of western Borneo, now Kalimantan.

China's 1982 Constitution (more a manifesto of current policy than an immutable Charter) takes account of the Overseas Chinese. Article 50 says:

"The Peoples' Republic of China protects the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese nationals residing abroad and protects the lawful rights of returned Overseas Chinese, and of family members of Chinese nationals residing abroad."

China's well-publicised official policy towards Overseas Chinese is to encourage them to take up the citizenships of the countries in which they are settled, and China does not, any more, maintain dual citizenships in these cases. None the less, those who have taken out foreign citizenship are not 'written off'. The Bureau of Overseas Chinese Affairs, attached to the State Council in Beijing, operates virtually as a Ministry in its own right, and handles the affairs of millions of people holding the citizenships of other countries. The special *hua qiao* rates of prices and charges (considerably less than that charged to other foreigners) can be had by almost anyone with a Chinese name or face, regardless of their passport, and a whole web of preferences and privileges make sure that no overseas Chinese will be treated fully as a foreigner while he is in China. Overseas consulates maintain contacts with Chinese communities.

Governments of small neighbouring countries with large ethnic Chinese populations may be forgiven for wondering quite how Beijing would interpret 'protecting the interests of Chinese nationals residing abroad' in time of crisis. In the case of Vietnam, for instance, it was clear that, during the 1978-81 purges against the ethnic Chinese of Vietnam, China was

accepting across the border, as 'Chinese' refugees, many tens of thousands of people who carried Vietnamese, not Chinese, citizenship.

Local suspicion of the overseas Chinese is often unfair, of course. Many Chinese settlers have been out of China for several generations, and of these a good proportion have become closely identified with their country of settlement. This is particularly so among many of the younger professionals, children of earlier immigrants, who have been educated outside of their parents' Chinese traditions. Singaporeans are a prime example of these, with a very strong feeling of their own separate nationhood.

Another proportion, though a dwindling one, are so strongly anti-Communist that they feel only nostalgic ties to a China that no longer exists, as one might feel towards a deceased parent. Yet another sizeable proportion of overseas Chinese businessmen see the Peoples Republic as a vast hinterland in which their ethnic links can open up great opportunities for themselves, in profitable trading, and with no more than lip-service to China's national interests. But those who do return to the Motherland, in the 'flower of youth' or in old age, are a very visible and very interesting sector of Chinese society.

China's first modern regime, the short-lived 1911 Republic, was founded largely on the financial and participatory support of Overseas Chinese, based on Guangzhou. Dr Sun Yat-Sen, still honoured on the mainland and Taiwan alike as the founder of modern China, had in fact spent so much of his time and effort rallying support outside of China that he had not built any substantial political base within China itself, and his regime soon lost momentum. Within a few short years, Dr Sun was back in exile, and there are grounds to believe that he is honoured in Communist China today largely on account of his extremely high standing among the Overseas Chinese, including the contiguous, but politically independent, regions of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. A giant portrait of Sun Yat-sen is erected each year in Tian An Men Square for a few days around October 10th, commemorating his role in the first Republican revolution.

A very high proportion of those who contributed to the flow of new ideas, political, social and technical, into China in those early days of the century were returned students from overseas - from Japan, Europe and America. Organisations founded by these people were precursors of the Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, and a host of other reform groups, some of which survive in rump form even today, under the guiding hand of the Communist Party's United Front Work Department. One of the tasks assigned to such groups, now, is the encouragement of Overseas Chinese to return to the Motherland and contribute to its development. From the beginning, such people have been vital to China's progress towards modernisation.

It was a surprise to me, at the end of the 1970s, to discover just how many of an older generation of urbane, foreign educated professionals were still to be found in Beijing, populating government and academic institutions. Many of them had been severely persecuted during the Cultural Revolution for their foreign contacts, but as they trickled back from the farms and remote exiles where most of them had spent at least part of that decade, they also began renewing contacts with their former friends and colleagues who had chosen, much earlier in life, to pursue their careers outside of China. Now, as it appeared that China was at last in a mood to appreciate expertise regardless of class background, many of those Overseas Chinese became interested, once more, in lending a hand.

China's rocketry and nuclear weapons programmes had been led by one such man. Dr Qian Xuesen had been a member of the original allied Manhattan Project team that built the world's first atomic bombs, and had remained in the forefront of American nuclear research until persuaded to return to China in 1955, at the height of McCarthyist harassment of people like himself in the USA whose loyalties could be questioned. In China, he was given a hero's welcome by Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou Enlai and all the luminaries, plus, one must suspect, a deeper satisfaction that he was at last working, in his own way, for his own people. Qian was one of the very few

foreign returnees who was spared persecution throughout the Cultural Revolution, as Premier Zhou Enlai ensured that China's nuclear programme remained a top priority.

That welcome was repeated, on a smaller scale, time after time in my period in Beijing. Overseas Chinese scientists of any distinction returning to China, even just on a visit, could be assured of a personal reception by a leading political dignitary, often Deng Xiaoping himself, and flattering notices in the national press. Often, the form would be that Xinhua would release a notice that such and such an 'American physicist' or 'Australian computer expert' had met Deng Xiaoping, but the name that followed was Chinese.

In 1980, many of the generation who had just begun their overseas professional careers when the Communists won China were now approaching retirement. On handsome superannuation payments from their host country, they were now willing to return to a position of some honour and gratification in the country of their birth, perhaps also to expiate some lingering guilt for having deserted China, thirty years earlier, when it needed them. I met several such people, suave and fully westernised on the surface, but still feeling themselves deeply to be Chinese, and wanting to help. One, I remember, was an aeronautical engineer, retiring from a long career with a high security clearance at a leading United States defence aerospace manufacturer, who came to Beijing prepared to offer his services and knowledge to China, asking nothing for himself. The quid pro quo, in many cases, would be the extension of special favours to relatives of the returnee who had never left China - a better job, return of housing or property confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, facilitation of applications for foreign study, and so on.

It is often remarked that China is almost never caught out in high-level espionage activities of the type we consider routine between the USA and the USSR. One factor may well be that, so far, China has seldom needed to run extensive operations to steal information, when so much is brought to China freely in the heads and briefcases of returning Overseas Chinese, either for the reasons above, or, in the case of traders, in an attempt to

curry commercial favour. A Hong Kong resident businessman, Zheng Daquan, was arrested in New York in 1982, charged with being head of a technical spy ring pursuing a 'shopping list' of advanced telecommunications technology required by Chinese organisations. Zheng's contacts in the USA were exclusively ethnic Chinese, working inside such institutions as American Telephone and Telegraph.

In this case, the motivation would appear to be simply commercial gain on the part of that Hong Kong entrepreneur. The flow of restricted technology through Hong Kong into China has been well-known for many years. But not all the tasks undertaken by overseas Chinese are entirely venal, if the following story is considered.

Lin Zhihua is a forthright young woman, whose family were landlords in old China, and had been thoroughly committed to the Nationalist, anti-Communist cause. On the communist victory, Zhihua's father went with the Nationalists to Taiwan, taking with him his wife, Zhihua and a brother, but leaving behind two elder brothers and a sister, in the care of a relative. Such family splits were all too common in those days, and have scarred a whole generation. Thirty years of separation from living family can be more painful, they say, than knowing that family members are dead. The wound does not heal.

In the mid-1950s, Zhihua's father became disillusioned with the situation in Taiwan, and emigrated with his family to Canada. There Zhihua grew up, and was educated. Her family ties to China remained, however. On college graduation, Zhihua wanted to explore her 'roots', and went back to Taiwan for two years study and re-orientation in Chinese culture. Student life in Taiwan had a political content of anti-Communist activity, which, in her first year, she accepted as natural, if not with enthusiasm. She also spent a lot of time with old friends of her parents, including a number of people with some position in the political and academic life of Taiwan.

In her second year, Zhihua began to lose faith in Taiwan's official aim to 'liberate the mainland', although, like so many others on that island, she was aware that close relatives of her

own were right then, in the mid-1970s, suffering miserably under a political tyranny. But Taiwan, too, began to suffocate her, and she returned to Canada. In the end, to some family disappointment, she married a non-Chinese Canadian.

Some years later, as the Peoples Republic made clear that all Chinese of any political colour were welcome to visit, Zhihua and her husband came on a package tour to China. But what burned in Zhihua's mind was the desire to do something for her brothers and sister, all now grown up, but living in considerable hardship. After years of silence, they had written to their father, asking what he could do for them. They were living in central China, in a small provincial town near to where their family had once been landlords, but a place not open to tourists. Zhihua asked her Travel Service guide what to do, and he gave her the telephone number of the Overseas Chinese Bureau.

She went to the Bureau. The interviewing officer was very friendly, and explained that there was every chance she would be able to visit her relatives or at least meet them somewhere 'convenient'. If the local authorities considered that they had accommodation of a standard adequate to receive a Foreign Guest, they would accept her visit. Zhihua's fears, grown from years of anti-Communist upbringing, melted away and she began to feel that, after all, she was really a Chinese, and this place, not Taiwan, was the real China. She was asked for all particulars of her family that she could give, and was told someone would be in touch with her. The tour group was leaving Beijing for a few days, but it would return, and the matter would be followed up then.

On the evening of their return to Beijing, the Tour Guide came to Zhihua and told her she would have a visitor that evening. Who was the visitor? Just 'something to do with her family'. Attendance at an acrobatic show was scheduled for that evening of the package tour, would she mind missing it? Her husband could still go. In fact, the visitor wanted to speak to her alone. The guide laughed nervously as he said that, and Zhihua, still not at all sure of her standing, and keen to help her family, accepted the condition. Her husband was briefly offended at his exclusion, but accepted Zhihua's explanation

that it was in the interests of her family.

At seven thirty there was a tap at the door of her room in the Friendship Hotel. A man in his sixties stood there, swathed in a large overcoat, wearing a peaked flat cap, and smiling. He was accompanied by a young man, apparently some kind of secretary.

'Welcome to China, Lin Zhihua,' he said, as she ushered him in. There was no-one in the adjoining rooms, as they had all gone off on the bus to the acrobatic show.

'What do you think of our country, eh? Still very backward, isn't it? But we're beginning to make progress, definitely. Soon all the Overseas Chinese will be proud of us!'

He sat down in one of the two armchairs, heaved a sigh, and placed his flat cap on the bed. The young man moved over by the window and sat on the plain wooden chair by the desk. They had not yet identified themselves, so Zhihua asked, politely, who they were.

'Oh, don't worry about that!,' said the older man with a hearty chuckle and a beaming smile.

'Just call me Old Cadre (*lao ganbu*), and this is my assistant. We work with Overseas Chinese, and we would like to help you. Tell us about your family.'

Zhihua went over what she had told the interviewers at the Overseas Chinese Bureau, and expanded a little on the immediate problems of her family in the provincial town. They had told her that their confiscated housing had not been returned or compensation given, as the current policies promised, and that one of her brothers was unable to get a job, apparently because local Party officials still classified him as a Landlord, thirty years after his father's entire landholdings had been nationalised. Only one house had been left to the family, and that had gone in the Cultural Revolution. Now the two families shared two rooms.

Old Cadre nodded sympathetically as she spoke.

'There are many deficiencies in our work', he acknowledged.

The policy is clear. Housing that belonged to Overseas Chinese, and was confiscated during the Ten Years of Chaos, must be returned to its rightful owners. We must build unity with the loyal Overseas Chinese, encourage their patriotic

feelings. Don't you agree?'

He gave Zhihua time to begin murmuring some vague response or other, then went on.

'Cadres at the local level have problems, too. Sometimes their understanding of Central policies is not very thorough. There are difficulties in finding enough money and enough housing to make compensation. Sometimes, they pay too much consideration to the personal history of people claiming compensation.

'Of course, it's much easier for you, as an Overseas Chinese, to receive compensation, than for your family members inside China to receive compensation. Without your help, I'm afraid they must wait at the end of a long queue.'

He paused a moment for Zhihua to absorb this, then changed the subject, adopting a thoughtful expression.

'Your father and you spent some years in Taiwan. Actually, we know all about you'.

He smiled again. Zhihua was trying not to blush, uncertain whether her Nationalist connections were going to get her into trouble. Could she be considered a traitor or a spy?

Old Cadre reached out and patted her hand reassuringly.

'Old cadres like me have many friends, many old comrades, now on Taiwan. Many of us have close relatives there. Patriotic Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits long to be reunited, long for re-unification of Taiwan with the mainland. It is our policy not to discriminate against patriots who come forward, early or late, to serve the Motherland. The people will forgive past mistakes'.

Zhihua had read these policy statements in the press, but she was not too comfortable with the turn the conversation was taking. She did not consider that she had done anything that required 'forgiveness', but Old Cadre was clearly putting her in that position. She said nothing, however, thinking of her family and the chance that she could help them.

Old Cadre began to question Zhihua, in the most friendly of ways, about certain old friends of her father who held positions of political influence in Taiwan. From the questions, Zhihua

realised that he already knew a great deal, not only about her father, but about what Zhihua herself had done and whom she had associated with during her student days back in Taiwan. His underlying theme seemed to be that there were people in responsible positions on Taiwan who would return, now, to the Peoples Republic, if they could be contacted correctly. If they could receive the right messages, through people they trusted.

Old Cadre came back to Zhihua's own situation.

‘Lin Zhihua, as an Overseas Chinese (actually she held Canadian nationality) you are entitled to full compensation for your father's property. We can pay you in any foreign currency you choose, send money to any bank account you nominate. We don't ask questions about your personal affairs. We can pay you the full amount.’

Zhihua sensed that she was being tested. Would she take the money and sell out her long-separated family? It was true that she had almost no personal relationship with them, having been separated in such early childhood. If she declined the money, however, she would demonstrate that the welfare of her relatives meant a great deal to her. Would that also invite pressure? She suddenly felt trapped.

‘I would need to think about that’, she hedged, trying not to show her feelings. ‘And I want to make contact with my family as soon as possible. I can't decide what to do unless I know their situation.’

‘Naturally. Of course’, said Old Cadre. ‘I can arrange for them to meet you in the provincial capital. But I'm afraid it will take some time. Perhaps you will not be able to meet them on this visit. In the mean time, I will see what I can do for your relatives' accommodation, and for your brother's job. ‘If you can help us, then I am sure that we can help you’.

His meaning was clear to Zhihua: help for her family was conditional on her agreement to carry messages from Beijing to Taiwan. Was there anything wrong with that? She couldn't see any reason to object, although she was uneasy about such a deal as the basis for the future of her relatives. Without her, they were helpless. If she refused now, things could get worse for them. If Old Cadre's people asked for this innocent

assistance now, might they give her more difficult assignments later on, all pegged to the welfare of her brothers, sister and their young families?

Zhihua replied in vaguely positive terms, wanting only to test the water, and certainly not wanting to spoil things without ever seeing the family she had come to rediscover. Old Cadre could see that there was no more to be said, and rose, smiling again, to leave. The secretary leapt to his feet and passed Old Cadre his cap. He gave Zhihua a scrap of paper with a telephone number on it, which she was to call next time she was in Beijing if she wanted to be in touch. As they moved towards the door with a series of polite goodbyes, Old Cadre turned again, remembering something.

`Of course, when you come again to China to see your relatives, it will be easier if you don't bring your husband. He's a foreigner, and we can't let him go to meet your family. It wouldn't be convenient.

`And don't tell your husband what we have discussed tonight. It's a matter between Chinese people. We Chinese have to work together, eh! We are one blood!'

With that he left, leaving Zhihua in considerable internal turmoil. Naturally, she told her husband everything that had transpired on his return from the acrobatic show, and he became very angry, especially about the attempt to exclude him from an important part of his wife's life. He wanted to complain to the Canadian Consulate, but Zhihua persuaded him to do nothing.

`I am Chinese, my family are Chinese. If I am to help my family, it will have to be in a Chinese way', she told him.

They agreed that she would leave things as they were, and return to China the following year to try to see her family. She kept in touch with her family by letter, and heard, within a few months, that they had in fact been moved into a new, relatively spacious housing block, which they were very pleased with. The local officials responsible for the compensation on their father's property had told them that they would get their compensation `when the money was available'.

Zhihua did make her return visit to China, on her own, and

went to meet her family. Their circumstances had improved quite dramatically, though there was still no comparison to be made between their small-town provincial life in China and her own middle-class, Canadian affluence. It was an emotional visit. She brought them the present expected of a returning overseas relative - a colour television set. There were tears, but they were tears of nostalgia for the infant memories they had of each other. As adults, they had grown apart. They talked for hours, but the more they talked, the more Zhihua felt that she lived in a world they would never share nor understand, and that she would never share her brothers' world.

She returned to Beijing with a sense of some loss. If she undertook, on her own, to bridge the gap between them, she would be making an open-ended commitment for an unknown price, and with no certainty that what she could achieve for them would be worth that price. They had their own lives, and China was now offering better opportunities to everybody than in the previous twenty years - even to those without foreign relatives. Perhaps they would eventually receive the rest of their compensation, perhaps not, unless Zhihua got in touch with Old Cadre.

Telling me the story, Zhihua said that back in her Beijing hotel room, the day before her return flight to Canada, she pulled out that scrap of paper with Old Cadre's telephone number on it and stared at it for half an hour, unable to make up her mind. Should she be an agent of the Peoples Republic? What possible harm could there be in it? Didn't every Chinese, including those on Taiwan, want an end to the separation? But on whose terms? Finally, on an impulse, she dialled the number, feeling that she was diving into a pool of unknown temperature.

The line was busy. She never dialled that number again, but she often wondered how many Overseas Chinese like herself had been in that position, and what they had been asked to do.

The political stand-off with the Nationalist regime on Taiwan has its seasons, but, under Deng Xiaoping, the principle has always been 'softly, softly'. The normalisation of diplomatic

relations between the Peoples Republic and the United States was a severe diplomatic blow to Taiwan, though it has since shown that a *modus vivendi* could still be reached. There were a number of scraps over membership of international bodies and participation in sporting competitions. Xinhua announced one day that a telegram had been sent from the All-China Sports Federation (Beijing) to the Chinese Sports Federation (Taipei), inviting them to send the measurements of their selected athletes to join a combined China team at the Asian games, so that the uniforms could be tailored in good time. Replies to such telegrams were never received, of course.

The ritual artillery 'bombardment' of disputed coastal islands, about two shells per week, was discontinued in early 1979. The Peoples Republic dropped all customs tariffs against goods imported from Taiwan (it was authorities on Taiwan who officially banned all trade with the 'Communist bandits', while turning a blind eye to the high level of indirect trade through Hong Kong). Truckloads of cartons boldly labelled 'Colour TV, Made in Taiwan' could soon be seen rolling through Beijing.

On National Day, 1981, President of the Peoples Republic Ye Jianying announced a new package of offers to Taiwan for consideration. These promised extensive autonomy to Taiwan, in exchange for sovereignty. Under the terms of the offer, Taiwan would be permitted to keep its own armed forces, its own political and economic system, its own cultural and trading relations with foreign countries, its own foreign investment. All the Nationalist Government on Taiwan would be required to give up would be its claim to be the legitimate government of the whole of China, its flag, and its national anthem. Political figures from Taiwan would be allowed to 'take up leadership posts in political bodies of the Peoples Republic of China'.

It was a bold ploy, but it did not escape many on Taiwan that, once their claim to their own sovereignty had been dropped, they would have no recourse whatsoever to outside support if Beijing later decided to renege on any of the promised 'special conditions'. All previous periods of 'United Front' with

the Communist Party had ended in disaster for the Nationalists.

In all probability, Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues had no expectation of positive response from the older generation of Taiwan leaders, but issued this 'offer' for the benefit of third parties, and as a talking point for the younger generation of Chinese living on Taiwan, many of whom are deeply fascinated with the liberalising developments on the mainland, and who might, as time goes by, be prepared to compromise over their sovereignty. Long-term, Beijing's fear is not that the Peoples Republic faces a counter-attack from some magically rejuvenated Nationalist force, but that young Taiwan-raised Chinese will simply lose interest in China as a single nation, and head down the road of an avowedly independent and separate Taiwan. The 1981 offer and other statements assured Taiwan and the world that Beijing was interested only in a 'peaceful re- unification', not a forcible one. But any future declaration of an independent and separate nation of Taiwan could be relied on to provoke the strongest possible response from China, including maximum military force if required, to keep Taiwan within the fold.

One of the weird features of the Taiwan stand-off is the irregular exchange of pilot defectors. Each country offers a huge bounty to pilots from the rival air force who fly their planes across the strait. Every few years, a disaffected pilot of one or other side runs the gauntlet, and is given a hero's welcome on the other side. The score seems to remain approximately even. The standing reward in Taiwan is a million yuan in gold, while on the mainland it is a million yuan. Major Huang Zhicheng made the big jump in his Nationalist Airforce reconnaissance craft in August 1981. He was immediately inducted into the PLA Air Force, appointed to the sinecure of Deputy Director of an Air Force academy, and sent around the country on a propaganda tour. He addressed the assembled press in Beijing with the fervour of a born-again patriot, but seemed rather vague about the actual conditions of life in the Peoples Republic. After a decent interval, a suitable wife was found to compensate him for the one he left in Taiwan.

The vast majority of returnees, however, come on a much less complicated basis. They are the millions, mainly from the South China coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, who now live in Hong Kong, Macao, and Southeast Asia. In those two provinces, currency remittances from expatriate relatives are a normal and significant part of the economy. And when the Overseas Chinese return, it is not so much as visitors, but as locals who happen to be living somewhere else. In some counties, for every two in the resident population there is another, non-resident Overseas Chinese, who considers the county to be his real home. They come back bearing real and practical gifts, and to admire the fruits of their overseas labours as sent back to the old home town.

Practically every family has its overseas branch somewhere or other, and there is a steady traffic of the young and vigorous departing overseas, to replace the old and frail who come home to retire, or to die. Some of these may have been away for over forty years. The movements have been going on for well over a century - urged by human and natural devastations at home, by a determinedly fecund population, and by the early efforts of European traders in indentured coolie labour - virtual slaves - for the plantations of Asia and the Pacific, including Australia.

The most famous, in China, of the 'Patriotic Overseas Chinese' is the Malayan rubber tycoon Tan Kah-kee, whose remittances to his old home town of Amoy (*Xiamen* in Mandarin) totalled many millions of US dollars. In the 1920s, Tan conceived the idea of building a university for the city he had left twenty years before, and began to plan it, along with local officials. Amoy, then, was one of the Treaty Ports, where foreign powers had forced the failing Manchu Dynasty to grant them special legal status, trade rights and territorial concessions.

As well as giving his own money, Tan Kah-kee tirelessly cajoled fellow Overseas Chinese from Amoy to donate to his project. He died before its completion, in 1961, but he left an estate of over twelve million dollars which finished Jimei, now the most spectacular university campus in China - an impressive string of buildings along the seafront, combining

tertiary and secondary levels, vocational as well as academic training, and sports grounds. Facilities and generous funding attracted a faculty of foreign-educated academics, who built an enviable scholastic reputation for the college which lasts today.

At the time, the college Tan built in China was bigger than anything that existed in Malaya, the country where he had lived and made his money for almost all of his life. This kind of 'patriotism' is blithely praised in China, but it is exactly what creates the local suspicion and resentment of Overseas Chinese minorities in Southeast Asian countries.

Few overseas patriots try to emulate the scale of Tan Kah-kee's endeavours, but medium-scale expatriate philanthropy is common enough throughout Guangdong and Fujian. County Associations of people from this or that part of the country get together, in an adopted land, to raise funds for a school or a hospital to be built back home. Rural districts of Fujian province are dotted with large, new, spacious houses, built, with remittances from prosperous expatriates, for that part of the family that has remained at home. Around Guangzhou, whole estates of new apartment blocks are funded in the same fashion, with money sent in from overseas.

The flow was slowed during the Cultural Revolution, when foreign connections were deemed to be traitorous. But with the changes in economic policy, remittances were once more actively encouraged by local officials. It had even got to the point in late 1982 when the Communist Party's Disciplinary Inspection Commission had to issue a firm instruction to the party cadres of Fujian province: they must cease their practice of demanding donations from any Overseas Chinese who happened to come through, must cease canvassing those still overseas for 'donations' to help the development plans of their localities, and must stop asking those already giving to give even more. There was also the embarrassing matter of a few cadres dipping their own fingers in the till of this tempting flow of largesse.

The road to Zhongshan County winds across the flat, sodden Pearl River delta country, crossing branch after branch of the

mud-coloured streams that cut the land into slices. You could lose your sense of direction in this watery maze, but for the herringbone TV antennae that wave high on flimsy bamboo masts over almost every house. Infallibly, the herringbones point towards Hong Kong, from where beam commercial television programmes which have captured local hearts and minds. Hong Kong's Cantonese television programmes carry commercial advertising directed specifically to this silent, mainland audience, knowing that the demands they create will soon be felt in requests to the hard-currency relatives outside, in Hong Kong itself.

Packing-case stalls beside the ferry offer a selection of foreign knick-knacks - American cigarettes, plastic novelties. Girls working in the fields around here are wearing tight Hong Kong jeans, as they bend and hoe under a low, grey sky. Older peasant houses are decorated with strange little towers and balustrades of cement, reflecting the Iberian style of Portuguese Macao, just down the road at the mouth of the delta.

A Hong Kong businessman has invested five million US dollars in a Hot Springs resort complex for returning Overseas Chinese who can pay in hard currency. A forest of luxury concrete villas, hotel blocks and bungalow compounds has risen from the sticky mud of the paddy fields. Girls from those fields have been brought inside and put into tailored polyester uniforms, to wait on dining tables under plastic chandeliers. They stand about shyly. One girl tweaks at the unfamiliar texture of nylon stockings that she is wearing for the first time. Another tells me that they feel strange, a bit like movie stars. A bustling *maitre d'hotel* from Hong Kong chivvies the waitresses, touching up the parsley garnish on a large butter-sculpture of the Goddess of Mercy. At another table, a slick young man from Hong Kong lavishly entertains his shy family of peasants - he is their

hope for the future. An air-conditioned coach from Macao stands in the parking lot, and the clatter of mah-jong tiles issues from the top floor of a concrete mock-Ming pavilion. On the low hill above the resort, the sound of mah-jong still rises faintly, and a red electric light bulb winks slowly in a small, modern Buddhist shrine.

At the port of Zhuhai, concrete ramps are going in for the hovercraft service which will bring the Special Economic Zone to within one hour's commute from Hong Kong. Hotels, apartments and industrial estates are rising along the fore-shore, to lure hard currency business onto the mainland. A hundred million dollars have been invested here. The fishermen's cottages now boast washing machines and refrigerators.

Zhongshan County has been sending people abroad for a hundred years. San Francisco, Hawaii, Vancouver, Sydney - they each have their Chinese names, and the million-strong population of this county know them all well. Half a million of their relatives live in these places. The county capital, Shiqi, looks like any other steaming South China town, but it's different. County officials usher me through their hospital, the best equipped in rural China, built with two million US dollars. At the county high school, students wear free uniforms, use well-equipped laboratories, swim in their own pool. I am led into a video training room, where young teachers are studying teaching methods from imported cassettes. Facilities like this are unheard of, even in the elite schools of Beijing. They are bought for this county-town school with remitted Hong Kong and US dollars, and with a healthy endowment fund left over.

Ruby Tinyu sits in a cane chair in the cool of her Shiqi shop-house, slowly fanning. A framed portrait of Chairman Mao is on the wall, but arranged about the modest family altar are

photographs of suburban Australian families with Chinese faces. Ruby was born in Melbourne in 1917, her father a market gardener. She returned to China as a young girl, but now she plans to rejoin the family who are still in Australia. Her brother has fourteen children and grand-children there. Ruby will take her son of 34 and a daughter, but her husband will stay in Zhongshan county. He's too old to emigrate. The family have lived well on remittances for as long as she can remember, and it is time for the next phase of the cycle. A new generation will go out to Australia, and, perhaps, more of the old will return to prepare their own graves on the Zhongshan hillsides.

Zhongshan County received over twelve million US dollars in remittances during 1979, an average year. In the following wave of consumerism, the money remittances dropped off slightly, as returning relatives, instead, carried consumer durables in with them (the ubiquitous colour television sets). Government currency regulations meant that for every ten dollars of foreign exchange sent to a family, only one dollar could be spent on foreign goods. It was a much better deal to receive the goods directly.

Not all returnees come to give, however. Some come to die, some for treatment in Chinese medicine. A proportion of young people are sent by their parents to be educated in Chinese schools. Ettina, a 160-kilogramme maiden from Singapore, came to China in search of the husband she had failed to obtain in Singapore after ten years of trying. With the resources of the Overseas Chinese Bureau, a suitable 150-kilogramme match was found for her, a wharf labourer, and it was joy all round. But thieves and charlatans also find a place among the teeming throngs of returnees who come into South China, especially during the festival seasons. Apart from the smugglers, there are counterfeiters selling fake Hong Kong dollars, commercial swindlers and con-men, and innumerable seducers of young women with the sweet, sweet promise of a trip across the border.

The interface for all this is the burgeoning Special Economic Zone on the border at Shumchun (*Shenzhen*), where Beijing plans that Hong Kong capital, enterprise, and technology will marry Chinese labour, land, and raw materials, in a zone where the normal restraints of a socialist, fully-planned economy are suspended. The zone has been a mixed success, with many once keen foreign entrepreneurs finding that they cannot get a fraction of the productivity out of mainland labour that they could expect in Hong Kong. There has been frequent friction at management level, as well, over fees, charges, and profit-sharing arrangements.

For many years, Shumchun railway station was almost the only permitted entry point to China for foreigners. Even in 1978, I had to trudge with my baggage across that railway bridge, still closed to through traffic on the Guangzhou-Kowloon line. By 1983, Shumchun was transformed. The zone had attracted US\$2.6 billion in investments and export contracts. Was capitalism knocking dangerously at the door? The Communist Party remained watchful.

Li Jiangzheng, secretary of the Provincial Disciplinary Inspection Commission of the party, issued a warning:

‘In running the Special Economic Zones, great attention must be paid to building socialist civilisation. No one may exercise special powers or enjoy special privileges. We shall never be soft on economic criminals.

‘We must be watchful against underworld organisations from Hong Kong, which are trying to penetrate the Special Economic Zone at Shumchun. They engage in smuggling, narcotics, extraditing escaped prisoners, procuring women, and other crimes.

We must crush them relentlessly and not give them any foothold. ‘We must maintain an especially strict legal system, public hygiene, and lead a rich, colourful, and healthy cultural life in the Special Economic Zone.’

Whatever the success of this policy, there is no doubt that the most exciting gangster movies and TV dramas of the period issued from the studios of Guangzhou.

Other Party stalwarts ventured to suggest that Shumchun and the handful of other Special Economic Zones were now the focus of China's real Class Struggle - a term which had gone out of fashion for a couple of years. Their thesis was that the only remaining bourgeois class of China were those in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and that by their very ingrained class nature they would be bound to seek to undermine China's proletarian ethics by every means. Shumchun must not be allowed to be the crack in the door by which such poisonous influences to gain entrance to a new generation!

These voices were drowned in the din of cash registers, not least in the booming Shumchun Duty Free Store, operated under Chinese Customs supervision, and which turned over more than \$50,000 per day in hard currency with tourists and *hua qiao* travellers.

It was all very sapping to the revolutionary ardour of the staff of the Shumchun Railway station, who spent their days watching their Hong Kong compatriots flowing to and fro, laden with the glittering prizes of their life in the capitalist wonderland of Hong Kong.

An education campaign was organised to correct their thinking. The hazards of Hong Kong's laissez-faire economy were spelt out in grim detail to a generation who had grown up to presume that the state felt at least a moral responsibility for their welfare. Not so in Hong Kong, where the weak may starve. High rents, long hours, no job security, no sick leave, no chance to find a wife or afford the bride price - these realities might be familiar to many Chinese peasants, but are unknown to the feather-bedded industrial workers, such as those in the railways, whose passive welfare state they take for granted.

The lessons were hard learned by Wang Peng, a cadre with a Guangzhou heavy engineering works, who believed the tales of Hong Kong as a land of opportunity and took up a chance to emigrate. He returned to Guangzhou after eight months, to the jeers of some but the applause of Party workers.

It took me a month to find a job in a small factory. I had to work all day, over ten hours, so hard that I felt dizzy. Living costs were so high that my salary was not enough to support

me and my son. I almost died through overwork and poor industrial conditions.

`In Hong Kong, relationships are based on money. When I asked help from relatives, they all flatly refused. My son and I were kicked out of our own relatives house, because we could not pay enough rent. We slept in the streets.

`Working later as a food peddler, I was threatened by standover men from one of the underworld gangs. They would have killed me if my boss didn't pay them off. The police didn't dare to touch them.

`I was disillusioned with the `paradise'. The sweet words of my relatives had come to nothing. I wrote to my unit, asking to come back, and to my surprise I was welcomed back with open arms.

`Since my return, I have been promoted to deputy section chief of supply and marketing. Where is the `paradise' that so many people are looking for? It is in this socialist land for which we are all now working diligently'.

But not, Wang Peng might have added, working ten hours per day or to the point of dizziness. His paean was published in the Liberation Army Daily.

But the first generation of returnees, those who had come back from comfortable, established lives in the developed world to help rebuild China, often saw things from a different perspective. These were people who had come with motives of idealism, wanting to be given a chance to do what they were trained to do, and, in most cases, not expecting any special privileges in return. But a structure of privileges did accrue, in the early days of the Peoples Republic. Special housing, special rations, access to special shops and tailors, appointment to honorific committees, invitations to state occasions - the qualified returnees sometimes found themselves forced into an elite they had not planned on joining. Come periods of political strife, and they were immediately marked for the envy and manic suspicion of the leftwing extremists. Countless numbers died under persecution, but, for the living, the bitterest pill was often to be forbidden to use their qualifications in the interests of their nation. It was a mania that can only be compared to

mediaeval witchhunting. The peasants, and their representatives in positions of power, feared knowledge that they did not share.

Guo Li's father was of the old scholar-landlord class, like most of the early reformers. He went with one of the first groups of independent Chinese students to study in Japan, in the early 1930s. Most of his fellow students of that time became Nationalist generals, but Guo, according to his son, had views further to the left. In the late thirties he went to London for further study, and, Guo Li told me, became an underground communist. In London he met and married an overseas Chinese woman from Indonesia.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Guo senior joined the Bank of China's London branch, then the most important office for any international bank, and at that time, naturally, very much under the control of the Nationalist government of China. Keeping his communist sympathies concealed, Guo senior was promoted to the rank of deputy branch manager.

When the Peoples Republic was declared in 1949 in Beijing, the defeated Nationalist Government attempted to transfer all the considerable assets and gold reserves of its London Branch to the new Taiwan regime. At the crucial moment, Guo Li's father prevented this by the simple device, according to Guo Li's story, of 'locking the Bank's strongroom and going out to lunch with the keys in his pocket'. By the time he came back from lunch, the Bank officially belonged to the Peoples Republic of China, and Deputy Manager Guo became Manager Guo, on behalf of the Peoples Republic.

Guo Li himself was born in England during this period, and was educated at English schools right through until he was seventeen. In the mean time, his parents had divorced and his father had returned to a senior post in the Bank of China in Beijing. Aged seventeen, in a act of rebellion against his English upbringing, Guo Li went to Beijing to join his father and to 'make revolution'. Thousands of young Overseas Chinese from all over the world were similarly inspired at that time. As the son of a kind of revolutionary hero, or certainly of a 'patriotic personage', young Guo Li was admitted, without

too close a political scrutiny, to a new elite group of six hundred who had been charged with creating Radio Beijing as the international voice of the Peoples Republic.

English was in fact Guo Li's mother tongue, and he became an announcer in the English service. He planned to study Mandarin as part of this return to his roots, but his superior officers would not permit him to study Mandarin with a native-speaking teacher, for fear it would 'spoil' his English accent for broadcasting. Guo Li, in Beijing, had to learn Mandarin from a foreigner! It was a weird idea, but the result is that Guo Li, to this day, speaks Mandarin with a plummy British accent.

Guo Li was instructed to keep the British passport he had earned by virtue of his birth, but he was given Chinese citizenship as well, to regularise his position at Radio Beijing. 'We increased our broadcast hours three hundred percent in one year, and we had all been complete amateurs at the beginning.

'There was a great spirit then... Beijing was still a small city, if you counted only those who mattered. You could bump into any of the big generals in any local restaurant. We used to take our girlfriends to the Western-food restaurants... in the Dongfeng market there was the Peace Cafe (American built, selling sodas and doughnuts), Kiesslings (Kiessling and Bader.. an Austrian firm based in Tianjin) and the Black Cat..

'I liked the Black Cat.. it had naked ladies on the walls.. I remember a mural of 'Aphrodite Rising from the Sea' that gave a certain daring cachet to the place. The whole feeling of Beijing was good, really, until old Mao went mad.'

'When the Broadcast Headquarters was built with Russian assistance in 1958, they put in an auditorium with a perfectly sprung ballroom floor. Being a top-security unit, it was a place where the bigwigs used to come in the evenings for their relaxation..

'I remember Liu Shaoqi (then President of the Peoples Republic) opening the studio door by mistake one evening while I was on air reading the English news bulletin.

'When Marshall Chen Yi chose to come, sometimes after

midnight, the orchestra and singers attached to the Broadcasting Bureau would be summoned to perform 'Return to Sorrento' and such hits of the time. We broadcast twenty-four hours a day, of course, and sometimes in the middle of the night a message would come down to the announcers' preparation room: "Send up six pretty girls". Marshall Chen Yi liked to dance with various partners in an evening.

When things began to get politically tight, in the late 1950s, other returned Overseas Chinese were among the most "radical" of the crew there.. always ready to criticise you. I was regarded as already contaminated with Western culture. Because of my work, I needed to read all kinds of Western journals and papers.. they were all available to me. But I was forbidden to pass any of the information in them on to others.. it was "sugar-coated bullets", we were told, which would undermine our ideological strength..

I remember one other cadre who was in charge of the monitoring department.. listening to foreign broadcasts to summarise them for the leadership. This man had a long revolutionary history, was a peasant in origin and didn't know any foreign language, so he was thought safe from bourgeois contamination. One day I opened the door of the monitoring section and saw him swaying and jigging with a dazed look on his face, to the sound of Voice of America's Jazz Hour.

These peasants, you know, they didn't have any resistance at all to music they had never encountered before... they were really susceptible.

In 1961 the Party suddenly sent in a batch of three hundred demobbed army officers to act as "political commissars" to our unit. We were all intellectuals, many of us from upper class families or Overseas Chinese, and we despised those clods who knew nothing about anything except Marxist politics. The unit was seriously divided for a while. Then the top man, General Mei, dealt with it well.. he sent them all down to Guiyang, in Guizhou province, to "learn from the masses and spread revolution" there. That gave us a breather for a few years.

All these units are riddled with old rivalries you know. In meetings, it wasn't just a matter of people getting up and saying

"I remember you supported such and such an incorrect line in 1957.." They go right back to the 1942 Party Rectification Campaigns in Yanan and even further. When a new man gets promoted he always wants to bring in his own people.. they're the only ones he can trust. People have a lot of old scores to settle. I had a fight with a woman who'd had me under attack in the Cultural Revolution.. her name was Liang. She'd come back from the United states, but wanted to be redder than red. I got stuck into a few people myself, in my time there.

`Finally the Cultural Revolution caught up with me. The whole lot of us were sent down to the farm for re-education. Old Mei, the peasant general, was there for three years, and he just reverted to type. He just got stuck into the work and worked like a peasant. Once, I was sharing a room with him while they were "struggling" some poor blighter outside, pulling his hair out, beating him. The fellow was screaming with pain, and I was terrified, I can tell you. I saw myself in a mirror and my eyes were literally popping out of my head with fright. Old Mei just told me to roll over and go to sleep. He'd seen it all before, campaign after campaign, and he wasn't afraid of anything any more. He knew being afraid wouldn't help one way or the other, so he wasn't afraid.

`Another of my bosses, Lao Han, was there with us. He was driving a tractor while I was shovelling dirt. But we all got to know each other pretty well, better than we could have staying in Beijing, and across the factional lines. Sometimes you could even think you were enjoying the fresh air and the physical exercise, but the study sessions were killing! Bore you to death!

`That all finished me though.. I knew they didn't want anything from me and I didn't want what they were handing out. After I came back from the farm I wanted out, but the authorities wouldn't recognise me as a British citizen because I was holding a Chinese identity card and was registered as the "son of a revolutionary hero". I went to the British Embassy and claimed their support as a citizen. I could have got into big trouble for that, but again General Mei protected me.

`They never agreed to my status, but eventually they just

told me to "go on leave", and I've been "on leave" ever since.'

After many years, Guo Li came back to Beijing on business, representing the London-based Visnews television newsagency in negotiations with Chinese Central Television. He found that, as far as the Chinese organisation was concerned, he still belonged to them.

'Coming back now, I find there's been hardly any change at my old unit. I still have my seniority and class.. if I'd stayed I would have been a department director now, like my contemporaries. And now the experts are getting right back in the saddle.. my people, the forty-five to fifty-five age group. The old military commissars are going to get thumped at last! Even people like Lao Han, good hearted and not hurting anybody much, are just going to be tossed aside.. its inevitable.'

Guo Li still felt some of the old sense of excitement that had first brought him back to China as a youth - there was so much to be done, such great opportunities in remaking such a great land! It was a deep hurt to him that what he thought he could offer to his country had been cast aside as dross in the furnace of revolutionary ideology. 'They invited me back again. I told them my condition.. the right to sack people. I know I won't get it, so I won't come back, for good.'

Guo Li still suffers the confusion of identity that can beset an Overseas Chinese. I asked him whether he now considered himself to be a Chinese, an Overseas Chinese, or a Foreign Citizen of Chinese Descent, and he could give no real answer.

'Blowed if I know what I am!'

But other Overseas Chinese, with a very firm idea of who they are, find that their visions of New China can run aground. The Chinese-American architect I.M.Pei, highly regarded, even revered, by the intellectual elite of the United States for his bold and impressive work on major national monuments such as Washington's National Gallery of Art and the J.F. Kennedy Library in Boston, found his architectural path far from smooth when he came to Beijing.

From 1978, a large number of foreign building and investment groups showed interest in joint-venture

construction of international-class hotels for the Chinese capital, which was suffering a severe shortage of such accommodation in the light of its rapid expansion of foreign trade and tourism. Most proposals fell by the wayside, but a small number, all led by Overseas Chinese, got under way. Invariably, the Overseas partners soon found themselves enmeshed in a nightmare of bureaucratic restrictions, suspicion, and incessant demands for an ever-higher proportion of the costs to be borne by the foreigner, with ever-dwindling prospects of getting a fair return on investment.

First of these to be completed was the Jian Guo Hotel - a small but efficient establishment designed and financed by the Californian-Chinese architect and entrepreneur, Clement Chen. The design, in fact, was an almost exact copy of the Chen's Palo Alto Holiday Inn.

I.M. Pei does not see himself as a scavenging entrepreneur. He is of a patrician Shanghai capitalist family, and grew up in one of the famous landscaped house compounds of Suzhou, not far from Shanghai - the Lion Stone Garden - owned by his banker father. His view of these packaged foreign hotels was lofty. 'I am not interested in building this kind of hotel', he said in an interview.

'I am not in the travel business. If I had been asked to build a high-rise tower with aluminium alloy and reflecting glass windows, what good would it have done China?'

'If you simply mix foreign words with native words, all you have is a kind of "pidgin". The same goes for architecture. We can't just go to a library, master foreign styles, and then tack on a few Chinese features and think we have created an architecture with true Chinese flavour'.

Pei was invited to design a hotel by the Beijing Municipal Government, only one of many authorities then engaged in hotel-building for the capital. But this authority had the advantage that it could offer a much greater range of possible sites than other organisations and ministries which had only limited land.

Pei's imagination was captured by a site in the Fragrant Hills Park, a former hunting preserve of the Manchu emperors, still

redolent with imperial architecture and garden landscaping. Among 700 year-old trees, he would recreate, on a grand scale and in a modern idiom, the classic garden architecture in which he had lived as a child in Suzhou.

'There is a Chinese temperament in me that cannot be changed', he said.

'Chinese architecture has deep roots. Naturally, some roots, such as the palaces and temples, have died, but the main roots are still deep and alive. Trees can be grafted... I came here from abroad, and I will graft only what can be grafted, and not what cannot be done naturally.'

Pei's design, and his vision, was a grand one. The building began to rise in that ancient Chinese landscape, blending ferro-concrete construction with the subtleties of traditional courtyard ornamentation and the harmonious placement of selected rocks. Pei's partners wanted the interior decorated in red and gold, the grandiose colours of Chinese palace and temple. Pei prevailed to use the soft greys and whitewash of the Suzhou gardens. A huge glassed atrium soars over reflecting pools, and picture-windows bring the careful landscape inside the building. The Fragrant Hills Hotel official opening was an event on the international social calendar, attended by Henry Kissinger and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

A few days later, I visited the Fragrant Hills Hotel with my wife and infant son - a pleasant Sunday afternoon drive into the hills, away from Beijing's endless drab boulevards and identical apartment blocks. To be in a building which embodied any architectural vision whatsoever was an almost overwhelming change from daily experience. We wandered around the atrium, decorated with fine paintings by expatriate Chinese artists. We noticed that, already, the spare lines of the public spaces were gathering a small accretion of crudely-lettered plastic signs directing visitors to souvenir counters and the like. We went to the dining room for a drink.

The bill of fare was as in every other Beijing hotel except for Clement Chen's Jian Guo, which had managed to persuade its Chinese co-owners, the China Travel Service, to accept Swiss hotel management staff and the importation of foreign

delicacies for its guests. At I.M.Pei's Fragrant Hills Hotel weak coffee, sweet soft-drinks, lardy biscuits and plain icecream thickened with corn-flour were the only choices, though guests would be paying a hundred US dollars per night to stay there.

At the next table was a party of prosperous American-Chinese, the women all wearing the tightly-curved hairstyle that for some reason is favoured by the Chinese matrons of San Francisco. One of the women appeared to know I.M.Pei, and didn't care who knew it, as she laid out a sorry tale.

`I.M. lost a lot of money on this. You know, it was originally costed at 12.5 million, then it went up to 25 million. All that landscaping.. I.M. wanted rocks that really suited the place. The locals kept saying "but we've got plenty of rocks here in Beijing". They tried to push the whole extra cost off onto I.M.'s company. I.M. was trying to reintroduce Chinese architecture to its roots. But these people just don't have any roots. You know what a calm man he is.. but here he turned into a real blood pressure case.

`This place is managed by the Number One Service Bureau.. you know, the people that run the Beijing Hotel and the others. They're so arrogant and they know nothing. We took the whole management team to the Jian Guo Hotel with its Swiss managers, to see how international-standard serving should be done. They just didn't see it. They said "We've had foreigners here for two hundred years.. We know how to serve Western food".

`That woman cadre, you know, one of the deputy managers.. she asked me "Why do people want to stay in the Jian Guo.. its twice as expensive as the Beijing hotel?" I said "Because they get their phone calls put through and the telexes passed on." `She said "But the rooms are much smaller". They just can't conceive what foreign hotel guests want, and simply they refused to accept any foreign advice or training.

`The Swiss Trade Mission got some Swiss interested in managing the bar for them.. they have this bar out here, but nobody knows how to mix a single drink. The manager knows how to drink them though, and he's never seen in the place. Anyway, the Swiss offered to run the bar and train staff, for

fifty percent of the profits.. a really generous offer considering the costs of keeping Swiss staff out here. The local hotel managers would only accept to have them on local staff and to pay them a Chinese salary! Six months after the Chinese staff were recruited, they still don't know how to mix a cocktail.

`For the opening, we had all these people come out.. Kissinger, Jacqui Kennedy.. then they served the meal. The soup was cold, and the salad was hot. You can't really blame the staff, they just don't know.. it's the management upstairs.

`I.M.'s really broken-hearted. It was his baby, and he wanted to see it grow, now he thinks it's going to die.

`You know, the hotel staff are mainly cadres' children.. it's a cushy job and they're there for life. I asked some of them what they would rather do if they had the chance. They all said "We'd rather do business".'

`I asked Clement Chen why not do another Jian Guo. He said "Over my dead body".. its just not worth the trouble.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE

FRAGRANT

CONCUBINES

The 1982 Constitution of the Peoples Republic defines China as 'a unitary *multinational* country created in common by its various nationalities'. This often surprises those who think of China as full to the brim with a population that is unambiguously Chinese.

Ninety percent of China's inhabitants would themselves, at heart, not take this 'multinational' definition very seriously. The names 'China' and 'Chinese' are not used by them, and never have been. As a nationality and as a culture, they know themselves as 'Han'. Officially, they have called their country by the names of the successive imperial dynasties. As the Emperor was supposed to be the Son of Heaven, there was, in official ideology, no terrestrial limit to his God-given sway. In court parlance the empire was immodestly referred to as 'All Under Heaven' - a claim seldom matched by even the most ebullient of European imperialists.

In recognition that some parts of the known world were less obedient to the Emperor than others, they called the land occupied by the Han (the most obedient and civilised people), Zhong Guo - the Central Nation - and Zhong Guo has stuck

as the basic Chinese name for China up to the present. The common English translation of Zhong Guo as 'The Middle Kingdom' is unsatisfactory to me, suggesting a kind of harmonious modesty rather than the blunt presumption of centrality to all creation which the Chinese term really connotes. Officially, since the first republic in 1911, the adjectival part of the name has been Zhong Hua - 'Central and Glorious' - thus, today, we have the 'Central and Glorious People's Republic'. And for most of China's history, that presumption has been excusable: the Han were, indeed, central to the world as they knew it - the world's most enduring cultural and political empire.

When the present Constitution describes China as multi-national, it acknowledges the inheritance of that huge, contiguous empire, complete with almost all its gradual accretions of territory. But almost half the land area we see on today's map of China is the homeland of people who are not Han... not, in fact, 'Chinese', in the sense most foreigners understand the word.

The seventy millions of those National Minorities, as they are officially known, are a mere seven percent of China's total billion, and they are themselves subdivided into over fifty recognised cultural nations. Some of these number a scarce handful of remnant tribesmen, living primitively on the mountainous fringes of Han settlement: aboriginal survivors of centuries of Han expansion. Others, though numerous, are racially very close to the Han.

But three in particular of these minority nationalities, the Turkic Uighurs, the Tibetans, and the Mongolians, remain distinct nations of several millions each, with radically different languages, great independent cultures and histories of their own, and who still rankle that they have lost the millennial struggle to retain independence from their overwhelming neighbours, the Han.

China's Constitution defines the relationship this way:

"The people of China, comprising many nationalities, have jointly created a splendid culture and a glorious

revolutionary tradition... Socialist relations of equality, unity, and mutual assistance have been established among these nationalities and will continue to be strengthened. In accordance with the characteristics and needs of the different minority nationalities, the state will tirelessly and constantly help the various minority nationality areas to accelerate their economic and cultural development... Discrimination or oppression .. are prohibited; big- nationality chauvinism and local-nationality chauvinism must be opposed... Citizens of the Peoples Republic are duty- bound to safeguard the unity of the country and the unity of all its nationalities."

On the penal side of this coin, China's Criminal Code lists three crimes more serious than murder in the list of capital offences: treason, counter-revolution, and `splittism'. The first exposes the state to external enemies, the second threatens the Party within the state, and the third raises a spectre that Han historians and politicians through the centuries have feared more than flood or famine: disintegration of the Empire.

Over more than two thousand years, successive imperial dynasties have seldom been free of rebellion and insurrection, somewhere or other in their territory. Reign periods are judged, traditionally, and past Emperors venerated, according to their success in avoiding or putting down such rebellions, and especially according to their success in expanding the frontiers of territory under Imperial control. More rigorous scrutiny reveals a torrid internal political history, full of complex regional rivalries and internal clashes of interest within the Empire, comparable with the history of Europe over a similar period. But the overriding ideology of the Empire obliged Chinese historians throughout the ages to record `unity of all under heaven' (and under the Emperor) as the proper state of the world and the unwavering aim of all good men. Theoretically, China could just as easily have evolved into the multiplicity of competing nation-states that developed in a roughly equivalent economic area: Europe.

The persistence of the Chinese imperial ideology, in the face

of all challenges, is a subject of fascination to foreign scholars. This ideology, broadly termed Confucianism, has been formative to the present-day politics of more than a third of the world, from Japan to the Pamirs, Siberia to Singapore. Curiously enough, several of the most vigorous Chinese dynasties were actually set up and ruled by non-Han invaders, 'barbarians' by Han reckoning, but whose rude militarist beginnings were soon muffled in the beguiling silken folds of Han bureaucracy, and whose sinicised grand-children blushed to remember their rough antecedents.

The frontier colonies have always figured largely in Chinese literature. They were often a place of banishment for disgraced courtiers or out-of-favour civil servants, spawning a vast genre of 'Longing for Home' nostalgic poems and songs. The genre includes several popular tales concerning high-born Han ladies given in political marriages to non-Han border princes, as pawns in the unceasing task of 'taming the Barbarians'. The tales vary. Beijing Opera treatments generally favour sagas of heroic misery along 'Close-your-eyes-and-think-of-the-Empire' lines. One, alone, of the popular tales puts a contrary view, making it subversive to Imperial ideology, then and now : the story of Xiang Fei - the Fragrant Concubine.

Around the year 1760, the Emperor Qian Long was close to the height of his powers. Like Henry VIII of England, he comes down through history as a man of prodigious talent: a statesman, a warrior, a scholar and a patron. As a Manchu, though, he seems also to have remembered his non-Han origins, and with age he became increasingly interested in Lama Buddhism, as practised by Tibetans and Mongolians, to the presumed distaste of orthodox Han courtiers.

Qian Long's military campaigns had expanded the Empire's borders further than any previous regime, but he was not free of problems in the border territories. The Uighurs, Muslim Turks in the far west, were particularly hard to control, on account of the long marches across ferocious deserts.. the Gobi or the Taklimakhan.. required to reach their oasis and mountain bases. The Muslims' religious fervour also reinforced their

desire for self-rule, and contributed to making them formidable foes.

A major rebellion lasting several years was led by one Ali the Lion.. whose family, the Aba Khoja clan, had both temporal and religious authority in the region through having first introduced the new Sufi sect of Islam to Eastern Turkestan some years earlier.

At great cost, and with great ruthlessness, the rebellion was put down by Imperial troops. All the rebel leaders died.. some sources say in a massacre, others that Ali the Lion took his own life after the defeat.

The story, however, follows Ali's wife. Her name was Ipar, meaning `musk', and she was famous both for her beauty and for a peculiarly attractive natural skin fragrance, from which she got her name.

Chinese chroniclers say the Emperor was struck by her haughtiness while reviewing a parade of hostages brought back to Beijing. He had her whisked off to the palace and given both rank and title: Xiang Fei, the Fragrant Concubine.

The Fragrant Concubine, however, showed none of the expected gratitude. She resisted with tears, fury, and ultimately with a drawn dagger, all attempts by the Emperor and his attendant ladies to take her to the Imperial bed. After twenty-five years on the throne as Son of Heaven, Qian Long could not take no for an answer.

As the story goes, the Emperor `next day was very sad, because the Fragrant Concubine was not obedient'. Guessing that she pined for her homeland, he ordered housing and food to be prepared in her local style, and procured a maid from the region to look after her. As nothing availed, he had a huge tower constructed by the palace garden wall, so that Ipar could look across Beijing to the nearby Muslim quarter, with its mosques and minarets.

Like many Palace tales, the death of the Fragrant Concubine has several versions: history has always bent to serve the present in China. The commonest story is that the Dowager Empress, Qian Long's mother, had opposed this infatuation

with an exotic foreigner from the beginning. She became increasingly concerned that her son was in some kind of danger from this intransigent, not to say impertinent wench. She took advantage of the Emperor's ceremonial fasting in the Hall of Abstinence to offer Ipar the choice of compliance or suicide. Ipar chose to strangle herself with a silk scarf, still weeping for her dead husband, Ali the Lion.

The story has always been enjoyed by the people, but has been a problem for propagandists. Was Ipar a loyal widow or a disloyal subject? Can a barbarian be morally superior to an Emperor? How could such barbarians reject the obvious benefits of accepting the Emperor's patronage, or the 'unity of all the nationalities'?

An attempt at resolving this embarrassment has now been made, with an elaborate exhibition mounted in Beijing in 1982 designed to suggest that the Fragrant Concubine never existed. An antithesis of her history has been published in its stead, following 'lengthy research by the Minorities Historical Research Institute in many parts of our country'. According to this new material, a hitherto unknown Uighur concubine named Glorious, whose family 'had assisted in *quelling* a rebellion in Xinjiang', lived happily with the Emperor Qian Long and his mother for 28 years, being buried with honour at the Imperial Tombs near Beijing at the ripe old age of fifty-five.

It's highly unlikely that the Uighurs will give up Ipar's story so easily. Whilst this new exhibition was being prepared, I visited the site at Kashgar, Turkestan, where the Fragrant Concubine has a tomb among the five generations in her family vault.

Preserved there, also, is the ceremonial litter in which her remains were carried back to her home from Beijing, on the orders of the Qian Long. Blue-tiled brick capped by a huge dome, the open mausoleum, built in 1763, sits now among new collective farm fields in the Kashgar oasis, on the old Silk Road, half way between Beijing and the Mediterranean. It is about thirty metres square, contains seventy-two tombs, and is the only known memorial to disobedience to Beijing. Koranic

inscriptions in mosaic tiles curl across the individual tombs, and the crude Maoist slogans of the Cultural Revolution have been painted off the walls again.

In a 1978 renovation, one grave at the site was razed to the ground: that of Yakub Beg, a nineteenth century local leader who played the 'Great Game' well enough to hold independent sway over the region for some years, playing Russian and British Empires against each other as best he could before a punitive expedition from Beijing undid him. He is remembered by Uighurs as, for all his faults, their last Uighur ruler.

I asked a young Chinese accompanying us why his grave had been obliterated.

'Because he was backed by foreign forces', replied the youth, a man brought to the region by his parents when the Chinese armies marched in the early fifties. The same young man told me that Uighur history is not taught in any primary or secondary schools in Turkestan.

'Anyway, it's just a part of Chinese history', he said.

Meriem was born in the year of the Communist victory, but it was some time before she would realise what this meant. Both her father and her mother were of merchant families, and one grandfather had been an Aksakal - the town headman - in one of the western cities of Eastern Turkestan. This was during the fifty years of Russian dominance in the region, when some Russian customs found favour among the local well-to-do. Some of Meriem's earliest memories are of the four-wheeled sprung carriage in which her family would go visiting, or promenade the dusty streets on hot evenings, comfortably above the bouncing two-wheeled donkey-carts around them.

Meriem's father was a trader in wool and hides - the major exportable products of the region, which were increasingly sought after by both Russian government trading agents and the burgeoning manufacturing industries of China's big coastal cities. Trade meant travel - hard travel. The way to the Chinese inland was the old Silk Road, now travelled by decrepit motor bus or lorry, through scorching heat, potholes, and windstorms

which could whip the pebbled surface of the Gobi into a murderous hail of stones. Those conditions lasted most of the 2,000 kilometres to the first Chinese rail-head, at Lanzhou.

Trading expeditions took a long time. So, following the local custom of prosperous Muslim's, Meriem's father would take a wife from among the local Uighur community, whenever he expected to stay long in any particular Chinese city. Then, China had no marriage law, and under Muslim custom such a marriage of convenience could be ended simply by the husband (but not the wife) announcing "I divorce you", three times.

Father had the reputation of being a good-hearted, generous and hospitable man, but Meriem still does not know how many half- brothers and half-sisters she may have, scattered in her father's tracks. Her elder brother, Ahmed, claims Father had twenty-four wives during his trading career. Mother stayed at home in Urumchi, the provincial capital - her four children memorials to the six pregnancies that followed Father's periods at home. In the harsh local conditions, infant death was an expected part of life.

The 'Liberation' of Xinjiang was a curious affair, owing to the region's long isolation, and to the ambiguity of Soviet intentions there. Though the Soviet Union had not kept any significant military forces in Xinjiang since the thirties (when Soviet troops and aircraft several times saved local Chinese warlords from Muslim rebel armies), Xinjiang had been teeming with Soviet agents since the 1920's. Objectives had been both political and economic: to prevent the area being used as a base for anti-Soviet subversion, either by White Russian remnants or by Turkic nationalist groups against Soviet Central Asia; and to ensure access to the rural produce and vast mineral wealth that Soviet geologists knew lay beneath its soil.

Access to the region is easier from Soviet territories than from China. The Soviet Central Asian Railway had already surveyed an extension line along the old Northern Silk Road through Ili to Urumchi, and held an agreement with Beijing to extend it as far as Hami - almost to the borders of China proper. Local leaders had been bought, threatened or

eliminated, and a cadre of promising young Uighurs and Kazakhs had been taken to Moscow for training.

It's clear that Josef Stalin's plan for the region was the establishment of an 'independent' buffer state under Soviet influence, along the lines of the Mongolian Peoples' Republic. This plan would have been widely welcomed by the local people.. not for love of Soviet Russia, but because it would seem to offer them the sovereignty they so dearly desired, and would have eased their perpetual fear of being swamped by the Han.

In January 1945, as the Chinese Kuomintang government was beginning its final attempt to wipe out the Communists, an East Turkestan Peoples Republic was in fact set up in Yili, under some Soviet protection. The 'government' was a coalition of prominent Uighurs, Kazakhs and Mongols. It's Minister of Education was a young Moscow-educated Uighur, a member of the Soviet Communist Party with a Russian wife - Saifuddin. He had led anti-Chinese uprisings the previous year in which several thousand Han had been killed in Xinjiang.

Stalin's historic mistake was his lack of faith in the prospects of Mao Zedong's Chinese Communists, and he re-opened negotiations with the Kuomintang instead. The East Turkestan Peoples Republic was dissolved into a bizarre and ill-fated coalition with a dwindling rump of Kuomintang government and troops.

In 1948 Burhan Shahidi, a Tartar (one of the smaller Turkic nationalities) educated in Germany, was appointed Governor of the province by the Kuomintang. A sophisticated man with considerable experience of the Soviet Union and politics, Burhan read the political winds better than either Stalin or the Nanking government. In September 1949, with the Kuomintang in rout all over China, he announced that his entire government had switched its allegiance to the Chinese Communists. Thus was Xinjiang 'peacefully liberated', though intransigent Nationalist forces held out in the mountains for a number of months. Burhan and Saifuddin were invited to the new National Consultative Congress in Beijing.

The only flies in this ointment were the non-communist

members of the old East Turkestan Peoples Republic government- influential and respected men among the local people, who continued to press loudly for a separate republic. They were invited to a conference with Premier Zhou Enlai to discuss these matters. A special plane was sent to collect them. It crashed mysteriously, not long after take-off, and the only survivors of that government were Burhan and Saifuddin, who had joined the Chinese Communist Party.

For Meriem's family, the first impact was simply the knowledge that the last chance their people would ever have for independence was now finished. They had known the Han for centuries, and they knew that the Han had never voluntarily relinquished a centimetre of their empire. In truth, for some centuries now Turkestan had only been able to hold its independence during periods when internal strife in the Chinese inland kept the Han forces at home. Some Han rulers had been ruthless and corrupt, others had succeeded in winning a measure of co-operation from the Turkic peoples through respect and the mutual advantages of trade. The question now was how the Han intended to rule them this time.

For the first few years under Chinese Communism, socialist policies were introduced slowly. In Xinjiang, the first requirement was to purge or 're-educate' the army units and administration handed over to the Communists by Burhan. There were further military campaigns against Kuomintang remnants, and against local rebellions, principally by the nomadic Kazakhs and others. And there was the task of recruiting and training an entirely new group of young local people as communist cadres to give the 'liberation' some local appearance. One such cadre, a Uighur, told me how he had been a small farmer near Urumchi when he answered a village recruiting poster, and was sent, after six weeks training, to take part in the 'liberation' of the very conservative Kashgar region in southern Xinjiang.

The introduction of socialism was orthodox. First targets were the rural landlords, and they were dealt with as in the rest of China. There were problems when Han cadres tried to apply

the same principles to the tribal herdsmen, where the group ownership of cattle was a more complex matter, and kinship loyalty to the clan leaders was very strong. Tens of thousands of Kazakhs and Kirghiz took their cattle, tents, and gold savings and departed - across the Pamirs into Soviet Kazakhstan, or even across the treacherous Karakorum Pass into Afghanistan, rather than lose their traditional way of life.

There were many Kazakhs near Ili, where part of Meriem's family were living. Some made extra money by caring for sheep and cattle owned by local townspeople - a system which, before refrigeration, was the best way a town family's fresh milk and meat supply could be assured. Meriem's family's first material loss came when their cows were 'collectivised' into the Kazakh herd. This enrichment of the Kazakh herd, at the expense of the town dwellers, may have been part of the bait to encourage them to accept collectivisation. In any case, there was no question of any compensation, and the cattle were never seen again.

Next official targets were the Capitalist Exploiters. A tiny handful of local entrepreneurs had started factories - a soda-water plant, a match factory, a handful of small foundries and tanneries - and were the only employers of industrial labour to be found, so they became the Capitalist Exploiters. Meriem's father, as a trader, did not count as a Capitalist Exploiter, because he did not employ labourers. His turn would come later.

It was from about 1954 onwards that the Party's heat began to concentrate on the traders. This was partly because the initial grand designs for a socialist economy had not been very successful, and the remaining free traders were doing very well by making up, outside the system, the deficiencies of the official commercial networks. It was also a period in which up-and-coming young party officials were keen to make their names by catching more than their allotted quota of 'speculators' - a term which by then was coming to mean anybody who made their living by buying and selling. Meriem's family had owned a number of houses and shops in various towns of the region. These were declared 'surplus' to

their needs, and 'redistributed' to tenants chosen by the officials, at nominal rentals.

Meriem was largely unaware of the tension in her family caused by these gradual moves against them, and the uncertainty as to what the future might hold. Her clearest memory of politics was the Destroy the Birds campaign. Mass-mobilisation increasingly became the theme of Chairman Mao's prescriptions. This time, he had decreed that the Four Pests - flies, mosquitoes, rats, and sparrows - should be made extinct in China within four years.

Personal quotas and household competitions were introduced to enforce the campaign against the first three of the pests. Meriem recalls her infant classmates proudly laying out their daily quota of captured flies and maggots, with their fingers, on the school desks - hygiene was not the important part of that campaign. Another participant, an adult, confessed later to deliberately breeding a swarm of maggots in a piece of rotten meat in a shoe-box under her bed, in order to escape punishment for failing to meet her quota.

Individual techniques were not good enough, however, to deal with the sparrows - winged villains accused of eating millions of tonnes of the Peoples Grain. On an appointed day, every person in every town and village was instructed to take to the streets and lanes, with pots, pans, or anything that could make a loud noise when banged. The purpose was to frighten the birds to death - or at least to keep them from perching until they were so exhausted they fell to the ground and could be despatched with a boot or a kitchen implement.

The children loved the noise, and the skies over every town and village swarmed with panic-stricken birds of all varieties. It was, indeed, a holocaust in feathers. But the birds' revenge came even before the next harvest. No-one had dared point out to Chairman Mao that sparrows ate insects as well as grain - and what's more the broad masses, in their frenzy of zeal, had killed not just grain-eaters, but every fowl that flew. Insect plagues were so catastrophic, that year, that Mao's writ was altered. Henceforward, the Fourth Pest was not to be sparrows, but bed- bugs!

Meriem's father decided it was unwise to spend much time at home, where he and his family were well-known and likely targets for the next campaign. He spent more and more of his time away, in the relative anonymity of Shanghai, Tianjin, Harbin, or Lanzhou. These cities still had big non-Han populations: White Russians, Jewish refugees, and descendants of the once-thriving foreign communities in the Treaty Ports. Turkics like the Uighurs, with their almost Mediterranean features, their unintelligible languages, and their western-style dress, could usually pass for foreigners among the common Han. Among themselves, they could live relatively unmolested, and on a looser ideological rein than the Han.

It was to Tianjin that Meriem's father took her to live, for a time, when she was just six. Tianjin is a flat, smutty commercial city on the coastal estuary nearest to Beijing, which had grown up around the Concession territories exacted by European powers in the wake of various disgraceful nineteenth century skirmishes with the isolationist Chinese empire. Mills, railways, warehouses and ports grew up, and with them a class of local Chinese capitalists as well. The commercial heart of the city was built in contemporary European style, banks and trading houses erecting huge neo-classical pillared stone facades as testimony to their power and wealth. Most of these buildings still stand, though decidedly down at heel.

The proud names of those banished foreign companies can still be picked out, in some cases, as slightly cleaner patches where the former bronze lettering was chiselled off the stone, or showing through the peeling slogans on a factory wall. Small white-painted wooden plaques now announce such premises as The Peoples Bank, the Peoples Insurance Company, or The Peoples No.3 Aquatic Products Export-Import Corporation.

The thousands of foreign residents lived in whole suburbs of European-style houses. As in Shanghai and the other Treaty Ports, when a foreign family was moved out, several Chinese families would move in to the same space, unless the residence proved desirable to someone with status in the new regime.

Meriem's father secured them a room and a half in a large house in the former German concession, sharing the building with a motley collection of Chinese and other non-Chinese families. Even today, one in fifty of Tianjin's population is classified as non-Han. Then, the proportion was much higher, but not enough to prevent Meriem realising for the first time what it is to be a foreigner.

The Korean War had raised the pitch of anti-foreign feeling among the eastern Chinese. Nursery rhymes then taught to Chinese children told of Eisenhower running home crying for his mummy, after getting his tail kicked by the brave Korean people. Uncle Sam caricatures were regularly paraded in the streets and lambasted in children's pantomimes. It was no fun, therefore, for Meriem and her step-mother to be followed in the streets by hordes of urchins chanting 'big-nose foreigner, big-nose foreigner!'

It had its compensations, however. China was still far from secure in its possession of Xinjiang, Tibet, and some of the south-western regions inhabited by Thais, Lao and other non-Hans. The policy of giving special treatment to 'minority' persons was being followed even in relatively cosmopolitan places like Tianjin.

A time of appalling food shortages, known as the Three Bad Years, followed Mao's Great Leap Forward. As a ten year-old, Meriem watched a woman die of starvation in the streets, surrounded by a crowd whose own hunger left them little energy even for pity. Her own people, in acknowledgement of their minority status, had access to slightly better rations than the masses around them, but every item of food had to be queued for.

Not all the beggars were peasants or industrial workers. One eccentric woman who used to wander the neighbourhood in rags was known as Mrs Admiral. Her husband had owned a fleet of coastal steamships. He had opposed the communists during the civil war, so all his property was taken from him and he died soon afterwards in prison. The woman went mad.

From the age of eight, Meriem rose at four in the morning to queue for food at the government stores. Even at that hour, the

queue could be long, the temperatures in winter down to twenty degrees below zero. Meriem learned early to apply politics to her own advantage, baring her non-Han features to those at the head of the queue as she quoted Chairman Mao's words on 'nurturing the minorities'. Often she could jump the queue this way.

Scavenging was also part of life. There was a canal dock not far away, where boats bringing scarce vegetables from the countryside were unloaded. Occasionally, some scraps dropped in the water, and could be fished out inconspicuously downstream. Fuel was equally scarce, but essential for winter survival. Meriem teamed up with some neighbouring Uighur children to scavenge a local coal depot for stray chips of wood. They considered that since it was a coal depot, wood would not be missed.

They were wrong, and the three young Turkic children found themselves in the Public Security bureau facing what could have been a very serious situation in those acutely rationed times. They took cover in their non-Han status, feigning less understanding of the Chinese language than they really had. As Chinese policemen do, the officer in charge of them delivered a long and stern lecture on the seriousness of their crime. The children's exaggerated looks of bewilderment gradually took the wind out of his sails, however, and his lecture came to a halt.

'Because Chairman Mao and our Party care very deeply for our small minority friends, we will not punish you this time as severely as you deserve', he said.

'Now, we all know that minority peoples are very good at singing and dancing. If you now sing us a beautiful song to show your good attitude, we will release you'.

The gang's ringleader was a boy of eleven, and he readily agreed. He began to sing a catchy melody from the repertoire of popular Uighur songs. The other children began to laugh. What the fondly smiling policeman would never know was that the boy was extemporising the song's lyrics, substituting a string of Turkic obscenities about the Han people at large, and the policeman in particular.

Culturally, the Uighurs in Tianjin held themselves aloof from the Han. It happened that the house shared by Meriem's family was quite close to the training school of a local opera troupe. Chinese opera singing style is hardly *bel canto*. Developed from open-air entertainments, and always performed before an audience of openly chattering commentators, its emphasis is on penetrating power rather than sweetness of tone, for male and female voices alike. In the quest for this power, the school-age acolytes of the craft were herded onto the roof of their dormitory at dawn every morning, there to bellow at the top of their lungs to strengthen their vocal chords. It was an unbearable cacophony to the Uighurs, whose own music is melodic and sentimental in character.

Students at this school were recruited from the age of eight. As the troupes were already all state-run, such recruitment would ensure life-time employment, whether the recruit finished up as a star performer or as carpenter in the troupe. When recruiters from the opera troupe visited Meriem's school, they were captivated by the strong-willed little girl with the fair skin, curly hair, large eyes and straight nose, and promised her a stage career if she would join. What nine year-old could resist such an offer. Meriem went home full of excitement to tell her parents.

The reaction was furious. 'All of us sing dance, in our own homes, better than any Han', exploded her father, 'but I will never allow my daughter to stand up on their stage, painted like a ghost and shrieking like a devil.' Meriem pleaded in vain. Recruitment would have given her tremendous prestige among her Han school-fellows, as the local opera troupes attracted the same kind of possessive hero-worship as football teams do in other cultures.

Father conceived the dream of emigrating. At the time, the remnants of the foreign resident community, especially the many White Russians, were leaving in large numbers. He applied for passports, knowing that this act alone would bring unwelcome attentions from the Public Security Bureau. It did.

There were many interviews with the police. Were they ungrateful to the Peoples Government for what it had done for

them? Were they secretly working for a foreign power? Were they seeking a life of ease and sloth, instead helping to build New China? Were they fooled by Capitalist propaganda, which falsely claimed that conditions elsewhere were better than in China? When the parents maintained their wish to leave, the police began on the children.

Meriem was warned that she might be interrogated by the police, and told to say that she knew nothing about anything. One day she was taken from her school and interviewed privately by uniformed police. When she had nothing to say about her parents, the security men attempted to sway her personally. Did she really want to leave all her little friends here? If she stayed, the Peoples Government would look after her, educate her, and give her a privileged job when she finished school, as a fine example of the assimilation of non-Han peoples. If she would only say that she did not want to go, the police would make sure that her parents could not take her away. How about it?

Meriem remained loyal to her parents. None of them were granted passports, in the end.

Things did not improve for the family, however. The tempo of anti-foreign feeling accelerated in China, with confrontations with America over Taiwan, the hostile stalemate in Korea, and even a growing hostility towards the Soviet Union. Hope dwindled for emigration, and it was becoming politically dangerous to show any interest in leaving China. Meriem's family gave away their isolated existence in Tianjin, and returned to their homeland, in Yili.

There, the regime finally caught up with her father. He had been careful in his dealings since the revolution, so did not, after all, suffer too greatly. All his property was confiscated, though they called it 'redistribution' and allowed keep only a part of one of the family houses, for his own family to live in. There were many visits from officials responsible for his case. Usually there would be two officials.. a Chinese, and a Uighur cadre who would go through and through the well-rehearsed litany of social crimes which inevitably attached themselves to any member of the capitalist class.

One day father finally 'volunteered' for fulltime re-education, and was taken away to a re-education camp outside Urumchi. This was before the Cultural Revolution.. persuasion, not compulsion, was the policy. There was even religious tolerance, up to a point, within the camp.

On the Muslim religious festival of Korban Bayram, those inmates who still adhered to their religion were permitted to organise a celebratory feast. After a heavy meal of roast mutton (paid for, of course, by the inmates) he went into a side room to offer a special prayer of thanks for the festival. When he hadn't returned after half an hour or so, one of the others went to fetch him, and found him dead... of a sudden heart attack that had caught him in the very act of religious prostration. Ever after he was spoken of with some respect by the faithful, who considered it a sign of great piety that he had died in the act of prayer.

But for his family it was a disaster. Meriem's mother had never worked, and her older brother was still too young to do much. None the less, he was the only breadwinner the family had, and he made them a living as best he could: breaking stones, contract coal-mining, whatever casual labour could be found in those days of economic confusion.

Eventually, Meriem and her mother were sent away to 'learn from the peasants' at a commune, a day's journey from Yili. Mother was too strong-willed to adapt to the collective system, though she did her best to follow the strange Chinese jargon that filled their compulsory daily political education classes. As everywhere, the cadres were a mixture of Han and local people. Frequently the pattern was that the Chairman of the commune was a local man, while the Party Secretary was a Han.. almost always a retired PLA officer of middle rank.

At the end of the year, each family's accumulated work-points were calculated, and the value of each work-point determined as a proportion of the whole commune's distributable income. From this was subtracted the food and other debts they had built up with the commune dining hall and store. Meriem's mother had had enough to eat all her life, and refused to adapt her diet to the meagre portions expected in the

communal dining halls. After three years of 'education' and unaccustomed agricultural labour, Meriem and her mother were hopelessly in debt to the commune, whose leaders were only too glad to send them back to the city. As recruits to the labouring class, they had been pronounced failures.

The Cultural Revolution, for them, took a while to sink in. The first signs were bands of Red Guards, almost all Han youths from the inland, marching around the city with slogans attacking various of the local political leaders as renegades and reactionaries. There were scuffles, people disappeared, but the locals tried to keep out of it as long as they could, leaving it all to the Han who seemed to be fighting among themselves.

It couldn't stay that way, however, and rival groups of Red Guards soon began recruiting young Uighurs into their groups.. starting with the most ambitious. As the movement developed into a more formal pattern of 'criticism' meetings, Meriem and her mother were obliged to publicly repudiate and revile their family background as members of the exploiting classes. Meriem's Chinese was good enough for her to handle the situation, but it also meant that she could be expected to master more of the self-critical jargon she had to regurgitate, day after day.

Mother was beyond that. She understood well enough the realities of what was happening... that some people were having their revenge on other people who used to be better off than they were... but the ideological niceties and universe of Marxist logic never had any meaning for her. She had courage, however, and with coaching from Meriem she was able to learn, parrot fashion, thirteen syllables which served as an ideological life-preserver.

'Da dao Mei Di, da dao Su Xiu, Mao Juxi Wan Sui!', she would yell, whenever she thought she was being asked for an explanation of her political views. To this day, she is not sure what the words meant, but she knows that they worked most of the time. She was actually saying 'Down with U.S. Imperialism, down with Soviet Revisionism, Long live Chairman Mao'.

There were deprivations, there were fears. Elder brother,

who had stayed behind in Yili, got into a fight with some Han, was badly beaten and went to prison for two years. In those times, he was lucky not to be killed. Sections of the Cultural Revolution fanatics identified Maoist correctness with everything Chinese, and considered all non-Han culture to be inherently counter-revolutionary. Where those beliefs prevailed, there were drawn-out pitched battles that claimed the lives of thousands, especially in Southern Xinjiang where the Islamic faith was strongest and most conservative.

Around Yili, where the Russians had had a big presence for almost a hundred years, the victims of the Cultural Revolution were more likely to be those whose family backgrounds suggested too-friendly relations with Soviet Revisionism. Other than losing all of their family property without compensation, Meriem's little family were able to ride it out.

Later, the army was brought in to restore order, and gradually the schools re-opened. Meriem discovered she was brighter than most, and was able to compete with the children of the Han immigrants.. mostly demobilised PLA men and women. Examinations for universities and teaches colleges were conducted only in Chinese.. so the only Uighurs who had a chance were the children of Uighurs who had joined the Chinese administration and got their children into the Chinese secondary school stream. The Han expatriates invariably nurtured dreams of their children being able to return to their inland home provinces, and insisted on having a full Chinese-language education system. So parallel systems of education existed, and still do today.

There is no more crucial moment for anyone in China today than their school graduation, upon which they will be assigned to the job they will most likely hold for the rest of their life. Meriem's available options were few, but she was delighted when she passed top of the class in an entry exam for the Nurses Training college. It would mean a move to Urumchi, the capital of the region, but there were few jobs in the region that offered more prospects for a respectable and mentally-stimulating career.

She had been there, one of only a handful of non-Han girls

in the intake, for two weeks, when she was called to the personnel office. The personnel officer, as in most units, was a woman, a Han, and the wife of a relatively senior Party official of the area. Meriem was told that the Party had decided to change her work assignment. She would be going to an iron foundry paper mill, immediately.

Meriem was devastated, sure that some terrible political crime had been uncovered in her family. Later, she discovered the explanation was much simpler. A Han girl, daughter of a military officer, wanted to be a nurse, and Meriem had been removed to make room for her.

Foreign visitors to Xinjiang seldom stay in Urumchi, the provincial capital, longer than they have to. It's an ugly, grimy place, without charm, and with scarcely anything to distinguish it from a thousand other provincial towns in the Peoples Republic. Even the indigenous people are in an obvious minority there. Urumchi has been a centre of Han administration and commerce for centuries, being at a strategic junction of the old Silk Road.

It was also an ethnic junction, close to where the oasis farming communities of the Uighurs met the open-range grazing territory of the Kazakhs, another Turkic people whose nomadic lifestyle closely resembles that of the Mongols. Urumchi's very name is Mongol, meaning 'good pasture'.. though the reason for this name is now far from evident.

Today, Urumchi is beset with all the problems of any expanding industrial town in China, and with few resources to cope with them. Many of the Han who have been transferred there would prefer to be back in their inland home-towns, and the Turkic peoples, substantially outnumbered by the colonists, feel an uncertain identification with the place. Urumchi is a widely un-loved city.

The real Uighur towns are further south. A sealed road leads out through miles of desolate industrial suburbs, then climbs into the surrounding hills - bare, stony, and deeply eroded - which, from the air, give the Urumchi region the appearance of a gigantically wrinkled pelt.

The Turfan Basin is the second lowest place in the world - 154 metres below sea-level - and one of the driest, with almost no rainfall at all. It's also the heart of Uighur cultural history.

The road follows the old Silk Route across an ancient pass in the Tien Shan range, past ruins of imperial watchtowers, then suddenly strikes off across a stretch of unrelieved Gobi desert. As the mountains recede, the sensation is of a voyage across a solid, flat sea. The continental Roaring Forties winds, that created this desert, have left a surface of small, round stones sitting on a hard-baked, lifeless crust of earth. When the mountains finally disappear in haze, it's like losing sight of the land, and you instinctively crane forward for a glimpse of a landfall ahead, like voyaging land-lubbers.

The ambient threat of that burning vacancy diminishes, however, when your bus passes local traffic, that restores a human scale to the landscape. Two men share a bicycle, one peddling, one holding up an umbrella - or a family of four, on a flat donkey-cart, trot confidently into what looks like infinity.

It's not infinite, though, and after a few hours Turfan begins to announce itself in a peculiar way. Doughnut-shaped mounds of earth and stones appear, scattered across the surface of the desert like small volcanoes. They fall into lines, marching, ultimately, towards a line of fuzz on the horizon. Like giant molehills, they are the surface signs of the 'kerez' - a system of underground tunnels dug by the Uighurs over more than a thousand years, and stretching for miles - a wonder of construction that taps the underground water-table of the Gobi Desert, fed from the Tien Shan snow-melt, and leads it to the oasis, while avoiding the desert's fierce powers of evaporation.

The fuzz on the horizon grows into tamarisks, then poplars, and suddenly you are driving down an avenue lined with tall green trees, beside a strong-running channel of clear water. Your car slows down to pass the shabby, disused reviewing-stand of a Peoples Square, and you realise that you are entering Turfan.

In another minute, you feel you have left China, and made a landfall in Central Asia, as the Turkic character of the marketplace laps against your bus windows. Kebabs are being

barbecued in the street, the towers of private mosques dot the earth-walled skyline. Aquiline old men in beards and skull-caps, women with gold and ruby earrings peeping out from their headscarves - a spectrum of complexions from sunburnt oriental to blond and blue-eyed.

Chinese history first records the early Turks, over three thousand years ago, as red-haired, green-eyed inhabitants of what is now Inner Mongolia. Recent discoveries of blond, mummified corpses from the period support the ethnic distinction from the Asiatic racial type, though millennia of neighbourhood have ensured a predominance, now, of the dark-haired, dark-eyed genes.

If you are foreign, a third culture strikes you as you turn into the gates of what looks like a southern Soviet dacha, clothed in cool vines. It is the Municipal Guest House.. once, long ago, a Russian Consulate.

Most of the service staff are Uighurs. But most of the administrators are Han. When I arrived on one occasion with my wife, Dilber, we were greeted by a guide who was neither.

Munever was in her early twenties. Both her parents were Uighurs, who had been working for the government all their adult lives as Uighur-Han interpreters and teachers. Realising the limited future for anyone given only a Uighur-language education, they managed to enrol their daughter, Munever, in the Chinese-language stream of the local school.

By the time we met her, Munever's assimilation into the Han way of thinking was complete. She dressed in Han style, wearing the uniform baggy blue trousers, shapeless white blouse and unadorned pigtails of a Chinese girl. She welcomed us in Mandarin, which she spoke with an inland accent, not the strong north-western twang that distinguishes her compatriots. She had of course been briefed on our background: that we both spoke Mandarin, and that Dilber, although she had lived almost all her life overseas, was of Uighur origin.

As the baggage was being taken to our room, Munever took Dilber aside and whispered to her: 'Speak Chinese. If you speak Chinese, the people will never find out that you are a Uighur.'

Dilber is rightly proud of her ancestry, but it was clear that Munever was not. It was also evident that she was regarded with a mixture of scorn and envy by the other Uighur girls working in the guest-house. Munever had become one of the Han.

My own response to Munever varied between anger and pity. In Xinjiang, Uighurs do not normally get the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Their only language option in school is to learn Han. In the parallel Chinese-language stream of the schools, the Han pupils have the choice of studying either Uighur, or English. All who can, opt for the English, as it might offer a chance of escape from their colonial exile to a more exciting inland job. For a young Han, to study Uighur is almost certainly to condemn oneself to a life-time in Xinjiang.

This was the atmosphere in which Munever completed her secondary schooling, surrounded by the sons and daughters of the Han cadres of Turfan. On graduation, she gained a place in the newly-opened Tourism Trade School.. one of many opening at that time, as China sought to develop its neglected tourism gold-mine. What she learned there, over two years, I do not know. Her English (the principle language of foreign tourism in China) was negligible, and, worse, she seemed totally ignorant of her own nation's history.

Turfan is the site of several of the most interesting ancient sites of the Silk Road. It was also the centre of Uighur culture and political independence for five hundred years.

It is the current Chinese custom to call these formerly independent nations 'minority peoples' even when referring to the long centuries of their independence, as if it had never existed. The 3,000 year old mummy found in the Central Asian desert was described as 'an ancient minority person', though Chinese power had reached nowhere near that region at the time. Munever followed this practice assiduously, and even bettered it.

As we went through the ancient Buddhist cave-monastery at Bezeklik, a store-house of pre-Chinese Buddhist frescoes blending Indian and Persian influences with the oriental, she could point out only those elements which showed contacts

with the Han.

In the magnificent earthen ruins of Karakhoja, known to the Chinese as Jiao He, she could tell us nothing of its five centuries of power as a trading and cultural centre. The architecture of that fastness, perched on an island of sheer earthen cliffs above a river junction, she called 'minority style'. Apparently, she had been taught only of its history under various Han imperial dynasties. Her final word on that abandoned city was, 'Our country had victories of unification here, against the minorities'. She was talking about the conquering of her own people by the Chinese empire.

In the end, we could only feel sorry for her, trapped in the syndrome of 'cultural cringe' so common to colonial peoples everywhere. One must wait for China's own historians to set the pace in restoring the record, since for any local Uighur to undertake it on his own would be a dangerous enterprise, verging on the crime of 'splittism'.

Foreigners seem to get a big welcome from the locals in Turfan - partly because the Turkic and Islamic traditions of hospitality are still strong, and partly, I suspect, because the Uighurs enjoy a common feeling with westerners, as being different to the Han. There is little love lost, however, between the Uighurs and the Kazakhs - the next most numerous people of the region. Though of common Turkic roots, the Kazakhs retain their nomadic ways, a thousand years after the Uighurs have become an agricultural people. The clash of lifestyles and economic interests has been a source of mutual hostility often exploited by the various Chinese empires in their diplomacy of divide and rule.

On an earlier visit, alone, I struck up an acquaintance with Salim, in the marketplace. It continued into the night. Salim had received some hundreds of yuan back from the government two years previously, in compensation for some property of his father's, illegally confiscated during the Cultural Revolution. A knockabout character, full of enterprise, but with no special qualifications and a personal record which would disqualify him from any government employment, Salim decided to build a restaurant. He simply chose a likely spot, on the main road

nearest the street market, and hired some casual builders to throw up a mud-brick shanty about four metres square. What about the requisite government permissions and licences? 'As long as I pay my taxes, there's no problem', he said with a wink.

Some wooden benches, an elementary kitchen, and he was in business. Shish kebabs grilling over a trough of hot coals, and an open-topped earthen bread-oven, filled the interior with a haze of appetising, onion-laden fragrance. A huge kettle of brick-tea (a rough-grade but very refreshing drink) and half a crate of bottled beer were his liquid stock in trade. An assistant chopped away on a huge block at the onions and meat for the kebabs. A young sooty-faced boy worked the bread-oven.. deftly splashing water over the inside of the fiery chamber before plunging his hand into the inferno to pat the round of unleavened dough onto the oven wall to cook.

I started cautiously with tea, moved on to beer, and finally accepted the grain spirits Salim had been determined, from the beginning, to press on me. By now, a procession of friends were dropping in, each wanting his turn to buy the foreigner a drink or offer me food of their own making.

Islam in Xinjiang is important to the people's identity, but does not have the literal authority it holds in some other parts of the world. Alcohol, I fear, is all too readily acceptable, and is increasingly the refuge sought by a people robbed of the dignity of self-rule.

At some point, now dim in my memory, our assembly, now full of bonhomie, moved to Salim's courtyard home, where his old mother and his young wife immediately put more food on the table. It would have been a disgrace, for them, not to do so, however unnerved they might be by Salim's unexpected guest. Someone produced a *saz*, the long-necked local banjo, others sang, and the dancing began, in a space under the grape-vines.

Dance is the Uighur's recreation, and a dance full of energy and humour. Most dances follow folk ditties about courtship, with sharp repartee between the partners ending in either a chase or an implied embrace. At Salim's, a neighbour brought in a cassette player bought in the Red Flag department store in

Urumchi. Some of the younger dancers took a fling at a tango - the big dance of Shanghai in 1948, and ever since carried throughout China in the diaspora of Shanghai's westernised middle classes. Salim's infant son, not yet two years old, was held up by the arms to stamp vigorously with the music in his mother's lap. A young Uighur might well dance before he can walk.

It was an evening of rare freedom from the social inhibitions that constrict Chinese society. My strongest memory of that night is not of the Tango, but of Salim's old mother, now missing some teeth, but once clearly a beauty, partnering her three-year-old granddaughter in a dance of the old Uighur style - head high, feet and hand movements smooth and precise, the power and humour of her dance transmitted through the subtle turn of a head or the raising of an eyebrow. May it endure the suffocating assimilation now in progress, as described elsewhere in this book.

Some important policy corrections are now under way, with a change in Beijing's view of the best way to 'safeguard national unity'. In the 1950s, a teacher of English in Beijing, who had some students from among the hand-picked Uighurs sent to Beijing for training as cadres of the new regime, was upbraided by the PLA General then in charge of 'minorities work' the region:

'Why are you teaching these people English?', he said. 'We sent them over here to learn to become Hans'.

China grew to its present size by sinicizing neighbouring 'barbarians' over the millennia. For most educated Chinese, it was presumed to be the right and moral thing to do, much as nineteenth-century Europeans presumed it their sacred mission to convert the world to Christianity. So its hardly surprising that the simple-minded would presume it should continue doing so. What has slowed the process now is religion.

China's revolutionary Marxist generation recognised the shackles of superstitious religion that kept their own peasantry, and a large proportion of their uneducated urban classes, in a thrall of abject conservatism. They saw that it also made those masses vulnerable to exploitation by clever charlatans and

manipulators. The communists propagandised for atheism with a fierce, often violent zeal. They did not recognise that for the major non-Han groups - the Tibetans, Mongols, and Muslims - their religion was vitally entwined with their whole culture.

The re-think in religious policy has not been purely from humanitarian considerations, but from a reassessment of the place of religion in world politics. Specifically, Beijing has been forced to recognise that many nations in the world, including some on whom China now depends most strongly for a united resistance to Soviet power, are fundamentally Islamic in character. In its present world diplomacy, Beijing cannot afford to alienate the Muslim governments of Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, or Malaysia. Even Soviet Central Asia, Islamic in heritage, must be considered. A radio propaganda war still rages across the Pamirs, with each communist empire now keen to show that it is the more tolerant of Islam. In Xinjiang, Islam is strongest just where Chinese political and military power is most vulnerable.

From the old Silk Road junction city of Kashgar, in the far south-west of Xinjiang, the Eastern ramparts of the Pamir ranges are clearly visible, and the border with Soviet Uzbekistan is only 120 kilometres from the crumbling earth walls of the old city. Four hundred kilometres to the south is the Afghan border, and, a little further to the east, the Karakorum highway clammers over the Kunjerab pass into Pakistan. By contrast, it's 4,000 kilometres to Beijing - a journey that takes two days even by plane. Most of that part of Xinjiang is taken up by the Taklimakhan, the Desert of No Return. But snow run-off from the bordering mountains nourishes a string of oases across that strategic south-west corner, with a total population of two and a half million. Ninety-five percent are Uighurs.

Kashgar, for a hundred years and more, was the conspiratorial hub of what Rudyard Kipling's generation called 'The Great Game' - the rivalry of two empires, British and Russian, for trade and border security, in a remote desert region that only a bulging empire could covet. Kashgar then, as now, was also the westernmost outpost of Chinese

administration.

Memories of the Great Game linger on in Kashgar, in the remains of the two imperial consulates, British and Russian. Once havens to itinerant spies, merchants, explorers, and occasional missionaries, they have been turned now by Chinese authorities to more prosaic uses. The Russian consulate is a base for the four hundred or so Japanese and Italian mountain-climbers who pass through each summer season, paying high fees for the chance to climb rare peaks in the Pamirs. It serves good ice-cream, chemical soft-drinks, and earns plenty of foreign exchange. The former British consulate, the farthest extension of British India and known in the chronicles as 'Chini-bagh', is now a run-down hostel for Chinese truck-drivers. When I visited Chini-bagh, built on a yellow bluff overlooking Old Kashgar, I walked around the back to the veranda where consuls and their ladies had sipped tea as they surveyed the frequent local wars and sieges about the city walls. I found the veranda is now being used as an informal latrine.

Both consulates were closed not long after the communist government secured control of the region, though Chini-bagh had been run as a joint Indo-Pakistan legation since the British left India in 1948. The Soviet Union was also forced to abandon its dream of an autonomous East Turkestan republic. China has never conceded an inch of sovereignty in the region, and has effectively stamped out all separatist resistance.

Official Chinese policy, now, is to make whatever compromises are acceptable to achieve communal harmony. According to briefings given by the Religious Management Bureau in Urumchi, over 15,000 mosques are in operation in the region, tended by 12,000 local Imams, each of whom has an apprentice in training. A new Islamic seminary (under government supervision, of course) was opened in Urumchi in 1984. The Koran, which was banned during the cultural revolution and burned whenever found by the Chinese Red Guards and soldiers, is now being re-printed and made available, in limited numbers, through the officially-sponsored Islamic association.

For purposes of worship, the Koran is always read in Arabic, and in the past the Chinese have been happy to let this linguistic obstacle limit the teaching of the religious contents of the Koran to the few licensed specialists. A few years ago, the World Islamic Association gave 10,000 Arabic Korans to Xinjiang's Muslims, and the gift was officially sanctioned by the Chinese government. The latest policy, however, has permitted the publication, for the first time ever, of a full edition of the Koran in the Uighur language, along with a mass printing of Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed and a full concordance to the Koran.

The rising prosperity of individual farmers and trading families in Xinjiang, since economic policy was relaxed, brought an upsurge in the private building of new mosques by families. In Turfan, more than a hundred families had built new, domed Islamic tombs for themselves, like a plantation of mudbrick Taj Mahals sprouting among the poplars of the irrigation fields. Chinese authorities do not approve of this use of money, but do not intervene. In Turfan the population is seventy percent Muslim, but in Kashgar it is ninety-two percent.

Kashgar is still one of the great bazaars of Central Asia, with 20,000 people coming to the weekly markets. It throngs with a dense, dusty, crowd of camel-dealers, rug-makers, outdoor dentists, blacksmiths, teashops, tinkers - the market is a testimony to the renewed vigour of individual trade. Most of the market-goers are from outlying oases, and it is plain to see that the relatively few Han in the place prefer not to move about unless in groups.

Though actual mob violence is not very common these days, it is never far below the surface. What brings it out will usually be an incident in which the Uighurs believe that Han have been given special privileges. Typical of the most serious kind of incident was in 1982, when a Han killed Uighur with a shotgun, after an argument over the digging of a drain across the front of his house. The Han was duly sentenced for his crime, but then his sentence was reduced under the influence of pressure from local police and military circles, dominated, of

course, by Han. There was a minor uprising, in which two more Han were killed, before the army came to put it down. The Peoples Daily said at the time that 'the people of all nationalities exposed the murderers and uncovered the counter-revolutionary organisations that made use of the opportunity to agitate and sabotage unity between the nationalities'. Eight Uighurs were arrested, and two Han. But by the time I was Kashgar, local officials were inclined to downplay the incident. The people who organised the uprising were counter-revolutionary criminals, they said, but one could not say that there was anything in the nature of a 'counter-revolutionary organisation' in Kashgar.

In the Al It'qa mosque, a stream of worshippers make their way steadily through the courtyard, to the ablution area, and to the praying wall at the back. Prayer mats are laid out on the raised platform under the awning, and on the bare, swept earth below. Walls are whitewashed, and the wooden beams and pillars picked out in bright blue paint. Water runs continuously in a leafy channel to one side, where bearded, beady-eyed old men in skull-caps sit under a pergola in animated confabulation. Wrinkled hands rise in emphasis, walking sticks thump the pavement. The debates die away and old heads slowly turn to regard the strangers, clanking into the mosque with their cameras and loud, strange language. Women sit separately, watching.

On the threshold of the mosque, young boys cluster about with a new, illuminated edition of the Koran in a bright blue binding. They compete to be photographed, holding the Koran open, reverently. To one side, a bald man sits in a wheelchair. He has two plastic stereoscopic transparency viewers, into which he is carefully allowing a curious crowd of all ages to peep, one by one. I join them, and find he is displaying stereo views of Mecca, the holy city of pilgrimage. To thousands who will never go, this man spends his days offering the next best thing. Friday prayers at Al It'qa

draw forty-five thousand of the faithful, and more than ten thousand pray every day of the week.

Mullah Kasim is the most senior mullah in Kashgar, more than eighty years old, he's not sure exactly. He is a Haj - he went to Mecca in 1946, coming back through Pakistan. He tells us Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are the Islamic countries he most admires. He has no time for Ayatollah Khomeini, blaming him for war between Islamic brothers. In any case, Khomeini's Shia Islam is not practised in Xinjiang. The Mullah believes that the Communist Party will not interfere any more with the practice of religion, as it did under the 'Gang of Four'. Other problems in the past concerned the political leadership role of the mullahs in their local communities. That seems to have been solved, he says without elaboration.

Mehmet Amin has a more difficult explanation to make. He is Vice-Chairman of the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau, charged with ensuring the compatibility of Islam and the Communist Party. He has been transferred from Cultural Affairs to Religious Affairs, and considers himself a 'bridge' between religion and government. The continuity of religion in Xinjiang is assured, he tells me, by Chinese law. There is a two year gaol sentence for interference with religious freedom. On the other hand, of course, religious interference with civil law in matters such as education and marriage is also forbidden.

'You can't change a thousand years of religion over night', he says.

Mehmet Amin uses the title 'Haj', because he has been to Mecca. He was the official in charge of a pilgrimage sent two years previously from Xinjiang. Islamic law is very strict on the Haj - only believers are permitted to attend, and the penalty for defying this rule is death. I asked Mehmet

Amin if he was a believer. He looked a little uncomfortable.

'Communist Party members can't believe in religions,' he said, 'but certain customs, which might include religious practices, are part of *nationality* customs, so they can't be called strictly religious, and cadres may participate in them'.

'Are you a Party member?', I pressed him, knowing that he realised he was in a difficult position.

Mehmet Amin declined to answer the question. I concluded that he was, and that the line he had chosen to walk, between two orthodoxies each demanding absolute loyalty, was one I would not envy, whatever his motives.

The old Mullah Kasim was not interested in any such compromise.

'The Prophet told us that Allah gives a man only one heart. Either you believe in Islam, or you believe in Communism'.

More than seven million people in Xinjiang believe in Islam.



An elderly Uighur in Urumchi, Xinjiang. Dreams of an independent Turkestan seem to have passed into history



Market food stalls, Turfan, in Xinjiang. Skirts and headscarves distinguish the Uighur women from the blue-trousered Han.



The Australian movie “Breaker Morant”, advertised in Chinese and Arabic scripts in Kashgar, Xinjiang. The Party likes anti-Imperialist movies. So do the Muslim Uighurs.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OPENING THE WILDS

The square in front of Kashgar's Al It'qa mosque is the peddlers' market, where stalls of cheap manufactured goods brought from inland China, from Pakistan (Pear's soap, patent medicines), and even from the USSR, vie with the local pots and pans. The Kashgar branch of the official department store, at one corner of the square, is by contrast gloomy, bare, and almost deserted.

Officials admit that their government commercial bureau, at the end of very long communication lines from the eastern industrial cities, can wait more than a year for orders to be filled, whereas the peddlers, operating their own personal networks of contacts, can obtain goods from the east in a matter of ten days. Ten thousand people hold private trading licences in Kashgar, and two thousand are full-time traders.

It's a profitable sideline for many of the Han who are posted to Kashgar, and to places like it in the outer territories of China. Though they all receive special augmented wages and subsidies to compensate for the extra living costs of their isolation, the Han settlers on the whole do not find life easy,

especially where, as in Kashgar, they are in the minority. Zhou Songying is a 40 year-old interpreter-clerk in the Kashgar Grain Administration Bureau. Zhou's parents were of the first generation of communist cadres who followed the Peoples Liberation Army into Kashgar in 1950. Those were wild days, with military skirmishes against local anti-Communists, against Turkic groups holding out for independence, and against remnants of the Nationalist army who took to the mountains rather than surrender to the PLA. The KMT general eventually was shot, the cadres say, after trying to escape to India across the Karakorum pass.

Zhou's parents were sent to Kashgar to push forward the land reform movement. Their job was to supervise the dispossession and trials of local landlords, and to supervise the redistribution and collectivisation of land. Uighur cadres at the time were almost non-existent.

Zia'uddin, a Uighur, is nominally the Director of the Grain Bureau. At a briefing session in the Bureau, over the usual enamel mugs of Chinese jasmine tea, he sat mute and ignored in the second row of chairs, while all questions were fielded by a Han `deputy director' who made no pretence of deferring to him.

I later had a chance to talk to Zia'uddin, and he told me how before `Liberation' there had been no Party organisation whatsoever in Xinjiang. A hasty public recruitment programme in 1951 enrolled him, a struggling and idealistic small-farmer in Urumchi, despatched as part of the Land Reform Team to Kashgar, after a mere ten days indoctrination in communist theory and practice. The duties of `minority cadres', then as now, were based more on obedience and docility than on grasp of the finer points of Marxism. All the Uighur cadres, in the beginning, were from Urumchi, where they had long been accustomed to living with a substantial number of Han in positions of power. In Kashgar, however, the mullahs and the landlords had held far greater power than in Urumchi, and the tasks of carrying out Party policy were both arduous and dangerous.

Zia'uddin was not expected to take much responsibility then, he told me, and I venture that he is not expected to do much

today, either, other than sit quietly at meetings and on committees, to boost the 'minority' quota.

Zhou Songying's parents, however, were both Party members. They kept their young daughter with them for a few years in the early fifties. This was unusual. Most Han parents of that generation in Xinjiang left their children behind with relatives in the inland, not wanting them exposed to the risk and the hardships of the borderlands. But once Songying was old enough for secondary school, she was packed off back east, to make sure she received a solid Han education. In the mean time, however, she had become fluent in Uighur, though neither of her parents had learned much.

When she graduated from her inland school, Songying was assigned back to work in the Kashgar Grain Bureau - not just because her parents were there (family convenience is seldom decisive in job assignments) but because she had the rare gift of a natural grasp of the Uighur language, learned in childhood. The Grain Bureau is a vital office in China's economic system, controlling the exchange of the staple commodity. It was even more so in the early sixties, when Beijing still expected the state role in commerce to be comprehensive. Zhou Songying was made first a junior clerk, then, as her proficiency in Uighur gained recognition, she became a full-time interpreter.

The Grain Bureau in Kashgar is still held up to be a model of racial harmony between Uighur and Han. As in all key units, the power is held by Han, but there are some 300 Uighurs on the staff, along with the 120 Han. Almost all the Uighurs speak at least basic Chinese (with their distinctive north-western accents), but very few of the Han, even after more than thirty years of administration, speak more than a few words of Uighur. The bureau cannot operate without two full-time interpreters just to handle the communications between the Han and Uighurs on its staff. Zhou Songying is one of these.

Zhou is one of the few Han in Kashgar who feels at home there. Her interpreting often involves cross-cultural diplomacy, not language alone. The Kashgar Uighurs take their Islam quite seriously, and become very angry if their religious principles are offended. Chinese who wish to keep pigs (as all who can, do) must keep the offensive creatures out of sight, and smell, of

their neighbours. The Chinese habit of public spitting, especially in the early mornings, must be curbed. Spitting in front of a Muslim who has washed himself for the Mosque is highly offensive, as are various other common and casual customs of the Han. Pork carried home from the butcher must be carefully wrapped - not like the casual inland custom of carrying your meat home unwrapped, dangling on a piece of string.

Songying seemed genuinely to enjoy her colonial life, though it had not provided her with a lifestyle any more luxurious than she might have achieved in the inland. Her home was the same cement cuboid any urban clerical worker might expect, though the relative spaciousness of the region allowed for the addition of a small courtyard. Her grasp of the language enabled her to enjoy the Uighur movies - a vigorously sentimental genre produced in the Tien Shan studios at Urumchi - and she professed not to be afraid to sit alone in a darkened cinema, the only Han present. Zhou Songying is exceptional in that regard, and she could not risk sitting alone in Urumchi.

But her local identification goes only so far. When it came to marriage, she was quite clear. Her parents would not, for a moment, have considered allowing her to marry anyone but a Han. Once she came of marriageable age, they kept their eyes peeled for a suitable candidate among the newly-arrived technicians and junior cadres assigned each year to the district. Eventually, their choice fell upon a young mechanic, and the match was made.

The Grain Bureau has many times won the annual local award for Unity of the Nationalities, but its leaders told me that, in its thirty years of existence, there had not been a single mixed marriage between Han and Uighur.

Zhou Songying did not think to comment on her marriage relationship, other than that her husband was 'very suitable'. None the less, almost immediately they began living together, the new groom committed one of those cultural *faux-pas* Zhou had spent her life sorting out. After washing his clothes one day, he tipped the dirty water, Chinese-style, out the window - directly in the path of a group of newly bathed Uighur men on

their way to worship at the mosque. The compound was invaded by an angry mob demanding apologies, which the green-horn was easily persuaded to give.

Uighurs in Kashgar live as Uighurs. They adopt, as they have always adopted, those elements of Chinese culture and material providence that suit them, or are forced on them, but they disdain those which are neither compulsory nor appealing.

Kashgar, like every sizeable settlement in China, had been mobilised to build a Peoples Square during the long years of Maoism. Since the old city is built on hilly ground, the square was built, mercifully, on the outskirts. Orchards on one side of the main road to the airport had been flattened and gravelled over. The usual concrete reviewing-stand and gargantuan concrete statue of Chairman Mao looked out across this expanse, from the other side of the road.

These days, it is little used, but as I passed through on one occasion the square was filled with a massed parade of the Young Pioneers. Squads of schoolchildren, marshalled by their teachers, marched up and down to the sound of drum and bugle bands. Chosen representatives uttered shrill dedications to the cause of serving the Party and building the nation.. in that order. In almost all cases, Uighur and Han children were in separate troops. Being 1983, the cult of Mao had almost vanished, and the gross statue across the busy road seemed irrelevant, now, to the proceedings, isolated from the children by the busy flow of highway commerce, both public and private. Most of the children were too young to have many clear memories of the Cultural Revolution and the fierce communal fighting the Red Guards had provoked in Kashgar. The rally seemed no more militant than a Boy Scout jamboree.

It was International Children's Day, and the kindergarten children of Kashgar had been led into the Palace of Culture - an echoing, auditorium with a cavernous stage, in the unvarying utilitarian architecture of provincial cities across China. The kindergartens, too, are largely segregated according to the child's ethnic background. No Han would consider sending their child to a Uighur kindergarten. But some Uighur cadres, ambitious for their children's future in a Chinese world, send them to the Han pre-school. Only units close to the

administration, in any case, have kindergartens at all.

The children's troupes performed in turn. According to the Chinese convention for such performances, bizarre to western eyes, the children are daubed in lurid pink rouge and eye makeup, and encouraged to sing with an exaggeratedly shrill voice and coy mannerisms. Conformity to this type brings the greatest applause, the most beaming congratulations from teachers and parents.

There was a notable difference in the children from the Uighur kindergartens. Their teacher had made them up in the Chinese style, but their singing and their gestures were their own.. expressions of an individuality and a cheek notably absent from the schooled routines of the little Han children. Song and dance are part of the adult Uighur culture, which children can learn with dignity.. not just childish, educative games.

There were roughly equal numbers of Uighur and Han children in the Palace of Culture that day. There were also rows and rows of beaming, nodding mothers in the auditorium, clapping the children through their routines. But more than nine out of ten of those mothers was Han. For some reason, the Uighur mothers had chosen to stay away.

In many ways, the small Han community in Kashgar are better off than their far more numerous Han compatriots in places like Urumchi. This may be because their very lack of numbers in Kashgar keeps them wary of provoking those amongst whom they live, so that daily tensions, on the whole, are low. But the Han have such a well-established monopoly of power in Urumchi that many are blasé and arrogant in their attitude to the local peoples, and the communal antipathies are more bitterly entrenched.

There was a nation-wide frenzy of public construction just before the tenth anniversary of the Peoples Republic, in 1958. Beijing threw up an array of monolithic public buildings in record time, including the Great Hall of the People and the Beijing Railway Station. Provincial governments, as usual, sought to emulate with grandiose projects of their own in descending scale. At this time, Urumchi also got its Museum of History. A giant columned central entrance and stairway,

intended to awe, and symmetrical exhibition halls on either side : I could almost have found my way blindfold for its conformity to the museums of its vintage.

Inside the doorway, two mature ladies sat at a small wooden table to collect the entrance fees. One was a brisk Han, with a rim of tightly permed curls around her tidy hairstyle. The other was a jolly Uighur in a headscarf. A symbol of the unity of nationalities, I thought. But when I approached them to enter the Museum, their division of labour became an even stronger symbol of the unity of nationalities. The Han woman collected the money and handed me the ticket, torn off a roll. She put the coins in a cashbox and made a note in her account book. The Uighur woman then took the spent ticket from me, and dropped it into a waste-bin. That was the limit of her responsibility. That image has stayed with me.

The museum itself, however, could not have been a clearer demonstration of Han chauvinism. Labelled a museum of the history of Xinjiang, it turned out to be a history of Han relations with Xinjiang, excluding almost all reference to any other element of the complex Central Asian culture. Hall after hall of artefacts supported what is not disputed: that Chinese trade and military influence have been significant in the region over more than two thousand years.

Missing, though, was any real acknowledgement of the Persian, Indian, Mongol and Turkic cultures which predominated in the region for almost all of its history, until the last two hundred years. A single alcove in the whole museum contained grudging references to the greatest of the region's indigenous historians and men of letters: Turkic scribes known throughout the Islamic world for their scholarship. And this was in a region which has yielded some of the world's richest archaeological finds.

On the outskirts of Urumchi, the traditional mudbrick courtyards of the Uighur people have been overtaken by the pressure of population. Beijing says the region must grow by immigration, but not much money is spent on improving the lives of the local people. There have been years of neglect, and the money is still not available. In the old days it would

be four or five rooms per family, with their own courtyard, vines, and chickens, even within the city. Now families with more than one room are lucky. Courtyards are filled with 'temporary' shacks. New brick buildings clamber up the crumbling hillsides, stacking people on top of each other. But there are no roads between the buildings, no plumbing inside them. People live in the concrete boxes, building their own brick coal-stoves, or cooking over kerosene burners. Rubbish accumulates around the feet of the buildings, and the soil is saturated with the urine of those who can't make the long walk to the nearest public latrines. Drinking and washing water is carried from the standpipe at the bottom of the hill. When it rains, the soil itself runs away, leaving deepening gullies where the construction workers had left cart-tracks down the hillsides. No postman is ever seen, but pairs of policemen, one Uighur, one Han, are quick to pay a call when anyone has an unfamiliar visitor.

Foreign visitors stay in a section of the Yen'an Guesthouse, forty minutes bus-ride outside the city limits. Tourists stay two days, others longer - engineers from Mitsubishi giving courses in motorcycle maintenance, a French computer programmer processing data for oil prospectors in the Junggar basin, around Altai. It's comfortable, isolated, and guarded by a platoon of soldiers who live there, raising their own pigs, supposedly out of sight of the Muslim population.

Other sections of the Yen'an Guesthouse accommodate privileged visitors from the inland. The oldest section is guarded by a two-metre brick wall topped by five strands of electrified wire, and with sentry-posts, now neglected, every few yards. The wall has fallen into decay, but the gates are still locked. On an evening stroll, I hear sounds from inside the compound, walk up to the gate and peer through a crack. A stream of irrigation water runs noisily through a wood of poplars, passing under the garden wall. A large, cement-built villa is visible, introduced by a circular sweep of driveway, strewn with twigs and leaves. A silver-haired old Chinese gentleman in a grey suit leans on a walking stick, watching a young man and a young woman play shuttlecock across a

bed of white lilies where the driveway circles in front of the villa. Tranquillity reigns in that grove of poplars, willows, and sand-dates.. the tranquillity of a secure colonial outpost.

Not all the immigrants are privileged. Wang Guorong works as an interpreter in the External Relations Bureau of Urumchi, and is often given the task of shepherding critical foreign reporters. It's an unenviable role, being the meat in a sandwich, which he fulfils with more grace than most.

Wang was born in Xinjiang, of inland parents, but in the Han custom he still introduces himself as a native of Henan. He is a tall, thin man in his early thirties, with large ears, close-cropped hair, and the usual tough blue-cloth trousers clamped high on his thin waist by a substantial leather belt which passing almost one and a half times around his body. I never got to the bottom of this particular sartorial custom of young Chinese - wearing extra-long leather belts. Perhaps it was simple economy: a leather belt as an investment early in life, expected to last forever, with prudent room for middle-aged expansion.

It was inevitable that Wang Guorong's work assignment would keep him in Xinjiang: the provincial Party boss, Wang En Mao, made clear on his return to the province in 1981 that his brief, from the Central Committee of the Party, was to 'make Xinjiang a strong bulwark against hegemonism and defend the national borderlands.' At a meeting of all local government officers and military commanders, he chided those who longed to return to their inland homes:

'Han cadres must show willingness for long term settlement', he told them.

'I know all the peoples love socialism, love China, love the Party, and want national unity'.

From henceforth, immigration is to be speeded up, and no Han who have settled in Xinjiang shall be allowed to transfer back inland.

Wang Guorong's wife is also a second-generation settler in the region, born of fifties migrants. She is a school teacher. Though both very well placed, for a young couple, they lived,

when I was there, in a single room with no central heating, relying on a smoky coal stove to keep themselves and their small child warm through the long sub-zero winters. Simply getting food was a continual problem. The Muslim peoples customarily ate a lot of meat, so, in the interests of racial harmony, there was a local regulation giving Muslims priority in the meat rationing system. Han had only a small meat-ration, plus what they could buy on the free market at three times the state market price. Wang himself had the advantage that his work often required him to eat with foreigners, thus supplementing his own meat intake.. but the advantage was not shared by his wife, or indeed by the majority of the young Han middle-class in Urumchi.

I asked Wang Guorong why he didn't keep his own chickens, as many of the local people seemed to do, feeding them on scraps?

Wang looked at me with that smile of embarrassment Chinese cadres use when complaining about their own situation.

'How could I ever buy a chicken?', he responded with some feeling. 'And if I had one, how could I afford to feed it? Since the free markets re-opened, the small farmers on the edges of town are becoming very rich, by selling their produce and paying little tax, while we government workers on fixed salaries still have almost nothing to eat.'

In Wang's case, I knew this was not a propaganda performance for my benefit. I had met him several times over a period of years, and he was one of the best examples of a Han who showed some feeling and respect for the non-Han character of Xinjiang, and for the issues involved in colonising it. Not that he ever questioned the basic two-point creed for the immigrants : "Xinjiang has always been part of China", and "Only Socialism can save China". It was simply that he recognised the integrity of the culture which had existed there before large-scale Han immigration began, and the wrong done to those Turkic peoples (like the Turfan tour guide Munever) who had been taught, by less sensitive Han colonisers, to feel shame for the inheritance of their own blood, their own history.

In the cool of Kashgar's evening, the dancers swoop and strut on the concrete threshing-floor, poplars behind them. Musicians sit behind them on folding chairs, their instruments and their music seeming almost more Celtic than Chinese. They play flutes, hand-drums, and the plangent, long-necked *saz*, a stretched member of the mandolin family. Male and female dancers alike move with subtlety and with vigour, exchanging the ritual banter of humorous courtship routines.

A stumpy young man with red cheeks steps forward as the music pauses. He wears a western-style suit, to which the idiosyncrasies of a local tailor have contributed an irremediable lumpiness. At least one extra pair of trousers is evidently being worn beneath this stage suit's tight but shapeless bags. The young man opens his mouth and casts on the night air a rich, controlled baritone, like a concert trombone, lifting the music again in a magical transcendence of his costume. His song commemorates old Kashgaria's renowned scholar, Mahmut Kashgari, compiler of Central Asia's greatest encyclopaedia, famous to the Mediterranean, but ignored in Beijing. In lyrics cleared by the commissars, the song ends with Mahmut praised as a "Builder of National Unity".

A comic duo step forward, one dressed as a smart young Chinese cadre, the other as a caricature of an old Uighur. Their duet ridicules the suspicion of the old Uighur toward the benefits offered him by Chinese medicine. It is sung in thickly accented Chinese. Art is propaganda, propaganda is art.

In the histories of China, Russia, and the USA, the Frontier has always loomed large. At the Frontier, and beyond it, the world was wild, promising, threatening, and meet to be tamed. Xinjiang has always been China's Wild West. With the pressure of population upon the Chinese heartlands, the cry is 'Go West, young man, and Open the Wilderness.'

Until the fifties, Xinjiang had seen only three types of Han

settlers: traders, officials, and soldiers. Successive dynasties had all practised the permanent settlement of Han garrisons on their border territories.. it was the only practical solution to supply problems, and, when it worked, it made the garrisons loyal to their territory. (Frequently too loyal, in fact, as time and time again weak emperors were overthrown by generals who had built up their own power-bases on the frontier, rather as happened in the Roman Empire.)

If garrisons survived, they would settle, eventually either inter-marrying with locals, or bringing their own women from the inland. This process of settlement accounted for much of the expansion of Han territory over more than a thousand years.

Two formidable barriers - the Gobi Desert and Islam - prevented this occurring in Xinjiang until now. Inter-marriage is still extremely rare. But transmigration is proceeding apace. It began as a military operation, had a phase of attempted civilianisation, and has now been re-instituted as a military project. Defence and development are seen as parts of the same enterprise - Opening the Wilderness - and the instrument for this is called the Production and Construction Corps.

Two and a half million soldier-settlers and dependants had settled in Xinjiang between 1954 and 1982. With massive state subsidies, they had ploughed and irrigated a million hectares of crops on what had been marginal grazing lands before their arrival, and protected it from encroaching sands with hundreds of miles of windbreaks. In 1983, an official survey claimed there was a further twenty-four million hectares of land in Xinjiang suitable for the Production and Construction Corps to colonise.

During the sixties, their military role diminished. Children were born and grew up with the poplar windbreaks. As they responded to Beijing's demands for impressive production statistics, the military colonies looked more and more like the thousands of State Farms throughout China. The difference between a State Farm and a Commune is that the State Farm workers are salaried, and deliver all product directly to the state, whereas the Communes and other production units have a

`commercial' relationship to the state. They trade their products for materials and money, and pay their workers according to shares of the profits - so runs the theory. Until recently, it made no difference to a State Farm worker whether the farm was financially viable or not. State Farms were built because policy said they should be. Many, naturally, were sink-holes of public money.

The road to Farm 148 is a hard one, nine rough hours' travel north-west of Urumchi, beyond Shihezi (`Stony Creek'). The area is a sensitive one, traditional territory of Kazakh herdsmen, now heavily colonised by Han. Along the way, you pass giant radio-jamming antennae, intended to block continuous propaganda broadcasting from the Soviet Union in the Turkic languages of the non-Han.

It's an unnecessarily hard road, too, because its engineers, for some unknown reason, ignore principles accepted elsewhere for at least a hundred years. For mile after mile, teams of labourers are laying a roadbed of round, unbroken river stones and pebbles, covered only with soft soil. Wherever there is water or rain, the round stones shift and the roadbed collapses - but the works continue. Driving over this travesty of construction was jarring to the mind as well as to the bones, as one realised that those miles of road, sooner rather than later, would have to be laid again, almost from scratch.

I discussed this with the driver, Mr Liu, a wry middle-aged Han with strong north-western accent, perhaps the equivalent, in English terms, of a Yorkshireman. He accepted that I was most likely quite right about this, but his reply testified to the values absorbed from a lifetime of negotiating through a completely state-owned economy.

`In the West, you're good at repairing roads', he conceded, `but in China, we're good at repairing vehicles.'

He smiled thoughtfully to himself about this, as he drove the car with some force into another swathe of football-sized boulders arranged across our path.

Farm 148 itself could have been almost anywhere in China,

apart from a certain spaciousness lacking in the inland. Three thousand Han live on Farm 148, growing cotton for the state mills in Shihezi and for export. There are 170 other farms like it in Xinjiang alone, so the scale of the development can be understood. The layout of the farm headquarters, the style of the briefings, all were indistinguishable from the inland. Two and a half thousand miles from Beijing, its residents live in considerable isolation - but then the great majority of China's 800 million peasants do live far from any major town. From Farm 148, the workers could catch, if they were lucky, a daily bus over that atrocious road to Shihezi. Most, in fact, make that bone-breaking six-hour ride, when they need to, on the back of an unsprung goods trailer, dragged by one of the farm's diesel tractors.

There was a difference, though. Most of the officials on the farm held positions roughly equivalent in rank to the military ranks they had held when Farm 148 was set up by the Construction and Production Corps. These included one Team Leader Wang, a colourful character who had been one of those Nationalist officers who held out in the mountains against the communist advance. He had eventually surrendered and after many years of 're-education' was now a Model Team Leader. Since mid-1982, Beijing had decreed that all those farms like 148 which were military in origin would resume their military status. All were to be re-issued with appropriate equipment, and the winter months were to be spent, for the men, in military exercises and training. Farm leaders would be addressed, once more, by their military ranks.

This move served to re-emphasise the sad position of the remains of that failed transmigration scheme, that of the Educated Youth, dealt with elsewhere in this book. It worked out that some of the most urbanised youth, from the great metropoli of the eastern coast, were the ones sent to most desolate regions of Xinjiang. A minority - the better endowed, the most astute, and the fortunate - found a welcome and a productive role to play in 'Opening the Wilderness' as teachers, clerks and so on. The majority lapsed into an embittered servitude which proved a seed-bed for crime, rebellion, and

alienation. Cut off from the group welfare of the communities they had been foisted upon, many faced near-starvation. The rate of failure was so high that when, in 1981, the Shanghai Municipal Manpower bureau held a ceremony to congratulate those Shanghai youths who had settled successfully in Xinjiang, only one hundred and six names could be found, from the many thousands who had been sent over more than a decade. Though no more were being sent out by that time, it was still an extremely difficult matter for an exiled youth to gain a transfer back home.

My most pathetic exposure to the problem was on the road to Farm 148. At a point where that appalling road emerged briefly above the marshy terrain it had been crossing for many kilo-metres, we passed a mud-brick hovel, marooned in the marsh, a twist of grey smoke dribbling from its makeshift chimney. Three bedraggled young men sat against the wall of the hut, two picks and a shovel lay beside them. No other tools or equipment were to be seen. Daubed across the front of the hut in white paint were the words 'Educated Youth Construction Team' - but I found it hard to imagine anything less constructive than the heart-breaking stone-breaking they would face until, somehow, they found a way out of it.

In Shihezi, at the junction of two broad, straight avenues, I stand with a small group of foreign colleagues and a crowd of Han officials, while a Farm Deputy-Director uses a pointing-stick to explain a large map on a hoarding erected there. It tells of the plans for ever-increasing crop production and expanding irrigation, with neat accommodation barracks for the workers already painted in. Bar-graphs beside the map claim spectacular success. In the fields behind the hoarding, teams of Han workers, mainly women, toil through the cotton-fields, handpicking the ripe bolls and emptying their tally-bags onto a growing mountain of snowy fibre. There's an unhurried tap-tapping on the road behind me, and I turn to see an old bearded Uighur in an embroidered skull-cap draw up, sitting cross-legged on his flat donkey-cart. He takes little interest in the briefing - probably he does not understand Chinese. When he notices my foreign face

regarding him, he breaks into a toothless smile, and, looking around, raises his eyes in a mute dismissal of the grand schemes surrounding him. Then he flicks the donkey's rump with a switch and they trot off into the heat, hooves and wheels raising small puffs from the road, which lightly dust the old man and his personal cargo of five watermelons.

It happened that my last departure from Xinjiang was by train. There had been a recent domestic plane hijack to South Korea, and in the resulting severe clampdown on internal air travel, flights were frequently cancelled at short notice. The train travel, however, was no cause for complaint: such journeys are prized by curious, Chinese-speaking foreigners, as an opportunity to see otherwise inaccessible corners of China in reasonable comfort, and to fraternise over an extended period with Chinese one would normally never meet.

The fellow-traveller in my compartment was topping up his jasmine tea from the regulation railways vacuum flask as we hauled through the grimy foothills out of Urumchi. He was a Han military officer whom I took, on age grounds, to be a colonel. No rank badges were worn, and etiquette forbade me asking him, but the railway staff soon confirmed my guess, by addressing him respectfully as such.

My colonel seemed a little disconcerted to be sharing his compartment with a foreigner. It was very likely the first time he had ever been alone with one, and the PLA has extraordinarily cautious regulations forbidding contact with foreigners. I made a few innocent remarks about the weather, to let him know that I was able and willing to converse, then sat back to let him set his own pace for our conversation. For some time this consisted of the colonel making elaborately weighty movements of his limbs, gazing out the window at the stony wastes we were by now entering, sighing heavily, and saying "Ah, Gobi Desert" in a tone of deep fatalism.

The colonel's opening conversational gambit with me was the standard Chinese enquiry as to my marital status, followed by warm congratulations on hearing that I was the father of a

young son. Later, he was hugely amused when, in answer to his query, I told him roughly what my salary was (about twenty times his own), then further astounded as I outlined the costs of living that I would face on my return to Australia. 'Why', he asked me, 'if foreigners are so rich, do they all wear those faded old labour-cloth trousers, instead of high-class wool or nylon.'

My reply that many considered jeans to be both comfortable and good-looking did not fully convince him, sitting in his extremely roomy green drab uniform. He was not satisfied until I suggested that the extreme hairiness of foreigners' legs made it uncomfortable for them to wear the synthetics favoured in China. It was a long time since my colonel had travelled by train. Military officers seldom have trouble getting flights on the internal airline. As it was, I had to show him, myself, how to control the fan, lights, and public address system in the compartment. He had been in Xinjiang for twenty years, and had raised a family of four children there.

I asked him how they were placed for jobs, knowing the difficulties that faced many young Uighurs in finding work.

'No trouble at all', he said proudly. 'I found them all good jobs within six months of leaving school'.

A little later we were joined by a man named Zhang who wanted to practice his English on me. He had been sent to Xinjiang as an Educated Youth, from the sophisticated industrial city of Wuxi, near Shanghai. His posting was at Altai.. a Kazakh town in the north, now centre of an important and growing oil field. Like an extraordinary number of these exiled Chinese, Zhang had taught himself a quite passable level of English simply from the lessons broadcast on China's internal radio network, supplemented by short-wave sessions on the Voice of America and the BBC.

Zhang had married a girl from his home town who had been sent out in the same batch as himself. They accepted Altai, now, as their home, as much as a continental European can accept migration to the New World. They had a son, however, and were concerned that his barefoot and fancy-free upbringing in Altai should not exclude him from all chances of

advancement in a highly competitive later life. When he was eight years old, they followed the common practice of sending the boy back to his grandparents home in Wuxi, there to become a proper Chinese and learn his ancestral dialect.

Within six months the boy was back in Altai. He had felt suffocated by the over-crowded city life of Wuxi, and had been jeered at by the city children for the north-western accent to his speech. Zhang had no regret that his son had rejected the inland, and, to him, Xinjiang would always be his home.

In 1982, Xinhua reported that 5,535 Han had volunteered to work in the Karamay oilfield, answering a 'Help Wanted' advertisement placed, in some desperation, by the oilfield's management in the national Peoples Daily. These volunteers in search of a challenge were reported to include engineers, geologists, teachers, and doctors from major cities. But few of the Han settlers in Xinjiang are volunteers. Many resent their exile unrelentingly. Others make the best of it. And there are some who take to the land with love, and make it their own.

For twenty solid hours the train ran east across Gobi desert.. the endless expanse of rounded pebbles broken by the rarest of dry tussocks. Approaching the Gansu corridor to the inland this became saltbush country, then, over another twenty-four hours, sloped up and narrowed into wrinkled valleys, until we crossed the end of the Kun Lun ranges through a mountain snowscape.

Of eighty hours travel between Urumchi and Beijing, only the last twenty-four pass through country that is what the world thinks of as typically Chinese.. the densely populated, intensively cultivated flats and hill-slopes of the Yellow River and North China plains.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE WORLD'S ROOF

Few places on earth are as fabled as Tibet. To most foreigners living in China, a visit to Tibet is the ultimate goal, and none who visit Tibet come away unmoved by its grandeur, and its pathos.

Chinese themselves, however, have a very different view of Tibet. With few exceptions, they consider Tibet a place of discomfort, exile, and horror. Tibet has rebuffed or consumed all invaders until the present era, defended as it is by stupendous barriers of mountain and tundra cut only by narrow passes. In the last thousand years or so, Tibet could never resist a concerted invasion from great powers of the East Asian hinterland. But for most of its history, those powers never saw reason to enforce more than a token suzerainty over Tibet, backed by the threat of punitive invasions. Only the rarest of individual Chinese has ever wanted to live in Tibet. China's historical claim to sovereignty over Tibet is contentious. Tibetans, naturally, dispute it.

China's historical claim to Tibet is of about the same strength as its historical claim to sovereignty over Korea or Vietnam - claims which, for obvious reasons, China does not now see fit to pursue.

The reality today is that Tibet has no chance of independence in any foreseeable future, short of a complete disintegration of the Chinese nation. Its isolation has been eroded by modern technology, with three motor road links (there was no vehicle access at all prior to 1950), air links, and the promise even of a railway from inland China by the end of the century. Satellite electronic communications between Lhasa and Beijing are already in place.

For nearly thirty years from 1950, the only foreigners to visit Tibet were those trusted by Beijing, and their reports told little beyond propaganda. In the late seventies, a few independent Western journalists and scholars gained admission, and by 1980 Tibet was receiving a regular foreign package-tourist trade, under the auspices of the China International Travel Service.

It was my own good fortune to visit Tibet twice, in 1979 and again in 1982 - spanning a period of quite radical revisions in Beijing's policies on the management of Tibet.

It's early evening, after the meal, and the local Han guides have retired to their rooms, to discuss oxygen-deficiency, the inedibility of Tibetan food, and their plans to return inland. I have walked out of the walled compound with a friend and strolled down Peoples Road, past the shuttered Chinese shops of the new town, to Old Lhasa, a kilometre away. There is still sunlight gleaming on the gold-leafed rooftops of the Potala palace, looming above on its hilltop, though a long dusk has begun in the city at its feet. The great inclined walls of the Potala seem to exaggerate its mass, and they are mirrored in all the buildings of the old Holy City, which also taper as they rise. Chinese roads stopped at the edge of the old town, and motor traffic is rare. Few Han are to be seen in the narrow streets where the sloping, whitewashed walls rise through four stories of tapering windows, lined with painted wooden balconies and peeping faces. Wide passages through these buildings give sudden courtyard vistas, with perhaps a tradesman at work, or chickens and children playing with a

brass-bound wooden bucket around a kitchen door. Even in the main streets, family milk-cows stand permanently tethered at the door, munching on hay, dropping their manure. Pony-carts jog by with a jingling of brass bells.

The Jokka Khang, the holiest shrine of Lama Buddhism, is cut off from the Holy Road by a tall iron grill across its forecourt. The Holy Road is a pilgrim's circle through the centre of Lhasa, each circuit contributing towards Buddhist redemption. Only those who are devout to the point of madness seem to have achieved the pilgrimage at this time, and they make their prostrations to the shrine on the flagstones outside the grill. The temple is closed and dark, though golden prayer bells stir softly in the evening breeze on the peaks of its roofs. One old lama looks out a side door, then closes and bolts it again from the inside.

Khampa tribesmen from Eastern Tibet, in high boots and braided hair, stare at the foreigners, and return smiles with honest delight. A man on a bicycle, wearing a mixture of Tibetan and Chinese garments, rides up to us and dismounts with a leap. 'Rus, Rus!', he says to us with evident warmth. He thinks we are Russians - possibly the only other Europeans he has ever seen, though no Russians have been in Lhasa for twenty years. He thrusts a note into my hand and hastily rides away into the crowd. The note is in Tibetan.

It was some time before I could get my note translated. It was much as I had guessed:

`To the Visitors from Foreign Nations:

Greetings to you all for having taken the trouble to come to see us and the situation in Tibet. As you all should know, Tibet has been an independent nation for 2,000 years....

We thank you and your governments for support. We

request you:

- **To recognise the Democratic Government of Tibet under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.**
- **To assist in seeing to it that the Tibetans are given the right of self-determination.**
- **To help us achieve freedom of religion and worship.**
- **To help ensure that the fundamental human rights of the Tibetan people are restored to them.**

We shall look forward to a definite change in our situation as a result of your visit. We beg you to pass on, to all, this note of ours, written in blood and tears.'

Several foreigners in that year received similar notes, unlike anything received anywhere else in China.

In 1979, Beijing's policy, on a national scale, was to criticise the 'excesses' of the Cultural Revolution, without quite throwing out the principles behind it. Thus, in Tibet, we heard admissions that the Red Guards had 'gone too far' in their attacks upon the monasteries. But the official line on traditional Tibetan society was uncompromisingly critical. It was summed up in the Museum of Tibetan History.

This hideous side-show was built in Lhasa by the Chinese to make the point, as they saw it, that Tibet, prior to the Chinese take-over, had been barbarous, cruel, and primitive. It had the usual social-realist tableau representations of feudal life.. peasants toiling under the lash of rapacious landlords and so on.. but it went several steps further, as well. Objects of Tibetan religious and mystical practice had been gathered and were presented there for public gaze as evidence of 'the barbarism of the old society'. On one wall was pinned the blackened, flayed skin of a human child. Instruments of punishment, some torturous, had been collected from monastic and civil dungeons. Religious vessels fashioned from skulls and other human relics were displayed, the whole designed to create an image of pre-Liberation Tibet as an unmitigated Hell

on Earth. The guides were young Tibetan girls, born after that 'liberation', and educated entirely in the Chinese schools.

In the labyrinthine splendour of the Potala Palace itself, guides had three points to get across to us in their prepared scripts. The first was to impress on us that the Potala's construction had been achieved by the exploitation of the toiling masses. The second was that we should not miss any artefact, reference, or corner of a historical painting which testified to the long-term links with China. The third was to encourage a picture of a depraved and violent native Tibetan culture, through showing us, without explanation, those religious paintings and figurines celebrating the spiritual dimensions of reproduction and death - i.e. sex and violence. Time and again we were regaled with statistics on the quantities of treasure held in the monasteries, the numbers of serfs, and the sinister influence of any outsiders, other than Chinese, on Tibet's history.

Deep in the belly of the Potala, wicks burn in great vats of yak butter, dimly lighting the base of the gigantic gold-leafed Sakyamuni Buddha. Its head, five stories higher, glints in the natural light filtering through windows far above us. Smoke from the butter-lamps curls slowly up through the pointing fingers of the Buddha, adding to the heavy redolence that pervades every fibre and plank of the huge temple-palace. The interior is a series of vast chambers, lined with thousands of silk and brocade prayer-banners, housing giant Buddhas and the huge memorial stupas of its masters, the 400-year succession of Dalai Lamas. It is also a formidable fortress, testifying to the fierce religious-political warfare endemic to old Tibet. The Red Guards never gained entrance to the Potala.

Unlike the flat, formal symmetry of Chinese palaces, the interior of the Potala is a three-dimensional maze of sloping passageways, narrow wooden staircases, galleries and chambers of every size. A conspirators heaven. In the great outer walls, warrens of small cells were the home of over three thousand lamas, ordered in ranks from child acolytes,

through labourers and cooks, up to the spiritual level of Living Buddha's who, like the Dalai Lama himself, could expect perpetual re-incarnation. Now there are no more than forty, and none are young.

On the very top of the palace, right under that golden roof, is a glassed pavilion flooded with sunlight. The glowing reds and yellows of its carpets and decoration suffuse the room with a warmth unique in the Potala. It was a special prayer and meeting room for the Dalai, and in his absence it is used as a briefing room for visitors. The Chinese call the Potala a 'museum', as they do the Forbidden City of Beijing. We have asked to meet some practising lamas, and they have been brought to us. The youngest lama moves quietly about, refilling our mugs of Chinese jasmine tea with hot water from a Chinese vacuum-flask, while three senior lamas sit cross-legged on cushions.

They offer no information, but answer our questions. There used to be 110,000 lamas in Tibet, in 2,500 monasteries. Now there are about ten monasteries, maybe two hundred practising lamas. What happened to the others? Some became industrial workers, some went out to work in the fields, and some were sent to 'study courses'. Of the monasteries, some suffered 'natural destruction', some were destroyed under the influence of the Gang of Four, we are told. If China is following its stated policies on freedom of religion, why are there so few lamas today? The lama pauses. He has not been told what he may say on this. His face adopts a fixed smile, and he stares over our shoulders, looking for guidance. I turn around and see a Han official, a military-looking man to whom we have not been introduced, standing at the back of the room. He is embarrassed to have been noticed by us, but nods to the lama and says a couple of words in Tibetan. The lama, supposedly of high theological rank, then says to us:

'There are less lamas now than before because of the correctness of the Party's policy on religion. As society develops, religion and superstition will surely die out. It's

just a question of when. I am an old man, and I still believe in my religion because I am backward.' Is this betrayal? The Han official at the door is introduced as the Deputy Director of the Lhasa Municipal Religious Affairs Bureau. He is the lama's real boss.

Before the Chinese take-over, the more than two thousand monasteries of Tibet were the centres of learning, education, and medicine of the land, as well as administration and politics. They were the largest land-owners, and also 'owned' much of the population as feudal subjects. Families were obliged to send sons to the monasteries as part of their tenancy, though many parents would also do so voluntarily, both for religious reasons and as the only means of advancement open to a child not from one of the ruling families. A bright peasant child could go far, in the monastic world.

It's also clear from contemporary accounts that vetoes of the religious officials surrounding the young Dalai Lama to almost all forms of modernisation were an important reason for Tibet's failure to seek, until too late, international support for its independence. In particular, the state theologians kept maintaining, until the Chinese armies were in Lhasa itself, that such an invasion would represent such sacrilege that divine intervention to prevent it was assured. In a bizarre corollary, some senior advisers maintained that for the Tibetan civil authorities to pre-empt this by taking their own defensive actions would be itself to show a sacrilegious lack of faith.

Demoralised by this conflict of loyalties, even the militantly nationalistic of Tibetan civil officials vacillated, hoping that, by not 'annoying' the Chinese with overtures elsewhere, they would somehow reach a compromise that would leave their nationality unviolated. Isolated from the world political climate in which Beijing was making its decisions, the Tibetan leadership did not realise that China at that time, only months after the declaration of the Peoples Republic, was facing the United States in Korea, the Nationalists in Taiwan, and, behind a veil of Communist solidarity, Stalin's efforts to prise off

important territories in Manchuria, Mongolia and Xinjiang. Beijing needed to make its territorial claims crystal clear, and it was no time for compromise.

Religion and state were one in traditional Tibet, and remained so even after Chinese Communist armies forced the Tibetan local government to negotiate a condominium arrangement in 1951. Tibet accepted Chinese military occupation, but maintained local self-government rights. The Dalai Lama remained effectively head of state, with a government of civil and religious dignitaries.

This arrangement collapsed in 1958-59, as the Tibetans found the Chinese insisting on Chinese-style socialist reforms in Tibet. A rebellion, led by Tibetan nationalists and conservative abbots, was crushed by the Chinese army. The Dalai Lama, with 100,000 of his followers, fled into exile in India.

Government after that was strict, and dominated by the Chinese military. Promising Tibetans sent for training in Beijing were seldom given full authority on their return, but placed under reliable Chinese mentors, often nominally their 'deputies'. The aftermath of the 1959 uprising, and later the Maoist Cultural Revolution, saw systematic destruction not only of hundreds of temples and monasteries, but also of the entire system of integrated religion under which every fourth Tibetan male was a Lama.

The religion of Tibet, Lama Buddhism, is a factor the Chinese communists have drastically underestimated in their programme to integrate Tibet into China's socialist development. They had believed that by suppressing it, while offering a measure of material progress, they would wean the people away from their thousand-year tradition within a generation. That generation has already passed, and as the pilgrims in Lhasa testify, the programme of socialism and atheism has had to be postponed.

The Chinese government, after twenty years of failure to integrate Tibet into China's own social and political system, introduced a series of policy reforms in 1980 which were designed to reduce tension between Han and Tibetan peoples in

Tibet, and to improve the standard of living of the local people.

When I first visited Tibet in 1979, it was clear that successive attempts to apply Chinese solutions to Tibetan problems had met with disaster, either because they were unworkable in Tibet's physical conditions, or because they were rejected and passively resisted by the Tibetan people, who want nothing more dearly than to keep their own identity. Virtually the entire educated class of Tibet had either followed the Dalai Lama into exile, or remained in prison, leaving all responsible work in the hands of Chinese or Chinese-trained Tibetans. Other than a few heavily-subsidised show-projects, the economy languished.

Tension between Han and Tibetans was quite visible on the streets. In Lhasa itself, I saw a wall-poster in Chinese pasted up on the wall of the main department store by embittered Han workers complaining of their living conditions, the frustrations of their lives, and the difficulties in arranging the longed-for transfers back to the inland. Han did not like to walk alone, and some foreigners who had been in remote areas of Tibet on scientific business said that their Han guides were plainly terrified of the local Tibetans. They would not accept the hospitality offered in villages, but insisted on setting up camp in secure positions some distance away. Rumour had it that Han, alone or in small groups, were likely to disappear.

It was acknowledged that much of the destruction of the monasteries had been carried out systematically by units of the PLA. Fantastic monuments that had endured for centuries were blasted to pieces, their relics burned, buried, or taken away. In 1983, Xinhua reported that over ten thousand bronze statues had been discovered, hundreds of kilometres away, in Gansu province, where they had been trucked out during the Cultural Revolution for melting down. Fortunately, that particular truckload had been saved, possibly at some risk to himself, by an enthusiastic Han archaeologist in Gansu. In 1983, these surviving bronzes were to be returned to Tibet, but they indicate the scale of the pillage and destruction, which appears to have been even more savage than the general rapine of the Cultural Revolution in most of inland China. One should also

note that the statistics offered by Han officials in Tibet to indicate the great wealth of the monasteries suggest that the two thousand destroyed monasteries would have owned a joint treasure of at least several hundred tonnes of silver and gold, much of it embodied in priceless arts and crafts. While the ten thousands bronze statues have been returned, where are the silver and gold?

Another item of immense significance was also returned to Tibet in 1983 - a life-size statue of Gautama Buddha at age eight. Its significance, though, is that this was the dowry gift to the founding king of modern Tibet, Srongtsen Ganbo, from the wife who converted him to Buddhism - a princess from Nepal. Why this matters is that China makes great play of the fact that King Srongtsen had a Chinese wife, Princess Wen Cheng, in honour of whom endless articles, and even ballets, are penned in Beijing. The claim is that Princess Wen 'civilised' Tibet. A statue of Buddha, taken by her to Lhasa and installed in the Jokka Khang temple, is invariably pointed out to visitors. But the fact, supported even in the more honest Chinese journals, is that Princess Wen entered the king's household as a 'treaty wife' when the king was already seventy-six years old, and she was only seventeen. King Srongtsen's Nepalese wife, meanwhile, had been installed as a queen forty years earlier, and the Jokka Khang was actually built to accommodate a Nepalese, not a Chinese, statue. During the Cultural Revolution, this significant Nepalese statue of the boy Buddha was taken from the temple it had graced for centuries, and 'lost' in a warehouse in Beijing.

This history-twisting is paralleled in the way guides interpret the chronicle frescoes of the Potala and other Tibetan monuments. On a wall of paintings depicting the diplomatic travels of a great Dalai of the past, one scene showed the retinue being received with great pomp by a ruler of Indian appearance, whose camp was defended by many elephants in royal caparison - obviously from the southern side of the Himalayan passes. When I asked the guide about this, she told me she did not know where it was, and moved hastily to point out a subsequent scene of a Dalai Lama visiting Beijing.

The watershed in China's Tibet policy actually came in 1980. The post-Mao policy had been to encourage the Dalai Lama to accept Chinese sovereignty and to return to Tibet as a member of the Chinese order of things - though of course without formal powers. Most recently, one of the sticking points in discussions between Beijing and the Dalai's representatives has been the request for the borders of Tibet to be adjusted to cover all areas in which the Tibetan people predominate. There are actually more Tibetans living in the four bordering provinces of China (Qinghai, Gansu, Siquan, and Yunnan), as a result of earlier Han empire expansions, than in what is now known as the Tibet Autonomous Region. This concession would double the size and concentration of a Tibetan political zone to a total of between three and four million people, and is unthinkable to Beijing.

As part of these negotiations, several parties of the Dalai's supporters from India had come on reconnaissance visits to Tibet. In June of 1980, one was led by the Dalai Lama's own sister. These parties became the focus for the pent-up complaints of the Tibetans against the Chinese administration. There were embarrassingly large and emotional rallies of his devoted followers in Lhasa and other cities, which broke into chants demanding self-rule and the return of the Dalai to the Potala Palace. However, the advice to the Dalai, even from those Tibetans who had not left Tibet with him, was that he should remain outside until he could be sure that Tibet would enjoy a proper degree of liberty upon his return.

There was also a tour of inspection to Tibet by the Chinese Communist Party Secretary-General, Hu Yaobang. He was reported to be infuriated by the conservatism, lack of progress, and unpopularity of the Chinese regime in Tibet, and ordered immediate changes. These began with the sacking of the long-time Party Secretary of the region, one of the original military 'liberators' of Tibet, Ren Rong.

Shortly after this, one of the Han under-secretaries of the Tibet regional communist party committee published a fulsome self-criticism, on behalf of the whole administration, on the front page of the Peoples Daily. This contained the most

thorough picture of colonial mismanagement ever made public in China. It admitted that Tibetans had suffered so much from current policies that it would take five years for them to return even to the standard of living they had enjoyed before the complete communist take-over in 1959.

The secretary, Guo Xilian, said that almost all Tibet's current problems of poverty and a severely unbalanced economy could be blamed on the Communist Party Committee insisting on trying to force Tibet to follow the Chinese ideological pattern, without regard to local customs or conditions. Chinese cadres had insisted, for instance, on the planting of lowland wheat crops, instead of the traditional highland barley. The crops failed consistently. Inefficient and unnecessary industries had been set up, draining the budget, while local handicrafts which supplied the necessities of Tibetan customary life had been stifled. They had interfered disastrously with the traditional yak-herding practices which were the basis of the natural economy in Tibet.

All these errors had been compounded, said the self-criticism, by an over-emphasis on collectivisation which had further disrupted production and caused great resentment against the Chinese cadres among the Tibetan people.

Beijing decreed that all such policies were to be reversed, and there would be a period of several years, with a complete tax holiday, devoted solely to the recuperation of the natural economy, in which farming and herding would be organised according to individual family groups tending their own flocks.

Many changes for the better were visible in Lhasa when I returned in 1982. The first was that far fewer Chinese were to be seen. This was evidence, welcome to the Tibetans, of the withdrawal of more than eleven thousand Chinese officials from Tibet over the preceding two years, together with another twenty thousand of their dependants. Many of these Han had been stationed unwillingly in Tibet for twenty years, and were doing low-level jobs which could easily be handled by Tibetans. Their presence was nothing but an irritant to Chinese-Tibetan relations, and a drain on the economy, since they all received special allowances and subsidies to compensate for

the conditions they regarded as unpleasant and dangerous to health.

More such people were leaving on each plane to depart from Lhasa, an irregular event due to dangerous flying conditions through treacherous mountain ranges. Those who left on my own plane were joking with those who saw them off about how glad they were to be leaving Tibet. Some foreign critics say these departing cadres are being replaced by equal numbers of Chinese soldiers coming into Tibet by truck, but even if this were true the fact is that the soldiers keep more to their own affairs, and generally cause less friction than unwanted officials.

Tibetan officials have now been placed in many of the leadership posts of the regional government. Obviously, they are picked carefully, and are never without Han advisors. However, certain changes do make the Tibetan's themselves feel better about the situation.

Tibetan language has been restored as the official language of the region, and precedes the Chinese script on official documents. It is taught in all primary schools, and is an optional language of entrance examinations for the regional tertiary college. Chinese language remains an essential prerequisite as well, and entrance examinations for colleges other than the agricultural and teachers colleges of Tibet must be taken in Chinese. The reduction in numbers of Han students, however, as their families return to China proper, means more places are available for Tibetans.

Large numbers of the former monastery-educated class, many of them lamas, have been released from prisons, and some are now engaged in teaching Tibetan language and culture. With the previous emphasis on Chinese, many young Tibetans had grown up illiterate in their own language.

A social science research institute has been set up in Lhasa, in which some fifty scholars, including former lamas of high spiritual degree, are beginning to work on selected religious and historical materials from the vast monastic libraries. This historical study is potentially risky, as a leader of the academy admitted to me that Tibetan manuscripts, not surprisingly,

often disagree with the authorised Chinese histories, especially on the political aspects of China's relations with Tibet.

Large teams of craftsmen, some also lamas released from prisons, some young apprentices to ancient skills, are at work restoring those few of the major monasteries which have been designated for preservation. They will be described officially as 'museums', but to the Tibetans they remain religious shrines, central to their Tibetan life and identity.

The Panchen Lama, second only to the Dalai in religious standing, has been firmly identified with the Chinese regime ever since the Dalai's exile in 1959. None the less, Chinese authorities kept him in Beijing and prevented him visiting Tibet for more than twenty years. His return to Tibet in 1982 drew crowds of ninety thousand pilgrims in three days to receive his blessing. To the purely faithful, he remains a living Buddha who can do no wrong. Other Tibetans boycotted his return, knowing he has a Chinese wife and son in Beijing, and deriding him as an apostate who abandoned his sacred vows of chastity.

Thousands of hand-held prayer wheels now turn constantly in Lhasa again, a prayer for the soul of the faithful ascending to heaven with each turn of the wheel. Pilgrims make their way hundreds of kilometres, on foot if necessary, sometimes selling their herds and belongings, for the privilege of prostrating themselves before Lhasa's holy shrines. The most devout make a complete circuit of the inner city prostrating at every step. Some starve happily to death, confident they will be reincarnated in a better life, if they die in the act of pilgrimage. Chinese authorities no longer interfere, so long as civil laws are not broken. Thirty years of anti-religious propaganda from China appears to have impressed only a few, while the majority of Tibetans remain intensely loyal to their religious beliefs, and to the person of the Dalai Lama, praying for his return to Tibet.

The Sera monastery is open again, and the faithful are always present. Offerings to the manifestations of Buddha are poor but frequent. A few fen of Chinese paper money pinned to the idol's sleeve, coins scattered at its feet, and in

the glass screw-top jar serving as an incense-burner, someone has offered the Buddha a precious gift - ration coupons for two metres of cotton cloth, redeemable in the Peoples Republic of China. Behind the towering idols at the back of the main prayer-hall, a series of small, dark shrines are cut into the mountain-side. Approaching them, the odour of burning yak-butter grows stronger, and the hum of incantations grows louder and more confused. I crouch to step through a low doorway, and am in a dark shrine not more than four metres square. It is the reliquary of a Living Buddha said to have powers of healing. The room swirls and hums with a continual procession of pilgrims, anti-clockwise around the *chorten*, a human prayer-wheel. Over time, their feet have worn a deep channel in the flagstones, their pressing bodies have polished the corners off the square stone base. Each mutters his own prayer, each hastens with his own urgency. One young man, not twenty-five, is close to a frenzy, ducking round and round the outside of the throng at twice the speed of the procession. His is not the faith of a simple peasant. His nylon wind-cheater identifies him as an émigré, probably returned from Nepal. He overtakes the wooden-sandalled lamas, his own feet shod in striped, Western jogging shoes.

The free market in the old city of Lhasa is flourishing again, with a specially brisk demand for traditional Tibetan products: yak butter, the portable wooden churns used to make it, and the many items used in the practice of religion. Peddlers from Nepal do very well, bringing prayer wheels, incense burners, small portable shrines, and the lama's prayer bells, from the large community of Tibetan exiles in Nepal. Religious texts are sold in large wads, like books of tickets, to be pasted on walls or hung from cairns and trees as miniature prayer flags. It's worth a prayer every time the wind moves the paper. Lines of prayer flags hang once again across roads, between houses, anywhere they can catch the wind. A small boy squats in the

market on the Holy Road, chanting aloud from the Sutras. Pilgrims have little to give him but a blessing, but even the tiny trickle of coins is better than nothing.

The new tolerance extends to other aspects of Tibetan tradition, such as the local ballad operas. Based on the oral legends of the Tibetan peasantry, the operas also celebrate the glorious deeds of historical Tibetan nationalist heroes. Directly anti-Chinese stories are not permitted, but none the less the preservation of the distinct Tibetan cultural tradition is treasured by the people. I had the good fortune to be in Lhasa for a harvest festival, and came across a village opera group in the midst of a long local opera performance under a giant fly-tent in a glade by a small river. The form is simple: the opera characters, and chorus, dressed in costumes of fixed symbolic meaning, spend most of their time dancing slowly round in a large circle as the story narrative proceeds to clamorous musical accompaniment, stopping from time to time for a solo aria from a leading performer. Tibetan music is honest, rhythmic, and strong of voice - stirring even when incomprehensible.

The same day I attended a picnic 'rodeo' - where the young Tibetans from the high grasslands put their ponies through a variety of competitive sports, including horseback archery. The rural Tibetans are sturdy, tough and open-hearted, always keen to press a bowl of yak-buttered tea or milky barley-beer on a visitor. Under present policies, their rural way of life should remain largely undisturbed for a good many years yet, while, hopefully, steadily improving their material circumstances.

There was one particularly curious note in that sports meeting, that show of skills unchanged since the Mongol alliances of several hundred years ago. The picnic took place about thirty kilometres down the valley from Lhasa, but right next to it was a very large, roofed concrete building in a walled compound. On first enquiry, I gathered it was a military storehouse of some kind - on second enquiry that it was none other than the Lhasa Railway Station. This had been built by ambitious local Han officials at a time, the early sixties, when all progressive municipal governments in China were building

new railway stations. The design flaw here was that the building was not close to Lhasa, for a start, but more importantly, there is no railway within a thousand kilometres of Lhasa, nor is likely to be one before the end of the century.

A visit to the Cultural Institute in Lhasa, however, was a serious disappointment. The Chinese 'folkloric' establishment have extremely stilted, Russianized notions of 'folk singing' and 'folk dancing', which result in any native talent that comes under their tutelage being homogenised into approximately similar and empty styles. Exaggerated high-kicking enthusiasm and banal choreography had tragically divorced a generation of keen young Tibetan dancers from their real, more subtle cultural tradition, which had clearly gone right over the heads of their Han or sinicised teachers. I clearly remember the disappointment of one senior teacher, a middle-aged Tibetan who had spent ten years in the Minorities Cultural Institute of Shanghai, when I insisted that, for recording purposes, I did not want the Tibetan folk songs done to the thumpingly inappropriate piano accompaniment he had so laboriously contrived for it.

Only two artists in that institute had retained their Tibetan integrity - an old man, a local troubadour, who was on staff as a 'consultant' on folk songs, and a teenage girl, a mountain singer, who had come from a remote village only two weeks before we met her. I took them to a wide open space outside the Institute to make my recordings, in view of the mountains. The mountain songs, done well, are spine-tingling in their keening power and beauty, as, like their musicological cousins the Alpine yodels, they use, reflect, and so possess, the reverberant grandeur of their native mountain landscape.

In the evening, at high altitude, sounds seems to hang in the air, and the cold grips the throat, even in summer. I had heard the sound of prayer, amplified, coming from the direction of the Potala's precipitous walls, but the monks who lived there had denied knowledge of it. I walk with a friend into the maze of traditional dwellings at the foot of the Potala, willing to get lost for a while. Laneways lead us on

until there is nowhere to go but up a steep and crumbling flight of stairs to what looks like the top of an old city wall. To our surprise, there is a door, out of sight, at the top of the stairs. It opens, and an old Tibetan, beaming, invites us in for a cup of tea. Like almost every household, one wall is dominated by ikons of the Dalai Lama. I point to a portrait of Chairman Mao on another wall, and he scoffs, indicating by sign language that this is a form of insurance against neighbourhood tell-tales. His wife makes tea, as he tells us yet again, in minimal Chinese, that his people live in hope of the Dalai's return, but only when conditions are right. In the meantime - he indicates his radio, and points out times on an old alarm clock. We have found the source of the prayers. The voice of the Dalai Lama in prayer is broadcast twice a day across the Himalayas, from Dharamsala, his headquarters in India. In his physical absence from Lhasa, his voice is distributed across his city by the faithful, with their mantle radios turned up loud enough to bounce it off the towering walls of the empty Potala.

To most of the world, Tibet, the idea, will always be more important than Tibet, the reality. Can the spiritual defiance of a mere two million people ever count against the incessant pressure of a thousand million on either side, Chinese and Indian? As a possible omen of the future, consider Lama Thubten Yeshe.

Catching my final flight into Lhasa that day in 1982, I noticed, in the foreigners' section of the waiting room at Chengdu airport, a somewhat odd-looking fellow traveller. Around fifty years old, oriental in appearance but not Han, wearing dark glasses, an orange shirt, and acrylic trousers of a brilliant sky blue, he carried an expensive-looking leather attaché case. From his large jug-ears, I guessed him to be a Tibetan by race, but as I had never known a Westernised Tibetan, I reserved judgement.

It happened that my colleague on that trip, the CBC's Don

Murray, sat next to him on the flight, and discovered that the man was in fact an émigré lama, returning to visit his homeland for the first time since fleeing with the Dalai in 1959. Lama Thubten had lived for many years in Kathmandu where, being a very sociable character, he had built up a following among the many Western Seekers after Truth who arrived there along what was then the Hippy Trail. Lama Thubten, homeless refugee, became a well-supported guru. He had Australian citizenship and a meditation centre on a large farm near Bendigo, in Victoria, Australia which belonged to one of his wealthy disciples. He had meditation centres and groups in Amsterdam, London, Paris, New York... wherever the Hippy Trails had started and finished for the Seekers After Truth.

Lama Thubten was nervous as he arrived in Lhasa - uncertain of the welcome he would receive from the authorities. He need not have worried. The policy by then was to do everything possible to help such people gain a favourable impression of conditions in modern Tibet. We were billeted in adjoining, but separate hotels, and the next time I saw Lama Thubten he was striding down to the Old City, still in his luminous blue trousers, still carrying his attaché case, but now surrounded on all sides by a motley collection of gushing Western admirers. That summer was a record one for Western pilgrimages to Lhasa, and the means used by those unorthodox foreign travellers would be a book in themselves. Suffice to say most of their routes demanded more than a little cajoling of officials, local police, and truck drivers, and that the Public Security Bureau has since stamped them out.

Two days later, we visited Lama Thubten in his hotel room. There had been a spectacular transformation. He was wearing maroon lama's robes, and squatted cross-legged on the bed, giving audience, as usual, to a gaggle of disciples. More interesting than those assorted French, Italian and American Seekers after Truth were two Tibetans of Thubten's age, looking shy and out of place. They were Thubten's brother, a country herdsman dressed in his best, and Thubten's 'dharma brother', a lama who had gone through the novitiate with him.

The true brother had been imprisoned only for a few years after Thubten's defection. The 'dharma brother' had emerged only recently from twenty years of imprisonment. He was emaciated and appeared to be in a state of some shock. Though he considered himself to be still a lama, and dressed in ragged lama's robes, he was not one of those selected by the Han to continue as lama-caretakers of the few remaining monasteries. The Manpower Bureau had sent him back, on his release, to join the farmers of his home district.

Lama Thubten was no longer nervous about his reception by the Chinese authorities - they had helped him to locate the two people dear to him, and would allow him, later, to go out to his home village as well. Lama Thubten was outspoken in his devotion to the Dalai Lama :

'The Dalai Lama is my god.. I would break my own body rather than betray him'.

This was during the time of the Panchen Lama's return to Tibet - the controversial figure, close to Dalai in ecclesiastical rank, but committed to the Beijing regime. As we spoke to Lama Thubten, Panchen was in Xigatze, the headquarters of his own sect of Lamaism. I mentioned to Lama Thubten the facts that were known about Panchen's somewhat chequered history as a monk - the wife and child, for instance - and asked what Thubten thought of him.

He told me that his brother and his dharma brother both respected Panchen, because, regardless of what he might have done in this present incarnation, he was and irrevocably would always be a Living Buddha - a being of a different order to mere mortals.

'There are some people in Lhasa', he conceded, 'who don't like some things that Panchen has done. But they are mostly Tibetans who no longer believe fully in the old religion.

'As for me..'

He thought a while and sized us up as Seekers after Truth.

'I don't get any negative vibrations from Panchen Lama'.

He put his smooth hand on the stubbled head of his dharma brother, whose private spiritual agonies were clearly of greater

importance than the trick questions of cynical Western reporters.

We left Lama Thubten blessing more of his Western disciples, squatting cross-legged on that bed in a Chinese government hostel in Lhasa. Propped firmly against the wall behind him, for safety, was the shiny attaché case containing US dollar travellers cheques, an Australian passport, and his international airline tickets.

Before leaving China's colonial problems, a footnote is required on Mongolia. A few centuries ago, Mongol power was a force to be reckoned with, when the horse was the ultimate in sophisticated military equipment. Armies led by the Mongols conquered the world, and ruled China. Since the collapse of that empire, however, the Mongols have lived more or less as clients of the Chinese state, though with their very distinctive nomadic culture and their religion of Lama Buddhism shared with the Tibetans.

Particularly in the last imperial dynasty, the Manchu, the feudal princes and chieftains of Mongolia played a dangerous game of flirtation with the Chinese court. The Manchus, themselves from a background not unlike the Mongols, flattered and encouraged the Mongol princes, who, in the end, were the staunchest defenders of that dying dynasty against southern Han modernisers.

But the borders of Inner Mongolia are only a few days easy ride from Beijing, and Han traders and money-lenders quickly monopolised the economy of Mongolia, for which they are hated, openly in Outer Mongolia, to this day. As a last fling, the Japanese empire of the 1930s planned to re-create a puppet Mongol state, as they had done in Manchuria, as part of their dismemberment of China. A Soviet-backed movement had carved off Outer Mongolia from the collapsing Chinese Republic in 1921, and Moscow supports the Peoples Republic of Mongolia to this day.

But the bottom line on Mongolia is that by the time the Peoples Republic of China was declared, there was already no credible claim for an independent Mongol state in Inner

Mongolia, and with the degree of Han penetration in trade and settlement, no prospect of China allowing Inner and Outer Mongolia to re- unite as an independent state. This situation has solidified with increasing Han immigration to Inner Mongolia over the past thirty years. The Mongol people live on more or less as an aboriginal population, though with certain political positions ear-marked for their representatives as a token gesture. During the Cultural Revolution, misguided attempts to stamp out Mongol culture led to a serious uprising that left over ten thousand dead. Such days are over now.

There is one curious piece of evidence, however, that Beijing is not wholly complacent over the future of Mongolia. It concerns Jingghis Khan (Genghis Khan), the Mongol who conquered half the world, including China. Not surprisingly, he is Mongolia's National Hero. The Russians however, don't like him at all, which makes life difficult for Outer Mongolian historians. And the Chinese official historians have recently changed their mind. For a long time, Jingghis Khan was classified as an aggressive imperialist who conquered China by force. Then it was noted that Jingghis Khan's home was in fact in Inner Mongolia... making him, in Beijing's retrospective view of such things, clearly a Chinese citizen. So Jingghis Khan's classification has now been changed, in China, from 'Foreign Imperialist', to 'Builder of National Unity'.



A 'model nomad school' in Tibet, under the Chinese flag.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TIDES AND EDDIES

When a great tide is turning, the undertows can be dangerous and confusing. Eddies cloud the water with sand. Some creatures drown, and others are stranded on the beach. Scavengers may grow fat picking through the debris.

Communists and their critics alike, during 1978-83, would often attribute China's problems to 'feudal thinking', left over from the past. It was a century since Chinese political thinkers had begun trying to bring their huge, lumbering state onto a forward-looking course, a course that would enable China to survive in the context of a larger world which, after centuries of exclusion, had finally managed to force itself upon the Chinese nation. Conservatives of the Imperial Court resisted it, and the Imperial system collapsed - whereas in Japan, the Imperial system had accommodated modernisation and has survived in modified form. Chinese Republican democrats, harried by an expanding Japan and by warlords fattened on the carcass of the Empire, failed to overcome the contradiction of their dependence, for support and administration, on a landlord and urban capitalist class accustomed to untrammelled privilege. China's new identity would only be forged in the

white heat of a huge catharsis, drawing on the ancient tradition of peasant revolt. Mao Zedong's monomania, his Class War against China's own past, struck a chord with those whose personal history had left them little but misery. It promised restored dignity to a haughty nation humiliated by `barbarian' foreigners.

But during Mao's thirty years of ascendance the revolutionary enthusiasm had become hysteria, the ideology had become a mystic Cult of Mao, and the furious energies of revolt had become self-destructive. This was the tide that was turning during my years in Beijing, giving way to a system of national government that was increasingly consistent, stable, and in the overall interest of the people. This did not mean that it was always rational, fair, or humane to individuals.

To be a foreigner in China was a position of privilege, and of challenge. China's rulers were determined to get from foreign countries the things they needed for China's own progress and security, to which purpose they promoted a wide range of developments in relations with foreigners and foreign countries. With the promise of their huge potential market, they attracted thousands of foreign salesmen to display their wares and offer inducements. Often, the `free sample' would be the end of the negotiations, and Chinese factories would labour to copy the foreign design. I lost count of the number of foreign businessmen who would assure me, flushed from a Beijing Duck dinner and a trot up the Great Wall of China with their hosts, that they had been promised specially favourable consideration in final negotiations.

I was present in the Great Hall of the People in 1981 when the world president of the Coca-Cola Corporation, Robert Goizueta, hosted a sumptuous banquet reception to celebrate the opening of a Coke-bottling plant in Beijing. Spurning the customary *maotai* for his toast, Goizueta asked the assembled senior cadres and politicians to join him in raising the familiar-shaped bottle to his lips, with the words `This is a great moment in the history of the world'. I had later bought a crate of Chinese Coca-Cola from the Friendship Store for a party,

only to find that not one of the two dozen bottles had any gas in it.

I was also present at the first Public Dance held in China since the Cultural Revolution, a quaint affair under paper streamers in the Chinese-run International Club of Beijing, but charged with an electric excitement for its breaching of taboos. For a few months, foreign diplomats and businessmen danced with Chinese waitresses in increasingly elaborate hair-styles, as the craze spread like wild-fire through the urban youth of China.

There was dancing in the Great Hall of the People. An underground disco, with the latest Hong Kong tapes, sound system and flashing light-show, opened in the Minorities Palace of Culture in Beijing, where, for a time, foreigners and Chinese danced together. State cultural troupes imported electric guitars and amplifiers from Hong Kong. I myself played bass guitar, for two years or so, in a part-time scratch band of foreigners, the Beijing All-Stars, to mixed audiences and dances. We gave a 'demonstration' rock concert at a teachers' college, and were showered with requests, on scraps of paper that I have kept:

`Please play the Village People's "In the Navy"

`A song by the Eagles'

`Please "I'm forever Blowing Bubbles"

`"Nobody Knows the Trouble I Seen"

`Please play anything you know sung by *Mao Wang*' (Elvis Presley).

I was taught to dance the Tango at a Spring Festival party in a small apartment where only one couple at a time could pace the floor. At bohemian parties, I had seen 'liberated' foreign students teaching their more adventurous Chinese colleagues how to smoke the marijuana which grows in such wild profusion on the outskirts of Beijing and is prescribed in local medicine as a cure for bronchitis. I had seen female European students cycling through the peasant markets in shorts and singlets that Chinese would consider immodest as underwear, and I had heard of the Chinese executed for rape committed

outside the Foreign Languages Institute.

The standard of living has risen visibly, year by year, and young Chinese have sloughed off their shapeless work-clothes. In 1978, a woman merely wearing her blouse tucked in at the waist would earn sour looks from the dowdy. In 1983, tight jeans wiggled in every main street, China was exporting fashion garments bearing international designer labels, and I covered the sensational first parades of China's own home-grown mannequin corps.

Marriage between any Chinese and a foreigner was a sensational event in 1978, achievable only through political interference at the very highest level. By 1983, there were dozens of such marriages each year in a greatly expanded foreign community, which faced no obstruction unless the Chinese partner was considered a valuable asset (such as a graduate) or was connected to a unit, such as a Ministry or the PLA, where the Party saw security implications. The basic rule was to be extremely discreet in courtship, for while marriage was not forbidden, courtship was very close to 'hooliganism' in the eyes of the Public Security Bureau.

Tourism had developed from the limited itineraries of timid 'Friendship Association' delegations to a wildly accelerating mega-business, stirring up long-somnolent guest houses across the country, rearing glass-walled tourist towers in the major cities, churning the dust of scenic mountains with convoys of air-conditioned buses, and profaning the Emperors' retreats with the squawks and flashes of wealthy foreign crowds. Thousands of young people marched into expanding handicraft souvenir factories, and China earned hundreds of millions of dollars per year in precious foreign exchange.

I saw the inevitable clamp-downs, with public dances banned, and a string of criminal prosecutions for 'lewd behaviour' of Chinese holding dancing parties in their own homes. Women who had made themselves playthings of a certain class of foreign diplomats vanished from the scene with stiff sentences of Labour Education. Yet I mixed with many young Chinese for whom pre-marital sex was normal, and divorce a common fact of life. To them, it was not a question

of morality nor of foreign influence - simply of opportunity - and they had lived that way, as their parents before them, without any contact with foreigners. But it suited the leaders, as it had always done, to blame the weaknesses of human nature on pernicious foreign influence. To the older generation of Communists, loosening sexual morals went hand in hand with social irresponsibility or, even worse, with questioning of the Socialist Road and the Party's authority.

Traditionally, foreign things were considered inherently corrupting until proven otherwise. Foreign science was corrupting to the Imperial cosmology, until proven useful in agriculture and war. Foreign religions and philosophies were considered corrupting of Confucian values and the national way, until Marxism, from the mind of a nineteenth century European romantic, replaced Confucianism as the unquestionable orthodoxy.

Guardians of the portal had a weighty responsibility. In negotiation of an annual Cultural Exchange programme with a foreign country, which must remain nameless, a vice-Minister of Culture sought to reassure his opposite numbers of the country concerned by quoting Chairman Mao: 'In relation to Cultural exchange, Chairman Mao told us "Let Foreigners Serve China".'

Faces fell, across the table, at this rather ignominious invitation, and an aide quickly leant forward to whisper the correction in the vice-Minister's ear.

'I mean, "Let Foreign *Things* Serve China".'

The caution could throw up unexpected obstructions. Negotiating a travelling exhibition of some of China's wonderful collection of dinosaur fossils, a foreign delegation found their was some dispute as to whether this should properly be handled by China's Ministry of Cultural Relations, or by the Academy of Science. At one point in the discussion, the senior Chinese official turned to one of his secretaries and enquired, in an audible whisper:

'By the way, are these dinosaurs alive or dead?'

It was my function, as a foreign correspondent, to report on

these developments from a foreign point of view. It was the wish of my official hosts, the Information Department, that my reports should conform as closely as possible to their own official view of events, allowing for my incurably bourgeois viewpoint as representative of a bourgeois capitalist society. There were time after time when apparent obstructions to the coverage I wished to pursue would reduce me to an impotent fury of proportions I had not experienced since childhood. I lost my temper, unfairly and unwisely, with obstructive customs officials or interfering local busybodies, and had to be extricated by the intervention of my driver, Mr Cui, an expert negotiator who ran the very effective line that the Young Barbarian still had much to learn before civilised could fairly be expected of him.

Sometimes I would rail, to my friends or my unfortunate office staff, against the inequities or dishonesties I perceived to be going on in the land about me. Almost always, these issues came down to the one issue of absolute Party power - anathema to one who sees megalomania as the worm in the bud of all human politics, and the frustration of megalomania as an essential function of any good system of government. `Open' elections were held, in 1981, for the local level of China's multi-tiered Peoples Congress system. Nominations were open to all, and came in floods, encouraged by talk of `democratic centralism' in the preceding propaganda. But the large nomination lists became `impractical', so local neighbourhood committees were given the responsibility of pruning them to manageable size. Party members made up ten percent of the original nominees - more than twice as many as their proportion in the population overall. But in the pruned lists for voting, Party members made up two-thirds of the candidates. To nobody's surprise, that proportion was retained, exactly, when the votes were counted, and in higher levels of Peoples Congresses as the power chain continued upwards. `Parliamentarism', and `ultrademocracy' are in no danger of taking over the Peoples Congress.

What has happened, in China, is that while the Leninist *system*

of one-party rule has been confirmed, grafted firmly onto the stock of the old Imperial mandarin bureaucracy, virtually every other principle of the Communist ideology had been thrown open to question. There are no deadlines or even specific programmes for attaining the Marxist heaven of pure Communism, once sought by Chairman Mao in his own lifetime. The new Party leadership have made clear that this is so far in the future that it is of no concern to themselves. There are no absolute precepts as to how much of the national economy should be under direct state ownership, how much should be collectively owned by participants, and how much should be left in the hands of individuals responsive to free market forces. Theoretically, China's 'mixed economy' could develop for a thousand years on a convergent course with mixed economies based on capitalism.

The Communist Party has become, in power, an oligarchy of decisive influence at every level, and a jealous protector of its monopoly of ultimate power. But its official ideology is no longer Marxism, or even Marxism-Leninism. Mao Zedong Thought, gutted of mystic visions and hyperbole, is now little but a great red flag, kept aloft by the Party, but set to billow with whatever winds prevail.

Could true Maoism or something very like it, return to China? The answer must be yes, because anything is possible in politics, over time. Most China-watchers agree that the Party's control of the nation is such that a left-wing coup, strongly supported by the military, could still be a possibility within this generation. There will still be a vast, uneducated mass of population who could be led back into mob politics. But only, however, if the current economic programmes suffer some absolutely catastrophic setback, such as a devastating war with the Soviet Union or another powerful enemy.

In the longer term, China's rapid industrial development will make it year by year a more significant force in world markets. By early next century, China will be one of the world's major trading and military powers, very possibly in a position to control the markets now enjoyed by Japan and other emergent Asian industrial powers, not to mention the older Western

industrial nations. Nobody, by then, will think of China as quaint and curious.

It will be a China in which better education has made opportunities for more and more individuals from that seething mass to rise into world view - sportsmen, scientists, performers, artists and writers. It will be a world in which more and more foreigners want and need to know more about China, and about the way China lives.